
SECTION 20

PROFESSIONAL'S SELLING
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TRAINING FOR RESULTS

Great advances have occurred in the professional training programs available today. Firms want a bigger payback from their investment in training. Accountants and attorneys are looking for courses that are satisfying, challenging, and rewarding. They want practical, exciting ideas for gaining efficiency and increasing their value to clients and prospects.

How to make training in technical areas work for you more generally will be dealt with in the next article. Marketing and sales training has some obvious paybacks, starting with more business and the ability to select the kinds of clients you want for your firm.

Motorola and others repeatedly have shown that a dollar invested in training returns from 15–30 times the investment. Yet many firms say “I don’t want to invest in training and then have people leave.” But the more relevant question is: Would you rather not invest in training and have your non-trained people stay?

How to Make Training Work

Even the finest training will not succeed without three keys. The first key is top management’s support. Top management must not only agree to the training; they must also become strong adherents of developing new habits. To improve mar-

keting and client relations, partners need to tell staff members, “We have been training you technically for years, but to advance further, let’s work together to develop skills and habits that will hone your competitive edge.”

The next important key is follow-up commitment by the firm and staff members to rise to the challenge of developing new habits. For example, we have added a self-directed 12-week follow-up program to many of our training courses. Firms need to hold follow-up marketing meetings, brown bag lunches, or periodic role-playing exercises to build new skills.

Third, commit yourself and your partners to train constantly in areas of client needs. Many professionals design their training classes around a good location or an interesting intellectual subject. These criteria should take a back seat to impact training.

Conclusion

The most successful professionals and firms are those that commit to excellence in training.

USE CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR MARKETING

In many legal and accounting firms, “CE, CLE ,or CPE selling” is a frequently neglected marketing tool. Continuing Education (CE) is viewed as a burden rather than a beneficial sales tool.

Many professionals view their CE requirement with disdain. Some even cram their hours into the last month of the year and try to do as little as possible to maintain their licenses. I’ve even heard some complain to their clients about their CE requirements.

Every businessperson competing in today’s economy knows that to stay ahead and on top of changes, their professional advisors must continuously upgrade their skills. The best and the brightest have adopted a lifelong learning attitude. Yet some professionals neglect their training and forego the tremendous marketing advantage it gives us

Why not make a strong commitment to your training program and then use your efforts to market your practice? Whenever you plan to attend a training course of any type consider how you might use the training to your marketing advantage. Here are a few examples.

Learn More Marketing and Selling Skills

In some states, such as California, attorneys can’t take marketing CLE classes. However, even there, they can take cus-

tomer service and ethics classes that deal with marketing issues. In most states, you can find classes that will improve your skills in this crucial area. You benefit your business, and receive CE credit besides.

Obtain Skills That Will Attract Clients

If your area of concentration is family businesses, why take a course in credit unions just because it is being held in Las Vegas? Clients of advisory firms are screaming for their professionals to add more value to the relationship by acquiring a deeper understanding of the clients' businesses. Don't be content with just a general understanding of your clients' businesses, limited by what they tell you. Become a decision influencer by learning how you can help your clients grow and prosper.

Let Your Clients Know About Your Commitment to Training

A while ago, I read a great article in *American Way* magazine, written by American Airline's Chairman. The article was titled "Where School is Never Out" and covered American's commitment to training. Just reading the article made me feel safer about flying on American. My clients are now sending a similar letter to their clients. The letter emphasizes the value of their commitment to CE and how it can help the clients. This can only build their loyalty.

COACHING FOR SUCCESS

One of the crises many professional firms face today is a scarcity of loyal, talented, and experienced people. What if, when you were age 24, one of the partners of your firm, whom you respected, invited you for a cup of coffee. Then after some initial chitchat, the partner said to you, “I’d like to help you succeed in this business.”

Develop Your Staff’s Talents

What if that partner went on to say something like this: “We have several young staffers in our firm, but I’d like to coach you? We hired you because you are talented and I think you are outstanding. I want to help you succeed here or wherever your career takes you.” And what if, over time, that partner followed through? He met with you, watched over you, guided you, and helped you make better choices and avoid mistakes.

Many of the best people gravitate to firms that recognize, pay for, and appreciate them. Yet too many firms use a sink-or-swim approach with their young talent and often the firm is the loser in the end.

There is a way to help cure this problem once and for all if it exists in your firm: Develop a formal coaching or mentoring program. A marketing coaching program can promote a can-do attitude throughout your staff. It can have a

dramatic ripple effect throughout your firm. You can help your staffers build a business network. And, should your protégé leave your employ, you will have a friend for life.

How to Do It

Coaching for success can help both you and your employees develop dramatically better skills. For the most part, you should only coach one or two people at a time. Take them on sales calls, take them to Rotary, and take them home with you for a meal. Talk to your young associate about what it really takes to succeed. Pour out your wisdom and help them build relationships and grow.

A basic rule for coaching is to be friendly, frank, fair, and firm. With that formula, you can grow an excellent crop of future partners and build your firm for the long-term. Coaching need only take an hour or so a week, but it should be consistent.

Want to learn more on how to coach? One of my favorite writers, Linda Richardson, has a book titled *Sales Coaching*. The book, published by McGraw Hill, can be found in your local book store. Would you like to work more deeply and become a mentor? Whereas a coach is more skill focused, a mentor helps a protégé with their entire life: financial, physical, family, and faith. Bobb Biehl's Christian-based book titled *Mentoring*, (Broadman & Holman Publishers), is an excellent choice for people of all faiths.

THE VALUE OF TRAINING TO TRAIN

Give your staff the training to train. For example, students of our Rainmaker Academy are asked to teach what they learned at the Academy to other people at their offices. No matter what the content area, research shows that teaching enhances learning.

1. People who are expected to teach pay more attention and learn more than students who do not expect to teach. Preparing to teach will help embed the newly learned information more deeply into the attendees. *We highly recommend the material be taught within seven days of learning it.*

2. Training gets passed on to managers and others in the firm who have not attended the training session. Everyone who aspires to leadership in professional firms must develop sales and marketing skills. Training just one person from a firm impacts only that person, whereas training three to five people is obviously more fruitful.

3. Students subtly develop a mentoring and coaching program in selling skills. One student should train three to five others in the firm. Training only a few others puts less pressure on the student and requires less logistical planning time.

For ongoing training, teaching the same protégés over time creates strong relationships among the team members. If the

teaching and coaching works well, the firm can expect up to double the effects created from the student.

4. Students develop leadership and teaching skills.

Good leaders model the activities for less experienced people to adopt. As students implement training and are held accountable for doing what they say they'll do, they become model leaders for their firm. When others are also held accountable, they develop significant credibility within the firm.

5. Skills are delivered in a more cost-effective way.

When the participants teach the material they've learned to three other people, the per person training cost to the firm drops considerably.

Summary

While the return on investment is still very powerful for one person's training participation, the ROI becomes overwhelming using the Training to Train concepts.

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SELLING IS AN INVESTMENT

One of the saddest events I witness in professional firms is the exodus of good people with experience. Yet this is just the group of people firms want to keep.

The policy of “up or out”—you make partner or you leave—strips firms of great experience. And it can cheat staffers who are not supported in doing what it takes to make partner. All too often, the staffers leave because they or their firms did not make a regular investment in their future. Partners who focus junior associates on the technical job at hand and then skimp on training and marketing may profit in the short-run, but will lose long-term profitability.

Invest in Yourself

If you are an associate professional or staff member, avoid the easy trap of exclusive focus on your work. Make this the year that you invest in yourself (even if your firm does not). You will make yourself more valuable to the firm, and enjoy your job more as well.

Recently, I asked a group of about 50 professionals if anyone had spent as much as \$100 of their own money during the last 12 months on education. Two people raised their hands. Most people spend more on the outside of their heads (hair styles and cuts) than they do on the inside of their heads. At a recent marketing session, several of the people com-

plained about the time (four hours) to read two paperback books on customer service. These thirty-year-olds had begun the process of retirement at an early age.

Developing Your Selling Skills

Here are three key areas where you should invest in your marketing acumen now:

Speaking and writing. All professions are changing from technicians to communicators. Technology is becoming the “technician.” Join Toastmasters International or take a speaking course. When you invest in your communication skills, you are creating a bright future for yourself. Write at least two articles for publication in the next year. If you do not feel qualified, ask someone who is an excellent writer to coach you and proof your material. Consider taking a creative writing course.

Invest in your clients. Spend 2–5% of your time meeting with clients, “off-the-clock.” Find out about your clients’ businesses. Learn about their problems, competition, and technology. Learn about their families, friends and other acquaintances. Others are selling to your clients. Why shouldn’t you? Don’t assume you know what your clients want, ask them. Make certain you let your clients know you are investing in the relationships so they don’t think you are billing them.

Develop two new referral sources. Your client’s other professionals and bankers are good places to begin developing referral contacts. If you will focus on developing two new strong referral sources a year until you’ve gained 12, you will never starve for new clients. Partners who have twelve acquaintances who send them just one referred lead a year, are known as rainmakers. If you start building referral contacts early in your career, it is easy. If you wait until you’ve been in the business for ten years, building 12 referral sources is hard. Inch by inch, anything is a cinch. Yard by yard, anything is hard.

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STRATEGIC ADVANCES FOR YOUR OWNER GROUP

A *retreat* is really a preparation to *advance* vigorously. That's why most of my clients now use the word *Advance*. Holding an annual strategic advance will help you accomplish three key things:

- Strengthen your firm's overall strategy.
- Assure that your structure, systems and staffing are in alignment with your strategy.
- Improve your commitment to action.

With a strategic advance, all of your owners can feel involved in the firm and it's management processes, enthusiastic about marketing the firm to clients and others; motivated to achieve their individual objectives, and an important part of a committed team.

The principals of Waugh & CO have conducted and facilitated advances for over 25 years. Our clients have used them with great success.

Management's Advance

While some advances are opportunities to "get away from it all," advances should be for really "getting into it." Educational and religious groups have used advances for years. But only recently have advances become popular for professional firms.

Objectives

We want to get away from the daily routine, the phone calls, the meetings and all other activities that might distract us from the advance's objectives. A successful advance will have a major impact on the achievement of company goals. Therefore, it requires the unfettered participation of the attendees.

Leadership by top management in planning and conducting the advance is a must.

Advances can have any or all of several objectives. A group that hasn't worked together very long or closely can use the advance to build lines of communication and establish relationships among members. The advance should almost always be used to motivate the management team and build a spirit of teamwork. Achieving those objectives can be greatly enhanced by following a few simple rules:

- Keep the dress and atmosphere informal.
- Keep size of the group manageable so everyone can and must participate.
- Arrange seating so participants are comfortable and feel part of the group.
- Eat meals as a group.
- Provide some social time for spontaneous interactions among members.
- Everyone remains at the advance from start to finish.

Conclusion

An advance offers an exceptional vehicle for educational programs for management. Remember, it's imperative that you know what your objectives are for the advance, or a substantial time and money investment will go down the drain.

(Appendices 8 – 10 contain various checklists that are helpful in conducting firm advances.)