



Structure, discipline help sales efforts

By Jim Kendall | Daily Herald Staff

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Sales guru Mike LeMaster lists "three concrete things" small businesses should do to get their sales processes ready for a ramp-up. But conversations with Russ Holmer, president of Haumiller Engineering Co., Elgin, and Cathy Gregg, a partner at Treasury Strategies Inc., Chicago, hint at a fourth thing to consider: Hire LeMaster.

A 29-year veteran of the sales and coaching wars, LeMaster is president of Revenue Advisors, LLC, Naperville.

Even though LeMaster's three things to do - assess current client needs because they may have changed, find the "ideal sweet spot" at the "absolute best target" for your business and develop innovative ways to reach prospects - are on the mark, they're not much different from advice any sales consultant will give.

Where LeMaster apparently excels is in bringing structure and discipline to the sales process. That's what he did at Haumiller and Treasury Strategies, and he gets high marks from Holmer and Gregg for doing so.

The two businesses couldn't be more dissimilar. Haumiller Engineering designs and builds custom assembly machines for manufacturing. Treasury Strategies advises large corporations and big banks on liquidity, working capital and payments needs.

"Our passion is building machines," says Holmer, who added sales supervision to his duties when a sales manager left two years ago. "Sales has never been a strong suit, but Mike has gotten sales strategy into my head. He's helped me identify the sales pipeline - what to do with sales at different stages (of the cycle)."

Holmer now has a better sense of "the 10 to 15 potential contracts we're trying to get to the quote stage, when our sales guys are getting to quote, and when to negotiate price and delivery."

As a result - and with some coaching by LeMaster who, Holmer says, is "a support person" for the sales staff. "Our sales people are more disciplined. I've started seeing the pipeline, and I can challenge what (the sales staff) is doing."

There is no outside sales staff at Treasury Strategies. The people who consult also sell. LeMaster's experience is helpful, Gregg says, because "selling is not intuitive" to consultants. "He knows where things can go haywire," Gregg says.

Early on, LeMaster's assessment of Treasury Strategies' selling process turned up what Gregg calls an "Aha!" moment.

"We realized we tended to spend as much time and effort on small opportunities as one bigger ones," she says. "We weren't putting enough firepower on larger opportunities."

Now, thanks to LeMaster, Treasury Strategies is more likely to "add other steps. We may create a bigger team (to help capture bigger opportunities); find out who we know on the board; network into people

outside the (target) company who can help us with inside contacts; perhaps meet socially with the principals over dinner, not just present our dog and pony show."

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