

[PEOPLE POWER]

“Account” ability = success

Account managers can make or break your business. BY **BRUCE WILSON**

THERE ARE FIVE things that are somewhat consistent in successful account managers (AMs):

1 The ability to communicate with customers in a way that builds trust. The key factor here is honesty in communication and behavior. A team that can deliver the expected service in support of the AM helps the AM to earn trust.

2 The ability to avoid things that are traditionally known as “trust busters.” (See “Common Trust Busters” below.)

3 The ability to bring value to the customer proactively. Successful AMs know what value the customer places on the service. The proactive AM brings things to the attention of the client that are important before the client brings the issue to him or her. The AM makes the client look good. The AM does not waste the client’s time.

5 The ability to build a relationship that goes beyond the job. Effective AMs understand that clients have a hard time firing someone they like or respect. These AMs earn respect and business friendships by building relationships that go beyond the day-to-day business transactions. Good AMs know about their customers’ hobbies, interests and family life. They connect in a personal way.

If an AM works at honing the above five traits, they are certain to be more successful. **LM**

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COMMON TRUST BUSTERS

- ▶ **Over-promising:** Sometimes, in an attempt to keep the customer happy, an account manager (AM) overpromises and then cannot deliver.
- ▶ **Being reactive:** Usually when a customer has to bring something problematic in nature to the AM’s attention, the tendency is for the AM to either get defensive or make a lame excuse.
- ▶ **Failing to check their work:** This often inadvertently leads to the AM telling a customer that something has been taken care of when, in fact, it has not.
- ▶ **Not accepting responsibility:** A team member made the mistake, but the customer sees it as a company error, not an individual error. The AM must approach it in this way and realize the entire company’s reputation is on the line.

4 The ability to manage time wisely. AMs that fall into “firefighting mode” instead of working proactively are prevented from doing things on a timely basis. They get themselves into situations where they lose trust. Clients see them as reactive, and commitments are often not met. Successful AMs are usually very organized and keep lists, which allow them to prioritize the importance of their tasks.

All too often, AMs end up doing menial tasks that are within their comfort zone, while really important things that are not in that zone are put off. These issues then mushroom into larger problems.



ILLUSTRATION BY: ISTOCK INTERNATIONAL, INC.

\$ GROWTH GOALS 1. Look for account managers who are good communicators and enjoy building relationships with people.
 2. **Make sure account managers are proactive, follow-through and accept responsibility for their customers.**

[PEOPLE POWER]

Using the suggestion box

Encourage ideas from your team to build morale and the bottom line. BY GREGORY P. SMITH

GETTING EMPLOYEES' IDEAS and involvement is critical in our rapidly changing world. If your company is going to be competitive, it's mandatory to involve not just hands, but ideas from everyone in your organization.

Why is it important to capture ideas and suggestions? For starters, the process improves individual motivation and morale. Involvement programs help capture the creativity, energy and ideas many people have. They also allow departments and individuals to work cross-functionally and create an environment of learning and constant renewal.

They improve work methods and processes continually, reduce the costs of doing business, improve safety and reduce accidents. Exchanging ideas always improves communication, and the knowledge that top management is open and willing to act on the ideas improves trust.

Good idea boards

Georgia's Buckhead Ritz-Carlton Hotel promotes employee involvement by letting

employees write their ideas on an "easy wipe" board in their department. Instead of passing untested ideas up the chain of command, the employee who originates an idea has responsibility for its achievement. They follow a three-step work process: "Study it, pilot it and adopt it."

A quality coach helps each department and its employees with the process. Once an idea is piloted and found worth-

while, it is adopted. Each month the department forwards the best idea to the division and then on to

the Quality Office for special recognition. The department awards cash for the best idea of the month. The best idea of the division gets a higher amount of money or brunch in the hotel's restaurant. At the hotel level, the best idea receives an even higher amount or dinner for two.

In addition, the winners receive letters of appreciation and an invitation to a quarterly reception courtesy of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel.

Bright idea campaigns

Most suggestion programs fail. Suggestion boxes sit and collect dust and approved suggestions are few and far between. An effective variation to the suggestion program is the Idea Campaign. Over and done with in three weeks, this steroid-enriched campaign generates hundreds of ideas.

The goal is to get at least one idea from everyone in the organization. For the first idea, each person receives a small token of appreciation, such as a coffee cup. A second idea is acknowledged with another form of appreciation. At the end of each week, a special award ceremony recognizes everyone who turned in ideas or suggestions. Names drawn from a basket receive other prizes and gifts.

Because the program only lasts three weeks, it generates a tremendous amount of focused energy and motivation from employees.

No one wants to be left out of the program – everyone participates. All ideas have to be considered and all employees suggesting ideas receive instantaneous recognition. For participants, the most powerful force is not the awards, but the feeling that management is listening to their ideas.

Idea expositions

The Sony Corp. is well known for its ability to create and manufacture new and innovative products.

Each year Sony generates approximately 1,000 new products and product innovations. Founder Masaru Ibuka's philosophy for success is "never follow others."

In order to foster the exchange of ideas within departments, Sony's Corporate Research sponsors an annual Idea Exposition. Scientists and engineers display projects and ideas they are working on. Open only to Sony's employees, the exposition lets individuals share ideas otherwise protected by departmental walls. **LM**

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WEB EXTRA

For another method of finding ideas visit www.landscapemanagement.net/mini-kaizen



GROWTH GOALS

1. Create an environment of learning and constant renewal. 2. Develop a program where all employee ideas are encouraged. 3. Inspire future ideas with instantaneous recognition.