

Ask for feedback. Face-to-face communication is a two-way street. Balanced feedback allows people to be relaxed and comfortable. However, when people start feeling comfortable, they may also become lazy and lose their professionalism. Don't forget who you are and what you are doing. Maintain self-control. Ask for specific feedback about the points you raised, the manner in which you presented, the way you responded and how you can improve. Apply that advice immediately. Hanke says that technology-driven communication will improve if you focus on face-to-face communication first. ■IPA

Personal Marketing Plans Help Guide Firm Development Efforts



Many firms are finding the best way to create a comprehensive business development and marketing process is to put some metrics to the test.

Perhaps the most effective way to gather those metrics is to create personal marketing plans for individual partners and associates. Like other service professionals, CPAs are concerned about billable hours. An individual marketing plan helps organize marketing into the rest of their responsibilities, says **Dawn Wagenaar**, principal of the **Ingenuity Marketing Group** in St. Paul, Minn.

A personal marketing plan sets forth the specific steps CPAs need to take and helps them move forward with concrete actions. "A plan makes marketing manageable and understandable to people who are more technically oriented," Wagenaar tells IPA.

Personal marketing plans are an important roadmap to help partners and staff become more effective at business development, says **Eileen Monesson**, a principal with **PR Counts, LLC** in New Jersey. Monesson works with accountants of all backgrounds and experience levels to identify organizations and referral sources with whom they should be interacting.

The end goal is always to keep your pipeline of business development leads full, Monesson says. She works with clients to help perfect their methods of keeping in touch with their network contacts and expanding their influence as thought leaders.

"Every situation is a bit different and you do have to look at the niches that professionals are in," Monesson notes. She works with clients to map out a plan for how their network can be expanded. For example, if an accountant joins an association, she encourages them to follow a path that will eventually lead to taking a leadership role within that organization – a role that allows them to build a stronger base of contacts.

All associates and principals at **Anders, Minkler & Diehl** in St. Louis follow a practice-wide development plan. **Donna Erbs**, marketing director, meets with each professional twice a year. The meetings and plans hold them accountable for business development goals.

**Incentives
& Mentors
Garner
Results**

Incentives help. When staff members achieve a goal from their plan, they record it using a formal point system. In December, a portion of their bonus is based on those efforts. Each person also has a “bucket” of money to spend on practice development efforts; the amount increases as their level increases.

“We have a mentor program for some of the (less experienced) staff and their mentors are involved in this process,” Erbs says. “It is woven in with their performance reviews.”

The process has garnered results. In 2010, the firm’s fourth quarter numbers reflected that 25% of new business came from non-partners. “The goal in doing all of this is to create a business development culture at the firm and to [turn] technically proficient young CPAs [into] savvy business people, too,” Erbs says.

**Follow-Up,
Update
And
Communicate**

For some accountants, it is important for those in charge of marketing to meet with them once or twice a month to ensure they stay on track and are meeting their business development goals, Monesson says. Such meetings can occur less frequently once a track record is established.

“You want to get the professionals to deliver on their promises because it can be easy to slip back into the billable workload routine,” she tells IPA. “[In reality], building and nurturing this business development pipeline is just as important.”

Personal marketing plans can be audited a couple of times a year for updates so that timelines are met, Monesson advises. These plans are not just for partners, but also for associates who want to build their own book of business early in their career. When successful, these associates will often advance quickly.

“As you move forward with your [personal] marketing plan, you will move faster up the ladder because you bring tangible value to the firm outside of the [accounting] work,” Monesson says. “But you only want to work with professionals who want to build their book of business and are motivated to do so.”

**Customize
Your Plans**

Individual plans focus on the personal strengths so they can do the things they like, Wagenaar shares. Instead of thinking that they have to go to social events or make cold calls, CPAs can focus on their strengths, such as writing articles, cross-selling to existing customers or improving client service.

“The overall impact is not only new business, but hopefully, improved client service. You are creating a firm marketing culture instead of expecting those skills to just show up once someone becomes a partner,” Wagenaar says.

Stacie Muldoon, Director of Marketing at **Mengel Metzger Barr & Co.** in Rochester, N.Y., is in the process of working with the partners to develop their first personal marketing plans.

Muldoon’s main goal is to assist the partners in establishing their comfort zones within six categories: *client relationships, referral networking, public speaking, community service, industry/trade group participation and niche marketing*. Realizing that professionals need to juggle many aspects of their professional and personal lives, Muldoon feels it is a necessity to allow people to focus on areas where they feel confident, and therefore, motivated.

“Once the comfort zones were established, goals were set and reviewed on an individual basis with me and the partner,” Muldoon tells IPA. “Quarterly meetings will be held to assist our partners in staying focused and allowing them to alter the plans in order to keep up with the changing marketplace.”

When compiled correctly, a personal marketing plan can benefit a CPA of any age, education or experience level. Typically, however, it is more effective for associates or younger partners who are in the process of becoming rainmakers or building their own book of business, Erbs says.

**Manage
Your Plan
Effectively**

When managed and executed effectively, a personal marketing plan can help a CPA expand his or her network, create new revenue opportunities, increase exposure and content expertise and even become more effective in creating satisfied clients.

“You essentially should have goals each month, week or day of what you want to accomplish from a marketing standpoint,” Erbs insists. “If you fail to meet some of those goals over that period, it can be hard to get back on track.”

In fact, one of the most common reasons that such plans are not effective is that they require the individual to understand that marketing is as important as billable hours. There is a natural tendency to place marketing at the bottom of a priority list, but carving out a set time can help individuals stay on track, Monesson says.

To be successful, individual marketing plans require a commitment to change, Wagenaar advises. “The plans require accountability to someone inside or outside the firm. They also need to be tied to the overall firm goals,” she concludes. ■IPA