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Talent Mangement

To survive, prove you are the strongest team member

Premium content from Birmingham Business Journal by Kelly Schuck, Special

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Expectations are at an all-time high for employees at every level.

Companies face the juxtaposition of managing talent and cutting costs. Through this challenge, it is clear that only the strong will survive. These tough economic times require all individuals within an organization to have a positive impact on the company's bottom line. Everyone must bring something to the table and be a net producer.

For all managers, the focus is on growing revenues and cutting costs. Those managers who lead their teams to achieve increased revenues will more likely be retained when layoffs mount. For sales people, the ones who produce the most business will survive. Individuals are charged with not only maintaining existing business but also increasing market share. In this new world, account management is a thing of the past. The pressure is on to increase sales by executing serious business development efforts.

This trend is particularly apparent in professional service firms. Within law, accounting, engineering, financial and consulting firms, those professionals who can bring in business and land their own clients characterize the new standard. Previously, young lawyers or accountants had the luxury of learning the business as the more seasoned handed off overflow work. The young professional lawyer, architect, engineer, etc. was not expected to hit the ground developing business but rather grow into a client base over time. In today's professional service world and across all industries, clients are tougher to land and tougher to retain as the client's business is also vulnerable to the weak economy. This results in shrinking work for firms thus less work to handoff.

When an Atlanta-based consulting firm recently laid off two consultants, the decision was based

on who had their own clients versus who relied on more seasoned consultants to hand off work. Those who were not self sufficient were let go. Strong employees should not only possess the technical expertise of their profession but also be able to develop new clients and business for their organizations.

As managers seek to hire and develop top talent, it will be important to ensure that business development skills are a core competency of every position. Likeability, good technical skills, intelligence and conscientiousness have always been important factors. However, strong sales skills must now be added to the new paradigm of business development skills as a core competency. Even individuals without bottom line responsibility will have to be savvy at cross-selling, referrals and creative ways to advance the business.

Some people are naturally talented at networking and marketing themselves. Such individuals seamlessly shift into marketing mode. They do it without thinking about it and are even energized by doing it. Although some come by this strength naturally, the test is whether those who don't are willing to crank up their efforts and become the whole package.

Managers must create a high-performing team across the board to ensure their organizations will survive this economic downturn. To do so, management must take certain steps to ensure a sales-centric environment.

The following tips will help leaders build a culture of peak performance and identify which team members will be up to the challenge.

- Clearly communicate expectations and educate all employees on how their role contributes to the bottom line.
- Set individual performance goals and achieve buy-in of goals.
- Establish group goals to include support staff and individuals who are not directly responsible for sales.
- Be honest about the state and needs of the company and be willing to risk losing people.
- Clearly communicate the emphasis on a business development culture and how this is part of the organization's core values.
- Have regular group meetings to discuss the state of the company and how the team is operating to ensure the company's survivability.
- Be willing to make difficult decisions when top performance is not achieved.