

COLUMNS

5 ways to manage holiday retail-induced stress

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By STAFF REPORTS

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Ah, the holiday season. For many, it is the most joyous time of the year: cozy scarves, hot toddies, gifts, family the whole nine yards.

But if you work in retail, your view is often quite different.

Feelings of seasonal joy are replaced with stress from budget meetings and frenetic teams trying to determine the right creative, offer, email cadence and marketing mix.

Do not even get me started on end-of-year budgets. It is enough to leave even the calmest Zen master needing a drink.

While much of the hard work has already been done, there is still plenty you can do now to improve business and team performance.

Here are five areas to help guide you through the stresses of holiday:

Make goals crystal clear. If you ask five people on your team what the goal is and you get five different answers, you are going to have issues.

When you ensure that you, your team and any or all supporting teams all know the goals down to the last dollar, you gain true alignment and those goals become far easier to achieve.

When things are fast, go slow. This year's holiday season is obnoxiously short and coming on fast.

The natural reaction is to get caught up in the speed and sucked into the fallacy that every decision must be made immediately.

When we do that, we add stress to our teams and our decision-making, which leads to errors or misses.

Instead of giving into the frenzy, force yourself to slow down. Try following the 1-3-5 method: 1 decision requires 3 perspectives and 5 hours of information-gathering.

By doing this, you will eliminate the burden of making a decision on the spot, force yourself to gain other perspectives, and give yourself time to process the information while accomplishing the task.

Eliminate new processes, augment existing ones. We all have brilliant ideas on how to make reporting better, fulfillment smoother and customer care more efficient. Hold on to those ideas until February.

The added stress of a new process combined with the added risk of that new process not working is too much to take on during an already tense time of year.

Instead, focus on simple, additive processes that strengthen the team's insight into performance, allow them to make more informed decisions, or alleviate dependence on other tasks or people to make progress.

For example, continue your complete weekly reporting, analysis and deep dive of digital marketing, but perhaps add a daily quick look of numbers with just one or two lines of analysis.

Typically, distributing the numbers daily takes little to no extra work, but ensures everyone knows where the business stands.

Expect missteps. If predicting performance and running our businesses flawlessly were easy, we would all do it.

But without a doubt, missteps will happen plan for them.

Try using the sandwich method when planning your day.

At the beginning of your day, spend 30 uninterrupted minutes thinking through the day's biggest projects.

Next, write down a few potential actions per project you would take if things went sideways.

At the end of the day, take another 30 minutes to evaluate the list and assess which risks came true, the actions you took, and the outcomes of your actions.

The simple task of thinking through projects and writing down potential solutions helps you prepare should something go wrong, thus reducing stress.

Plus, evaluating the effects of your actions helps you keep track of your effectiveness, consequently improving performance.

Keep your vision at the right distance. One of the worst things about the holiday season? It convinces us to abandon our rational thinking and allows us to get caught up in acting for the now rather than for the future.

The worst thing you can do is make decisions that damage the future to make the now look good.

A way to prevent falling into this trap is to always outline two outcomes: immediate and long-term.

For example, if we add in a promotion now, we will have to anniversary it next year do we really want to add two promotions?

Ensuring you take both a short- and a long-term view of every action makes it easier to make more thoughtful decisions.

YES, THE HOLIDAY SEASON comes with its stresses.

But with a bit of focus, alignment and intentionality, we can reduce those stresses and spend much more time in Zen-like bliss, and still have time for a drink, too.

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