

Are your business developers match fit?

Assigning a business development coach to your partners could transform their performance in the new business arena at a time when performance really counts.

There are very few professional sports clubs – football, rugby, cricket, athletics – that would send their highly paid players out into competitive matches without the benefits of regular personal coaching. In sport, there's an understanding that talent and fitness will only take a player so far. The difference between winning and losing is often (largely) down to psychology – setting performance goals, overcoming fears, creating the right mindset, being hungry for success.

In professional services, there still exists a view that partners can do everything – generate leads, pitch, sell, deliver, motivate, lead and walk on water. Like top sports players, they are highly paid assets, but are sent out daily to compete with expectations of the highest performance, without the benefits of coaching.

The need for effective business development has never been greater than in the current economic climate. Most businesses are under pressure and are caught between the need to continue to invest in new business and the temptation to cut costs.

The two are not incompatible. The answer is to make more of your existing resources. In a professional services firm, this means increasing the skills, confidence and effectiveness of partners. Many firms have already invested in training their partners in business development and selling. But many partners are still nonetheless reluctant to do what they need to do on a regular basis.

Generally the issue is not that they lack knowledge, but rather that they lack the courage, confidence and drive to make it happen. Coaching can help.

Coaching is about enabling people to achieve their full potential. Coaches don't tell people what to do or offer them advice. They work with the person to set clear goals, unblock barriers and develop strategies and actions to achieve their goals. Coaches raise people's awareness of their capabilities, what works best for them, how they might take small steps forward, how best to overcome obstacles on the way.

When working with partners on business development coaching, the coach begins with the goal. Often the goal is not clear. It's rarely specific enough or measurable or time bound. And frequently it's simply unrealistic. Little thought has been given to realistic steps on the way. The coach helps the partner to break down the goal into achievable steps and then works with them in a series of sessions to reach each step.

Many partners have what are called "limiting beliefs" about their own abilities. They don't think they can sell. They're uncomfortable with networking. They are reluctant to pick up the 'phone without a technical matter to discuss. They think business development is better left to others who are more capable. The coaching process raises awareness of these beliefs and challenges them.

Finally, coaching is action oriented. The coach helps his client explore all the things that could be done and then pin down the things that will be done, when and how they will be

done and what other resources might be needed to make them happen. Regular coaching sessions ensure that actions are reviewed and goals revised if necessary to maintain motivation. The very fact that a partner has to meet their coach on a regular basis will help ensure that action is taken.

Coaching is about performance. It's about getting results. Raising the business development performance of your partners is probably the most valuable thing you could do for your business right now.

Whichever league you're in and however talented your "players" their performance can be enhanced by the right kind of coaching support.

For more information on coaching support, contact Geoff Dodds Consultants

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