

# MARKET TRENDS

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## Developing the Next Generation of Leaders

By Wendy Nemitz, Shareholder, Ingenuity Marketing Group

**W**hen I graduated from college and went into public accounting, it never occurred to me I would be in sales," said John Edson, shareholder and marketing director at Blanski, Peter, Kronlage & Zoch, P.A. in Minneapolis. "About ten years later it dawned on me that I am in sales every single day. That was kind of a shock. But now it is second nature."

People entering public accounting twenty years ago never expected to be in sales or marketing. Most were not taught to think of themselves as leaders. People graduating today have expectations that are not too different. They are often surprised or unprepared for the type of work they will really do.

"CPAs used to spend most of their time on more technically-oriented compliance work. But clients today demand a lot more. Our most significant value comes from consulting, which is helping them create their futures. That takes a whole new set of skills," Edson said.

Being a CPA means constantly updating technical skills. Leading a firm in a changing environment and growing a book of business demand a completely

different set of skills. Leadership abilities like consultative selling, interpersonal communication, managing both people and projects, developing influence, persuading others, presenting ideas fluently, being credible, and networking are skills required today. While most CPA firms help their professionals develop technical skills and credentials, very few have created a formal learning program for developing the "soft skills" of consulting, rainmaking, and leadership.

Firms have found three ways to deal with this issue of developing young leaders and rainmakers. The first method, known as "Sink or Swim," is very popular. This method involves:

- A once-in-a-great-while lunchtime or firm retreat speaker on communication skills. No follow up.
- Keeping young professionals away from clients because they might "say something wrong."
- Partners who expect managers to bring in new clients when they have never been mentored in how to connect to the business community nor involved as members in any trade or community association.

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## Rainmaking 101: Helping CPAs Excel

By Ilene Schwartz, McCrory & McDowell

**A**s professional marketers, we know that working in a vacuum is lethal. We must enlist our CPA colleagues in efforts to grow and sustain a profitable business. Although most of us are inherent "rainmakers," CPAs by nature tend to seek refuge from that to which we gravitate.

In years past, many firms' success resulted from entrepreneurial partners skilled at networking and relationship building. Quite often it was enough, their staff needed only to focus on technical skills and delivering high quality services. Today, however, the competitive landscape is daunting; it is no longer feasible to rely on one or

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## Training Your Staff: Best Practices, Methods, and Strategies

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## Next Generation of Leaders

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The downsides of this method are obvious. Younger professionals who enjoy developing their leadership skills leave this firm because they don't want to "put in their time," while more technically-oriented people, who have little incentive to develop outside contacts and little practice leading people, are promoted to management/leadership positions. A leadership and rainmaking vacuum threatens the firm. Professionals lack the skills to cross-sell to clients.

The second method of leadership development involves having a partner-in-training program. Some firms have developed:

- Young Rainmaker Groups where a small group of high potential professionals meets weekly or monthly to focus on developing their connections outside the firm and their leadership skills inside. A partner or outside facilitator keeps the program on track and coaches the participants.
- Ongoing voluntary training programs, usually over lunch, that use inside talent such as the marketing director or HR director or various partners to talk about issues.
- Leadership training for everyone on a regular basis.

One of the critical factors in the success of these programs is someone excited about promoting the program and a budget to hire outside trainers to bring new discussion into the firm.

Dawn Wagenaar, a shareholder at Ingenuity Marketing Group is the former marketing director at Boulay Heutmaker Zibell & Co., PLLP, in Minneapolis. Wagenaar put together a regular program of leadership and marketing training for her firm. Participation was mandatory for some groups and voluntary for others so she worked to generate excitement with e-mails and posters.

"One of the keys to success," says Wagenaar "is to strongly encourage at least a few partners to be in the sessions. It makes a big difference in how the program is perceived."



## About the Author:

Wendy Nemitz founded Ingenuity Marketing Group in 1991. Nemitz became the first marketing person in a large, local CPA firm in 1987 and has worked in professional service and educational marketing ever since. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Communications from the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul and is presently working on her Master of Leadership Degree at Augsburg in Minneapolis. Wendy will be a featured speaker at AAM Summit 2005: Marketing Magic in June in Orlando. She can be reached at 651.690.3358 or by email at [wendy@ingenuitymarketing.com](mailto:wendy@ingenuitymarketing.com).

The third method, which only a few firms have developed, is to create a regular, ongoing program for all staff.

One firm, Contryman Associates, P.C. of Nebraska, has developed a full program of leadership development that focuses on individual initiative.

Marketing director Linda Slothower spearheaded the development of the program about two and a half years ago.

"We have yet to have someone go through all levels of the program," said Slothower. "But many people have completed pieces of it."

The Contryman Academy creates three levels of achievement: Graduate, Advanced, and Master Level Certification. Each level requires a mix of college level or certification level coursework, self study, and cooperative field study with required results in terms of community involvement, new client acquisition, or cross-selling.

Because Contryman has seven offices across the state, and it is time- and cost-prohibitive to bring groups together regularly for training, the Contryman Academy is set up to make use of individual initiative. "Like every other firm, we make money on billable hours. Driving across Nebraska to get to a class takes a lot of time," commented Slothower.

A firm with only one location, BPK&Z in Minneapolis, has set up its program, Leaders in Training (LIT), to encourage group learning.

"We are very team-oriented," said Phil Kronlage, President at BPK&Z. "It just made sense for us to keep our people together so they would all get the same

message and be able to discuss various issues and experiences."

The LIT program is introduced to new team members within a few weeks of joining the firm. While it is an optional program, nearly every accountant at the firm participates, sometimes volunteering evening hours or personal time. Most of the LIT program is a series of learning events, such as seminars or lunch and learns. Topics range from Professional Image to Better Public Speaking.

This year the firm is focusing on the theme of "How to Think Like a Consultant," featuring learning events such as small group case studies, a book group, a seminar from a local professor on coaching clients and colleagues, and a lunchtime program that discusses local publications, Web sites, and other media.

The LIT program is integrated with BPK&Z's planning and coaching programs. Each team member and shareholder writes a 90-day plan of action. Those plans are often about joining community organizations or achieving practice development goals. Each person has a coach who helps them determine the plan of action and holds them accountable to it. Shareholders use a marketing consultant as their coach.

"A lot of young people who choose this profession don't realize that they will be selling their knowledge and ideas, convincing clients to see and fix problems, persuading others to work well with them. You just have to package yourself and your skills in a positive manner," said John Edson. "Those twenty and thirty-somethings are our future. We had better make sure they are ready." **AA**