

# Why is staffing my business my biggest headache?

*By Mel Clemmons*

I have spent thousands of hours discussing this topic with business owners from a wide range of industries. I have come to the conclusion that the reason staffing is our biggest headache is because we have not made it our highest priority.

I read a quote recently which states “Necessity is what makes a person act; without it, there is no action.” So when a staff person quits, we rush to find a replacement out of necessity. Some business owners tend to get complacent when things are going well, preferring to sit back and enjoy the ride. True leaders are proactive – not reactive – which means they are always in an improvement mode. They don’t wait around for a crisis to make improvements.

Actually, most successful business owners interview 5 to 10 prospective employees each month, depending on the size of their business. They do this to keep a fresh pipeline of talent and so their staff never feels irreplaceable. This process leaves the staff wondering why their supervisor is always looking for new people. You might ask, “How do I find 5 to 10 people each month to interview?” The question I ask you in return is, “How can you not?”

Before I explain how I go about finding great talent, I think we can all agree that our biggest concern is getting more production out of our employees. In a word, this means maximizing SALES by our producers.

I got tired of bumping my head against the wall, so I began to record the names and contact information of sales people I came across in my everyday business and personal transactions. Last month, for instance, I was buying a suit and the salesperson started pitching me their rewards program, which I really didn’t want, but she convinced me to get it. At that point, a light bulb went off in my head, and I thought, “Maybe she would be a good producer for my agency.” Then I told her what I did for a living and we scheduled an interview.

Another instance occurred while I was walking through the airport. As you know, there are always people selling credit card services for the airlines. One of them stopped me and told me about his credit card program. I gave him every excuse I could think of, but he wouldn’t give up, and – DING, DING, DING – another sales producer got added to my list! I remember thinking, “If he has enough gumption to stop 300 people a day, he can probably convince five people a month to buy life insurance.”

I have also always utilized my church to locate talent. I believe the vast majority of people in that arena are responsible individuals and at least somewhat committed because they routinely attend weekly services. And since we share something in common, they are often very receptive and willing to offer firsthand references of suitable employee candidates.

These are simple strategies that I have seen people implement to find good talent. But before you can build a successful team, you must first determine your strengths and weaknesses. You can find and hire all the people you want, but if you can’t lead them, it will be hard for you to get off the hiring treadmill. As business owners, it is up to us to lead people and manage processes. The secret then, is to learn to how to lead, and if you can do that, many of your headaches will cease.

Let’s discuss leadership and why it causes us to struggle. Before we begin, we should ask ourselves a few questions, the answers to which may reveal why some of us stumble as we attempt to create the perfect team. First, have you been trained how to lead a team? Next, have

you been taught how to effectively motivate sales people? And last, have you been trained how to identify sales people?

The biggest mistake people make is expecting their new producer to be a super sales person right away. Super sales people are not hired; they are shaped, molded and developed over time. They must also be motivated to succeed. As business owners, we have to learn what it is we don't know about leadership and then invest in some personal development to get the success we desire. This means that if our producers continually miss their sales goals, it is our fault, not theirs. By us continually accepting mediocrity, we are setting ourselves for failure. So without making changes and demanding more, we're simply handing out "get out of jail free cards" to our employees and giving them the impression that we condone their lack of results.

I was in a business owner's office just this week. I found him in the back of the office reading a book. I looked out front and one employee was reading a magazine while the other was surfing the net. The question is: If you don't care about the success of your operation, why would your staff? You have to demonstrate the results you want your staff to produce.

You also have to be able to cut ties with staff people who go against your vision. Grandma used to say, "One apple can spoil a bunch," and she wasn't wrong. I have seen first-hand how negative employees can contaminate a whole group with bad energy. It takes commitment to run a successful organization. The questions to ask yourself are: "If not me, then who? If not now, then when?" Success is a constantly evolving process. It is a journey, not a destination. There will be ups and downs. The key is not giving up.

Let me now elaborate on some things you can do to succeed in your agency. The way I look at it, every roadblock is an opportunity. If you find out the company is going to take a huge rate increase, don't dwell on how bad things will be, think of ways you and your staff can convert angry customer calls into sales opportunities. Come up with a reasonable explanation for the increase and calmly discuss with your client. Once the customer is satisfied, switch the pitch and move on to another subject – such as life insurance.

What if the company comes out with an unpopular change? Instead of bashing and complaining about it, look for a silver lining. Explain to your employees how other agencies have flourished in similar situations. Other agencies may decide to call it quits and exit the business, which can mean a boon for your agency because those customers need to find agents elsewhere.

Top agents also incentivize their teams more during tough times because they want to encourage them. The team need to know it's a joint effort and by persevering, they will succeed. Invest in staff training on consistent basis for your organization. Take them to conferences, bring in sales leaders, and offer to pay for classes that will improve their job performance. Highlight one good thing that each person in your office does each month. Focus on your vision. And let your staff know failure is not an option.

The key concept here is for you to realize that people will follow, but someone must be willing to lead. And remember to ask yourself: **"If not me, who? If not now, when?"**

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