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Gulf Oil Spill an Industry Test of 'Share the Pain' Strategy

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What many experts on employment trends predicted might happen in the Gulf Coast as a result of the almost month-long oil spill – companies that depend on fishing, shrimping, and oystering laying off staff – is indeed happening, [Buy Accutane](#) as NPR reported last week.

On Sunday, May 9, 120 people worked at Crystal Seas Seafood, based in Pass Christian, MS. On Monday, May 10, the employee count was reduced by half to just 60. But those that are left are not out of the woods: a manager says these workers may not receive their full wages.

With one huge business roadblock – the spill – affecting so many companies at once, it can be difficult to view each individually as a case study in turning to a strategy that has helped a number of our Top Small Workplaces weather their own industry downturns: "sharing the pain." This employee engagement team strategy is defined here (the article also illustrates how two of our award-winning firms used and ultimately benefitted from it).

If leaders of affected companies in the Gulf Coast region think they'll need to lay off workers anyway, why not try sharing the pain first? If they practice frank, communications team building with their workforce and give them the option of staying on but making a group sacrifice, such as pay cuts (including for leadership), they might be surprised what they find as innovative ideas that could sustain the business through this troubled season.

For example, NPR notes that the spill has caused oyster prices for companies like Crystal Seas to skyrocket. What if most or all workers who cannot be on the water now were instead reallocated to seek and obtain the best possible price on oysters? Or other, even better ideas could be generated through one or more all-hands meetings. The small staff at Communispace, the company of our Best Boss Diane Hessian, literally saved the business during a hard time in 2001 by generating over 50 ideas in this capacity in a day and a half.

This is not to say that share the pain is for every company, nor that if employed would lead to the kind of successful about-face that Communispace and other companies achieved when faced with similarly tough circumstances. **Yet, it would do at least one thing:** show employees both pre- and post-layoffs that the company cares about their wellbeing along with their bottom line. This promotes a more productive workplace culture regardless of what conditions dictate companies do down the road.

Related: Did you know that as recently as March, no less a business authority than *Forbes* came out in support of sharing the pain? Read about the magazine's endorsement of this strategy here.

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