

100 Days to REVENUE-FOCUSED LEADERSHIP

Practice group leaders must make business development a priority in the first 100 days. For example, almost every firm has a huge opportunity to improve cross-selling additional services to its clients.

BY JOHN CUNNINGHAM

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES firms — unlike their corporate clients—generally do not groom individuals to prepare them for leadership roles within the organization. As a consequence, a new practice group leader often faces the daunting task of learning about leadership just when he or she is at the most critical juncture—the beginning of their term.

David Freeman of Whetstone Consulting in Boulder, Colorado, who has coached thousands of professionals in corporations and service firms on business development and “revenue-focused leadership,” said that the first 100 days of leadership are “the ideal time to form good organizational habits [or] break habits that are not functional.”

He asserts that “new leaders get a break coming into their positions” because that is when people are most likely to trust them, adding that a change in leadership represents “one of those catalyst events when people are willing to try new things.”

People are in fact starved for leadership, as evidenced by the 77,000 books on leadership available through Amazon. Yet making an investment in leadership training is still something of a cutting-edge tool for professional service firms.

He asserts that research shows “people join a firm, but they leave a boss,” adding that a good leadership coach can not only help to drive revenue but can assist in cutting losses from defection and lost productivity. Freeman adds that a good coach has the greatest impact when working closely

with a new practice group leader in the very first month.

The first steps

One of the first things leaders should learn, according to Freeman, is that there are different ways to lead and that various people respond differently to particular leadership styles. The most effective leaders are “hybrids” who can “look at the group and look at themselves” to decide what is needed for a particular situation, he said.

Leaders can benefit from utilizing various styles that researchers have described as:

- Visionary.
- Affiliative.
- Coaching and collaboration oriented.
- Democratic.
- Pacesetter.
- Commanding.

The specific attributes of various styles—such as empathy, listening, standard setting, or providing forceful direction—are just different “tools” for achieving the objectives of leadership, according to Freeman.

Leaders can also benefit from an early effort to interview people in their groups and understand their objectives. “If you can solve one person’s problem, you will quickly be their hero,” he said, adding that “people will really put their shoulders to the oars for someone who is their advocate.”

But Freeman cautioned that effective leadership is not just about “soft skills” either. Early in their tenure, leaders have

to get people focused on goal setting and the process of getting to their goals. Leaders must identify opportunities to build commitment toward a plan and an organizational process for achieving the plan that fits with the people and the culture.

He adds that corporate leaders understand that “you have to design and build the flywheel before you can actually get it moving,” noting that much of his work with leaders focuses on building the blueprints for organizational success.

Freeman explained that practice group leaders are the spine of the firm, carrying out the messages of the head by getting the fingers and feet to move in the right direction. “It’s important for group leaders to understand that they don’t have to do it all themselves to be effective leaders,” he stresses, noting that effective leaders know how to delegate the right tasks to the right people.



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Seizing opportunities

One of the first tasks that revenue-focused leaders must put into capable hands is the formulation of a business development plan and strategy. “It’s up to leaders to set the tone in every meeting that business development is a priority. It can’t be just something you talk about at the end of the meeting,” Freeman said.

Practice group retreats can effectively get people focused on business development messages and opportunities in the first 100 days. “Retreats are a great way to do team-building, training and identification of cross-selling opportunities,” said Freeman.

The veteran coach asserted, “almost every firm has a huge opportunity for improvement in cross-selling additional services to its clients.” In fact, Freeman facilitated discussions at one law firm retreat that identified roughly \$60 million in potential cross-selling opportunities that nobody had tapped.

Freeman also tells leaders to challenge their people in business development with specific goals, specially empha-

sizing goals for client meetings. “If a leader sends a clear message that you need to get ‘on site’ with clients a certain number of times per month that is a great start,” he advises.

He recalled one example where a New England lawyer experienced “the magic of being on site” with a client: “While he was there, three other people in the client’s office [other than the principal contact] stopped him [and] he walked out eight hours later with four more deals.” It is ironic that some professionals think that clients don’t want the imposition of a visit, when quite the opposite is usually true, said Freeman.

But he also warned that you can’t send out messages to clients about “who you are” until you do a “reality check” that insures your deliverables match your branding promises.

The follow-up component to business development is providing superior client service that leaves the client wanting more, and Freeman said there is a demonstrated history of what works in this area too. “There are five aspects of exceptional client service, and if you nail these five things, you will deepen your client relationships with great service,” he asserts. They include:

- Knowing the client’s business.
- Being highly responsive.
- Communicating frequently and clearly with clients
- Being proactive by anticipating issues and proposing solutions.
- Getting client feedback.

Measuring success

Freeman advises leaders to be patient in working through a program for revenue enhancement. “Dollars in the door is a lagging indicator of success,” he explains.

The “lead indicators” that should be measured are specific activities that lead to revenue enhancement, such as client visits, cross-selling efforts, or even regular business development meetings. Freeman said that independent professionals are “just not trained to be leaders,” but they can rapidly adapt by understanding the component parts to success and breaking them down into achievable, measurable steps for their groups.

He added that revenue-focused leadership is not just about setting standards and measuring deliverables for activities directly linked to business development. “Business people understand the importance of a ‘balanced scorecard’ that measures all the components to success,” he asserts.

Such a scorecard puts financial success at the end of the formula, with priority emphasis on training and motivation, internal systems of operation and sharpening organizational focus on the clients.

“If you follow this program and hold people accountable for each activity, you will see results,” he concludes.

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