

How to P.E.R.K. Up in a Down Economy

Ronald F. Arndt, DDS, MBA, MAGD—*Master Certified Coach*

Over the past 36 years of my business career I hear the phrase all the time. No matter what era, what decade, no matter whatever is happening in the economy at the moment, many weighty proclamations have been preceded by this phrase: “**in these tough economic times,**” or “**in these challenging times**”. The fact is *every* time is a tough economic time. *Every* period is a challenging time. Life was never set up to be easy. It was, however, set up to be fabulous. Life is about creating opportunities for every one of us to work through some really tough issues in our lives. Life does not have to be perfect to be wonderful!

As a professional Dental Coach, no matter what dental office I visit, the issues are the same. I know, every dentist thinks they are unique and different than all the others. However, when I ask about the state of their business; how are they doing, I hear the same comments: “My business is down”; “or up”; or “different”; or “challenging”; or ...you pick it. I then ask them, from their perspective, what is the etiology of the sluggishness of their business: “What’s the cause? What’s going on? What’s the challenge? What kind of problems are you having?” The answer I get from the team, and most times the doctor or CEO as well, is, “*It’s the economy*”. Don’t feel bad, I hear the same thing when I ask friends or business acquaintances how they are doing.

I hear this disguise, no matter what the season, what the year, what the crisis. It’s always, “*It’s the economy.*” Really, I think to myself. When I was a young entrepreneur, I used to think this way as well. As I have matured, I have come to the conclusion that the economy is not wholly to blame. The fact is, people are afraid to assume responsibility for their own behaviors. I know this is tough to read, unconventional, and many will shut down right now. For those who will acknowledge the truth, I would enjoy your company. It’s so much easier to simply pass off onto some mystical third party—in this case, “*the economy*”—the responsibility that we need to take for our own behaviors. I know, there are always those extenuating circumstances where folks have had terrible things happen to them and they do need help and support. I’m not heartless.

For many of us, however, it’s not the economy that is creating our biggest challenges now. **It’s us.** It’s our **behaviors.** It’s our **belief systems.** It’s the **attitudes** that we develop towards our lives, towards our work, and towards the circumstances around us, that create the challenges or difficulties we face every day.

Aldus Huxley famously wrote, “*Experience is not what happens to a man. It’s what a man does with what happens to him.*” I believe the same principle applies here. It’s with that backdrop I’d like to offer up the idea that **we do**, internally, have control over our own lives. Both individually, and collectively, we can decide to make our lives be the way that **we** choose. And one of the ways to do that is to take ownership—to assume responsibility for the behaviors and actions over which we have direct control. Positively shift our thinking.

Ronald F. Arndt, DDS, MBA, MAGD—*Master Certified Coach*

THE DENTAL COACH©

Phone: 440-748-6161 Email: DrRon@DrArndt.com Web: www.DrArndt.com

PERK Up!

I'd like to share an acronym that I heard some time ago, and apply it to our quest to take control of what happens in our businesses and our lives. (I wish I could identify the author, but nonetheless, whoever developed this idea up was brilliant.)

Think of the word **P-E-R-K**. When you read or hear this word, what comes up for you? What runs through your mind? If you're like most people, the word "**P-E-R-K**." brings up thoughts like, *perky, at attention, bright, active, energized, paying attention, fresh, crisp, or new*. I believe this acronym, offers possible solutions to our current economic morass that will enable us to take control of our own lives and our businesses.

Let's break down the acronym, **P-E-R-K**.

- "P"** represents **Postpone**
- "E"** represents **Eliminate**
- "R"** represents **Reduce**
- "K"** represents **Keep**

Now, let's dissect each one individually.

As I share some of these ideas, the concept isn't to debate the specific actions themselves as much as, **to get you to think** and then **take ACTION**. What could **you** do? What fits for **you** in **your** life? I'm merely offering up some thoughts or suggestions. Make them fit for yourself.

P is for *Postpone*

Rather than say, "*It's the economy,*" consider the concept: **postpone**. For instance, at home, my wife and I were contemplating replacing all of our kitchen cabinets. The corners had become tattered, they look worn, and they just look old and aged. They've had more than 10 years of very active use, and they weren't the highest quality when we built our house. We had anticipated that we would be replacing our kitchen cabinets this year. Instead, we've decided to postpone that project, and learn to live with them a little while longer. It doesn't mean we're not going to do it—it's still on the agenda—we've simply moved it down our priority list, and will address it later at the appropriate time. **What could you be postponing for a later date?** We all have something. C'mon, think on this one. Discuss it with your spouse; discuss it with your team.

E is for *Eliminate*

What in your life, do you have, but don't really need, or even use? I had four internal phone lines into my house: a fax line, a business line, and two personal lines (we had a younger daughter living with us). It became very clear that having all these phone lines was **excess**. We really didn't need four lines and we are now empty nesters. So, I eliminated three of my internal phone lines—the personal and fax land lines—and simply upgraded my cell phone service, leaving me with one landline into the house, expanded

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cell service, and a lot of saved money. **What excess can you find in your home or business to eliminate?**

R is for *Reduce*

What is it that you could reduce in your life that would really have no appreciable difference on your lifestyle, and may even save you money? On a personal perspective, when I'm traveling on the highway on my vacations or to events, and the speed limit is 65, typically, I might be travel at 70, or if I push it, I might even get up to 75 (hopefully no COPS are reading this). But what I've discovered is if I reduce that speed down to the speed limit of 65, the result is, I get 20% better gas mileage in my car. So by reducing I'm actually making a positive difference and it has no negative influence on my outcomes. **What are some of the things that you might be able to reduce at home or work, that won't negatively impact you, and may even have a positive effect?**

K is for what you *Keep*

And the last letter of our acronym perk is the **K**. **K** represents, regardless of the circumstances, what you **keep**. I've declared that regardless of the environment, regardless of the stress, regardless of what the economic conditions are, I'll keep my personal business coach. She's way too valuable. I'll keep my virtual assistant. I couldn't operate without her. I'd like to keep my early morning exercise routine—it keeps *me* healthy. And, I'm going to keep reminding my family and friends just how valued and important they are to me. I'm certainly going to KEEP telling Trish how much I love her. **What would you decide that you must keep?**

What I hope to have done is to simply raise your level of awareness of the concept, "*If it's to be, it's up to me.*" And that means **you**. I had to learn that lesson myself. I used to think all my problems were the result of someone else or circumstances outside my control. Rather than looking to outside sources for the cause of your difficulties and challenges, and instead of blaming others for what seemingly is happening negatively to you, why not take control! **You're in charge!** You're smarter than that.

When you hear yourself, or others, begin to say, "*Oh, it's the economy,*" stop and revisit the acronym **P-E-R-K**. Take whatever time is necessary—frankly, it's not very long, and it's a fun exercise—to go through **P-E-R-K**. Declare what you can **postpone, eliminate, reduce** and **keep**. Think it through, because, **you** have control.

Take this action. **Take** the step. Remember, it's the **start** that stops most of us!

Ronald F. Arndt, DDS, MBA, MAGD, MCC, THE DENTAL COACH© of www.DrArndt.com professionally coaches successful dentists who would rather be in control of their practice rather than their practice controlling them. Visit <http://www.drarndt.com/full-contact-coaching-candidate.html> to discover the value of coaching to you. Dr. Arndt can be reached at drron@drarndt.com.