

## **CORPORATE COMMUNIQUE**

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### **SOMETIMES PLAY TO STRENGTHS INSTEAD OF TRYING TO FIX WEAKNESSES**

I just read about a firm that had a senior consultant with strong technical skills, high integrity and a great work ethic. But he couldn't sell new business. In many professional firms, where consultants must also sell additional services, this would have cost him his job. However, senior management wanted to keep him so, as a last-ditch effort, they stopped trying to correct his weakness as a sales person and restructured his role to focus on his strengths.

Because of his technical ability, they placed him in charge of quality control to review every analysis and report before they were presented to clients. In addition, because the firm needed a senior person to develop junior staff, they also put him in charge of mentoring the younger consultants, a role he was already filling informally. The results? A re-energized executive, a relieved senior management, vastly improved work products and increased revenues.

This reminded me of our experience with one of our clients.

I was brought in as interim CEO by the Board of a manufacturing company that had gone into a downward spiral in the previous three years after it had promoted the Vice-President of Engineering to President. My mandate was to turn the company around and then recruit a permanent CEO. In the process, I was to release the President and recruit a new V.P. of Engineering.

I first tried to determine why the company had done so well prior to the last three years. I also took time to evaluate each senior and mid-level executive. Several factors quickly became obvious:

- The rest of the senior executives were quite competent but not capable of being CEO.
- Engineering did not require a vice-president to run it.
- Most important: When he was V.P. of Engineering, the President had also developed a number of very successful products – but not one new product was developed after he became President.

At this point I told the Board that, in addition to several other steps, we should separate engineering from product development, hire a chief engineer and make the ex-President responsible only for product development. The Board reluctantly agreed. The results?

- The ex-President adjusted to the change and quickly regained his confidence. Within six months, he developed several new products that were immediately successful.
- By nine months, cash flow turned positive.
- I was then able to recruit a competent CEO who continued to grow the company.

The lesson from these examples? As the old saying goes, "You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear." However – to mix metaphors – sometimes you can turn a weak starting pitcher into a strong reliever if you play to a person's strengths instead of trying to correct their weaknesses.

*Bob Denney*

