

## Get operations staff into the sales game

1/11/10

**“How can I keep sales upfront and center for my operations staff? I have people who work with customers all day long and it scares me that they may perform their assigned work but leave new opportunity on the table.”**

Often an organization's best sales come from existing clients. They need more and they usually know people in other companies who need something similar. It's natural for clients to ask for help from a company they're already comfortable with because of an existing work relationship.

Your customer service and operations staff are usually front and center in the sales game. They may not think of themselves as salespeople, but they can be a great source for expanding existing contracts and finding new business leads.

### **All sales, all the time**

Let's say your goal is to increase sales in 2010 by 15 percent - a nice, healthy goal. What if some of your clients grow because operations people jump on requests for additional support - let's say they can add 6 percent. Then operations picks up referrals that turn into another 4 percent. That reduces the demand for marketing and new sales to only 5 percent, before attrition - very manageable.

It's all about getting operations and service people to think about sales as a priority. Regular meetings, continual discussion of the importance of sales, goal setting, commissions, joint calls, reviews, reading and sales training are all tools in your kit. Then there's your day-to-day role as owner: Think of yourself as a sales manager all the time!

Make weekly operations meetings as much about sales as they are about operations. Ask people to discuss leads and how they found them. Recognize people who are successful bringing in new business and ask them to explain to the group how they did it.

Discuss clients' buying cycles at operations meetings. Big clients have additional divisions that need to learn about what your company does. Small clients may have the same buyer in charge all the time. Some clients have regular recurring needs and others only need what you do periodically. Over time, review each client and discuss what might happen next.

Ask everyone to identify clients they think are good for additional business. Don't accept the excuse that clients have no additional opportunity. Push people to have meaningful discussions with clients about who they else they know, to fill in lead gaps.

Set goals for people in operations. Make it clear that being a star in operations includes identifying potential new work. Ask every person in operations to come up with at least one lead per month.

### **Lead by example**

Consider a commission plan to incent operations. You can pay a flat fee for each lead identified, a percentage of new business they bring in or a finders fee for each new client they find. Make sure your plan is consistent with what you pay your salespeople.

Keep your eye out for clients that become 1,000-pound gorillas. You may find one operations person gets good at expanding one client. Keep individual clients under 20 percent of your total volume. That way, if one client departs you don't take a major hit. Assign operations people who succeed in expanding accounts to more than one client to balance growth.

As owner, you need to regularly be out in the field with your people. See what they do. Correct behavior if necessary. Don't tolerate poor communication and client skills - they're bad for business.

Ask operations people to set up client meetings for you to attend with them. At those meetings recognize the team's success - your staff and your client's staff - and ask about new business opportunity. Credit your staff with any leads that come out of those meetings.

Make sales education a priority for your operations staff. Develop a sales reading list and discuss books at staff meetings. Consider putting people through sales training to sharpen their skills. Build your skills as a sales /operations manager through education and practice.

Looking for a good book? Try "Proactive Sales Management: How to Lead, Motivate and Stay Ahead of the Game" by William "Skip" Miller.

*Business owners regularly turn to Ask Andi and Strategy Leaders for advice on how to grow profitable, successful companies. They find what they need time after time. Specific advice is available at [www.AskAndiBlog.com](http://www.AskAndiBlog.com). Ask Andi is also published weekly in the Westchester and Fairfield County Business Journals and Hudson Valley Business. Written by Strategy Leaders President, Andi Gray, the Ask Andi column is a rich source of advice for owners of established, privately held businesses.*

*If you are a business owner and you have a question or would like to discuss some aspect of your business, call [1.877.238.3535](tel:18772383535) or send an email to [AskAndi@StrategyLeaders.com](mailto:AskAndi@StrategyLeaders.com).*