

The magic of marketing

Starting a new series on improving the performance of the finance function, **David Parmenter** kicks off by looking at how to pitch more persuasively to the board

It is no good moaning that the finance team is not properly appreciated by the organisation. Working hard into the night, day after day, does not enhance reputations. To succeed, you need to manage the perception of the finance team's contribution.

It is important that corporate accountants undertake a marketing programme that puts the finance team on the map. As a starter I would recommend the following.

Selling change

It is through your audience's emotional drivers, and not through logic, that a story is sold. Failure to appreciate this has undermined many an accountant's pitch to the board.

All major projects need a public relations machine behind them. No presentation, email, memo, or paper related to a major change should go out unless it has been vetted by your PR expert. Do not get

offended when they rewrite most of your content. Just admire their genius and claim the credit when the PR process works – that's what everybody else does.

A sales pitch to the senior management team and the board should go as follows:

- * Make sure you have a good proposal and one with a sound focus on the emotional drivers that will matter to your audience.
- * Focus on selling to the thought leader on the senior management team and board before presenting your proposal. This may take months of informal meetings, sending copies of articles, telling better practice stories, and so on, to awaken interest. Remember that the thought leader may not be the CEO or chairperson.
- * Make sure you prime the thought leader to speak first after your presentation has been

CELEBRATE

Many staff across an organisation notice accountants working into the night and often wonder what they are doing as it never appears to be anything of value – otherwise they would surely be celebrating those activities.

A celebration is a great communicator of success. It tells others you have performed well. In going from one deadline to the next, often deferring a celebration to the never-ending future, corporate accountants are missing a vital PR trick. Let's face it, the marketing team celebrate all the time, telling everyone how good they are.

delivered. This gives your proposal the best chance of a positive vote.

Many mentors

Have a cluster of mentors.

Over the last 10 years I estimate that less than 10% of all accountants at my seminars and workshops have mentors – it is no wonder corporate accountants are so isolated.

In his book *Winning*, Jack Welch, ex-CEO of General Electric, says that one mentor is never enough. Anyone who feels they have arrived and do not need a mentor is like a matador who turns away from the bull to the adoring crowd to show how brave they are – a gesture of stupidity that will ultimately bring about a painful end.

Mentors have many functions from advising you on tricky stages in your career and managing work

NEXT STEPS

- 1 **Take more care with your next pitch to sell change**
- 2 **Find yourself a mentor or two to help you on your journey**
- 3 **Read Jack Welch's book *Winning***
- 4 **Organise that finance team celebration you have been deferring**
- 5 **Celebrate some success, no matter how small, at every team meeting**

relationships to getting great career opportunities.

David Parmenter is a writer and presenter on measuring, monitoring and managing performance

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