

Teams and Coaching



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By William L. Ginder, CCIM, SIOR

When I began my career in commercial real estate, I was awed by the high-achieving brokers in my company. I could not imagine ever being able to produce the revenue these successful brokers did. There just wasn't enough time in the day. Work smarter I was told, work bigger deals, work longer hours; and I made every effort to do just that, but still it was years before I could come close to producing the numbers of my senior peers. Imagine my surprise when I attended a breakout session on high achieving brokers at my first SIOR convention and discovered the revenue numbers that impressed me were nothing compared to what these SIORs were doing.

How were they doing it? They were all on teams, teams composed of senior and junior brokers, and each team member was measured and compensated by the success of the team, not by individual performance. In a business known for its "individual

private contractors," the most successful brokers worked as a group. Producing high revenue numbers was nothing more than a game with a game plan, a team, and a coach. I had experience with coaching, teams, and games; producing high revenue was only a matter of time and dedication.

Agree on the Game

The first task is to be sure you know what game you are playing: What are the long-term strategic goals of your company? As varied as our industry is, the choices of games to play are endless. The second task is to know how you keep score and how long the game lasts. I would suggest that scoring may be revenue or profitability, but it could be market share or business growth. The length of the game is harder to determine, but again I would suggest it should not be for a quarter or a year, but for five or 10 years. The third task is the game plan: How are you going

to win the game? This is planning your day-to-day, month-to-month, and year-to-year activities and measuring your progress using specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely (SMART) goals. As individual brokers, we have all done these three tasks or we wouldn't produce the revenue we do. But I have discovered that the revenue produced by a well-coached team will far exceed the sum of the revenue produced individually by a similarly skilled group. How do you form such a team, and more importantly, how do you coach them?

The Importance of Team Chemistry

The first order of business is to develop a winning team. Most coaches inherit their teams. But the coach who knows the game and has a plan must look at the "chemistry" of the team and quickly determine who is on board with the team's direction and who isn't. Some senior brokers who have had a great deal of individual success will fight the idea of working on a team; they have made a lot of money on their own and see no need to do something different in order to improve the company they work for. If a senior broker doesn't completely buy into the team concept, keeping that broker on the team will damage what the coach is trying to accomplish. The negative effect such a broker has on a team, especially the team's junior brokers, cannot be underestimated. Regardless of the revenue this complainer produces, the coach must make the hard decision and "cut or trade" him or her if the coach and the company are committed to the team concept.

Ensure Team Members Have the Right Skills and Attitude

The second order of business is to look at the members of the team and determine if they have the skill, knowledge, and ability to do what will be asked of them. Do they understand the game plan and their role in the game plan? Do they know and agree with the goals of the plan and, working with

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their coach, have they written down SMART goals that will measure their performance? If the answer is yes, then a coach should not be so concerned with the remaining senior brokers on the team; after all they have demonstrated their skills by their individual success. The concern would be with the junior brokers, and developing junior brokers is where the ability of a coach to guide and teach is really measured.

Our industry's attitude toward junior brokers has always amazed me. Rather than coach and help them, we throw them into an alligator pit and if

they crawl out after a year or so, we accept them as peers. A respected broker recently told me, "It has always been that way." This tradition of survival of the fittest doesn't make it right—at best it is a waste of a company's assets and at worst a disregard of individuals wishing to enter this industry. If we follow stringent hiring practices and provide proper training, mentoring, and coaching of our junior brokers, we can greatly reduce the number of personnel failures.

Mentor and Coach Junior Players to Success

The third order of business for the coach is to develop the younger members of the team as quickly as possible. I have found a properly coached team to be the best method to accomplish this goal. Because the team—including the coach and the senior brokers—benefits from the success of the junior brokers, there is a motivation to mentor and guide them. Working with their seniors, the junior brokers can participate in larger transactions and gain the experience they will need to eventually work such transactions on their own. The senior brokers benefit by having a cadre of juniors to do the time-consuming, tedious, but necessary work found in every transaction. This frees up more time for the senior brokers to hunt for other business, which in turn creates more opportunity for the junior broker. The coach, a senior

broker himself, watches over this process, matching the progress of the brokers with the SMART goals they have established for themselves. As the game progresses, the coach can adjust the game plan based on the composition and ability of the team and the opportunities they can take advantage of in the marketplace. At the same time, the coach makes sure the team gets the formal and practical education needed to be successful.

The Need for Team Credentials, Networking, and Education

The success of the team concept and the revenue and net revenue it produces means that all brokers should have their CCIM designation within five years of their employment, and those qualified brokers should be in the process of achieving their SIOR designation. Their teams or companies should provide the funds to pay for achieving these industry designations. Scheduled attendance at local SIOR and CCIM events should also be required and supported financially by the team. Also, the team or company should pay for different team members to attend national industry conferences.

Practical or “street” education should take the form of team meetings or one-on-one discussions between the coach or senior brokers and the junior broker. Once again, the team concept encourages this sharing of experience and knowledge. Finally, it is important to go “outside” to provide a team member with specific training. Classes on marketing, cold calling, etc. are readily available, and can be invaluable to team members who attend classes then share their newly acquired knowledge with other team members.

Clearly Judge Members’ Abilities and Form an Optimal Team

The hardest part of coaching is judging a team member’s ability to do the job. Unfortunately, no amount of skill training or education can make people successful if they do not have the ability.

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At best, the training and education will make them better at something for which they are not well suited. The level of ability that is needed is determined by the game being played. The game might call for someone to juggle five objects, and a particular team member can only juggle three. This does not mean the teammate is a failure, it only means he or she does not have the ability to complete the job requirements.

Obviously the coach must find someone who can juggle five objects, but the teammate is still a juggler and the coach needs to put him in a position to succeed.

Other Truths about Coaching

What are some other truths about coaching? The team will always reflect the attitudes, ethics, and principles of the coach. If the coach is honorable, works hard, and has fun, so will the team. Team members will always strive to reach the expectations of the coach if they believe in the common goal to which they are striving. They may not totally succeed, but they will reach a level higher than they would as individuals. The coach must distribute compensation, praise, and criticism equally; protect the team and team members from outside rebuke and criticism in a loss or failure; and applaud the team’s successes. A coach who can do these things will have a team reaching unbelievable heights of success, a team that loves and protects each other, and a team who will follow a coach wherever he or she asks them to go.

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