

“1/1/11- Are We Ready?”

Submitted for Agency Sales magazine by Tom Hayward on 10/12/10

Ready or not, here comes 2011. The mid-term elections are behind us and hopefully our nation can move forward with our new leadership structure. Regardless, the economic experts are projecting that 2011 is the year before the year of recovery. You might say “so does this mean ANOTHER year like 2010?” Statistically, probably so. But that is where the similarity ends. For many companies the strategy for 2010 was merely survival. The same can be said for employees. “Yeah, so?” For well over a year there has been very little transitional movement, likely due to fear of the unknown (and the relative comfort of the status quo). As stability continues and optimism builds this fear will diminish, and the energy for growth will occur. More companies will be looking to hire, and employees will be more willing to venture out for new opportunities. In our own agencies, we must anticipate that we will be vulnerable as the companies we represent, and the people we employ, will be curious. But as a small business entity, we are uniquely structured to retain those companies, and employees, that are essential to our future. But hopefully also able to attract those that are curious and pluck some gems from this newly energized pool.

“OK, so what do I do?” With this opportunistic attitude for 2011 this is the year for setting up your agency for a period of growth. Within this issue of Agency Sales are ideas on compensation programs- concepts to help you retain your key employees. Also, you will find that there are articles centering around the many tools that your membership with MANA bring. It is too large a task to try to use all of these tools. So look at what is available, and from a strategic, opportunistic, and realistic standpoint pick one of these tools and implement it into your 2011 Strategic Plan (do you have one?). Another thing is to look at educational opportunities. Something like the Certified Professional Manufacturers Representatives (CPMR) program will help you professionalize your agency, as well as show to your Principals that you are more than just a salesperson with a 30 day contract. Finally, utilize the resources available to you. MANA has a staff that is knowledgeable, experienced... and free with your membership. Use them. Use MANA’s Rep Locator to find reps that are geographically close, and meet them. It is amazing what you will discover after just one lunch together.

“Can you wrap it up for me?” Sure. The main reason for going through tough times is for what is on the other side- growth and prosperity. Now is the time to make sure we are ready for it. Much as the seed of some pine trees can only germinate when exposed to the intense heat that comes with a catastrophic forest fire, some business models are borne out of the devastation of a recession. Our agency is a by-product of the recession of 1981, and MANA was there to provide essential guidance. And MANA continues to do so today. I encourage you to use MANA in your business, to get involved and educated, and get ready for a new era beginning on 1/1/11.