

Building a #1 sales team

01/31/05

"My firm provides sales and marketing services to small to mid-size professional services firms. I'd like to get your thoughts on (a) the obstacles that small firms, especially those with no salespeople, face in trying to market their services e.g. juggling sales and client work, lack of focus, lack of sales expertise, limited funds etc and (b) ways that they can overcome these obstacles to create a sustained business development effort."

This owner nailed a top issue for most business owners. Growing a business means sales, sales and more sales. Some owners get that concept, and make it their total job. Some owners look for a hero or heroine – the superstar who can bring home the big bucks. We probably all know business owners who love delivering what they sell, and leave the selling to someone else. Regardless of approach, most owners get caught in the traps between getting sales, servicing customers, collecting on what's been delivered, planning for the future, expanding marketing efforts and just plain running the company.

Let's set some ground rules for achieving success growing sales.

1. Sales is every business owner's #1 job. No sales, no revenue coming in, no company. It is that simple. You, the owner, don't have to do it alone. You do have to look in the mirror, and

realistically assess your selling skills, successes, failures, and willingness to engage in fueling the future growth of your business by selling. Seek out people who look to be good at sales and find out what they did to get there. Then figure out how to apply that to your role and responsibility as owner of your company. Get training, find a coach, build a support structure, set sales goals for yourself – start small, and work your way up. Every time you find yourself shying away from sales, figure out how to get yourself back in the game. Take it one day at a time, within an overall plan for the week. Think of selling time as a time to do what you love best – talk with people who might be interested in what your company does, so that you can have a chance to get more business and do more delivery.

2. Find the money for sales. You are going to have to spend money to grow. Make it a priority. Sales and marketing budgets need to be in an inverse relationship to revenue; if revenue goes down, commitment to expand sales and marketing has to go up, in order to get things back on track.

3. Be frugal, not cheap. If funds are limited, look for firms or individuals willing to work on commission. Good sales people are not intimidated by reasonable, risk-reward propositions. Lay out a realistic

scenario whereby they can get started quickly, generate a base of income, and grow from there.

4. Build a sales team. Start with one, use part time if you don't have the money for full time. Make it everyone's job in the company to be in sales – from receptionist to shipping clerk to bookkeeping. Pay attention when an employee keeps bringing forward leads, opportunities, and ideas for new and better sales. If you need more sales, recruit, recruit and recruit. The more people you talk to, the more ideas you'll get, about what might work in your company.

5. Be involved in every sale (see rule #1). Make it your job, as owner, to be the closer. Too many businesses get into jeopardy because of bad business deals. Be sure you're getting the right sale, one that is profitable, on delivery terms you can meet, to a customer that will be good for the future of your business. If you have any concerns, work them out with the customer and the sales person, before the contract is inked. It's your job, as owner, to keep the company safe.

6. Hire support people to fill the pipeline. Lots of possibilities create momentum and confidence. You'll negotiate better, knowing you have more prospects than you need. I've also found that lead generators are usually less expensive and



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more productive than closers. Focus on people who know the routines of lead generation – regular direct mail, follow up, networking, building a database, using the Internet, and generating word of mouth enthusiasm.

7. Watch out for superstars – they're dangerous. They can squeeze out other contributors, be demanding and hard to manage, and may promise more than they can deliver. They tend to focus on what's good for them, which may differ from what's good for your company. I'll take a team of players, all working together, over a superstar. It's a safer bet for the company.

8. Set a schedule and goals. Make sales a priority – one of many. You can't sell all day long and neglect the rest of the company. It's a juggling game, and winners know how to minimize how much they juggle at any one time. Set limits and plan your activities to insure you sell, and have time to attend to your other duties.

Looking for a good book? Try these two titles by Dave Kahle: How to Create A Win/Win Sales Compensation Plan, and How to Find, Interview, Select and Hire a Good Sales Person. You can find them on the Internet at www.davekahle.com.

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