

# CareerSmart Advisor™

Strategies & Solutions for Your Career Success

## A Note From Dave

Perhaps one of the most popular career guides ExecuNet has produced is *Dealing with Your Digital Dirt*, in which we explain the importance of reputation management — especially crucial in this Web 2.0 world.



The guide focuses on how executives need to manage their reputations online, and it's a topic that continues to be top-of-mind for us at ExecuNet and for our membership.

It's affirming to know that we're not alone in our belief that reputation management is a timely, yet challenging, issue facing leaders today. A newly released report from The Conference Board certainly confirms it.

The report summarizes the findings that resulted from a survey of 148 risk management executives at major companies. Eighty-two percent said that managing reputation risk was a strong area of commitment.

But, there is still some work that needs to be done to educate executives about this subject. The report notes how consumers and investors are collecting their information from blogs, online forums and social networking sites, while just 34 percent of respondents said they seriously monitor such arenas. Our *Digital Dirt* guide notes that only 10.5 percent of ExecuNet surveyed executives conduct online searches for their own name more than once a month.

If you don't know what type of information about you and your organization is out there on the Web, I strongly encourage you to find out now. Regardless of the strength of the economy or the health of the job market, your reputation is one of your most important assets. It's up to you, and you alone, to protect it.

Sincerely,

Dave Opton  
ExecuNet Founder & CEO  
[www.execunet.com/davesblog](http://www.execunet.com/davesblog)

## Can an Executive Portfolio Differentiate You From the Rest?

By Marji McClure

In today's ultra-competitive job market, executives are constantly wondering what they can do to separate themselves from the competition and become a hiring organization's top choice.

For years, individuals seeking jobs in creative fields toted a portfolio of their work, from artwork to newspaper clippings, to showcase their skills for potential employers. These days, the idea of creating and presenting a portfolio of prior accomplishments and current capabilities is gaining traction in non-creative fields.

"Bringing in a portfolio makes it immediate and real for the person making the hiring decision," says Paula Weiner, president of New York-based executive search firm Weiner & Associates Inc.

### Anatomy of a Portfolio

Depending on an executive's career experience and accomplishments, the exact contents of a portfolio can differ. However, most executives should have the following list of materials prepared, says Jan Melnik, president of Absolute Advantage, a career management and résumé writing firm:

- Precision-focused challenge/action/result-rich two-page résumé
- Project or leadership addendum (two pages in length, maximum)
- In-depth briefs created for significant success stories
- Networking cover letter
- Recruiter letter of introduction
- One sheet of annotated references
- Full-page bio
- Very brief bio
- One page executive résumé (that provides succinct glimpse of qualifications)
- Separate mini profile (of publications, presentations, speeches, etc.)
- A 90- or 180-day business plan (for presentation after the first or second interview)

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## Insider Insight

# Peanut Butter's Business Lesson: Managing Sticky Situations

By David Grossman

In the last three months, we have experienced one of the largest food recalls this country has ever seen due to one tiny food — the peanut.

More than 2,100 processed and packaged foods containing peanuts or peanut paste have been recalled in the wake of a Salmonella outbreak. More than 660 people became ill and infection may have contributed to nine deaths through potentially tainted peanut products from the Peanut Corporation of America.

While contamination is no new issue for the food industry, what made this situation so horrific, and ultimately avoidable, was the poor judgment and actions allegedly taken by the company.

Yet, the situation reminds us that every company, no matter the industry, deals with difficult problems and issues each day. What should corporate leaders do when something goes wrong?

Let's be clear — sound communications cannot make up for poor decision-making. However, when leaders do become aware of issues, they should follow these actions:

### Gather the Facts

Understand the situation, its components, results and future implications as much as possible. Figure out what you know; what you don't know; what you need to find out; and what are myths and rumors that abound.

### Tell the Truth

There is no substitute for this. While you should work with your communications team on what information you will be sharing, whatever you share needs to be the unadulterated truth.

### Plan Your Communications

With the exception in the case of FCC and/or regulatory requirements, all communication should be executed from the "inside out." Employees should be communicated to first and foremost, followed by outside audiences.

### Build Communication Skill

No matter how successful the leader, there is one common truth — communication is a learned skill. When crisis situations arise, those leaders who have taken the time to build that skill beforehand are far more successful than those learning "on the fly." To drive effective communications, leaders must:

- Have a platform that outlines their core messages and actions.
- Be visible, open, honest, trustworthy and candid.
- Be consistent.
- Communicate frequently.
- Understand that everything they say and do communicates.
- Answer questions employees have.
- Be engaged in developing and planning their communications.
- Engage their communications team as a business partner.
- Ask employees for their input and use it.

These are the qualities of what I call a "leader**communicator**," an individual who realizes that most problems in business today lie in the absence of real communication. As a result, they're able to create shared meaning and move people to action. ■

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## Your Career Advisor

# How to Make Meetings More Productive Endeavors

By Stephen Balzac

**T**here is one thing that everyone has in equal measure. It can't be saved, and although it can be invested, you don't get more at the end. That one thing is time. No matter how much we talk about saving time, everyone still gets 60 minutes in the hour and 24 hours in the day. At the end of the day, there is nothing quite like that warm feeling you get when you look back and wonder where the time went. There is nothing quite like realizing that an entire day has gone by, and nothing was accomplished. Unfortunately, this happens far too often, especially when the day holds meetings.

Meetings have a bad reputation for consuming a great deal of time, while producing little of substance. That reputation is well-deserved. Despite this, meetings remain extremely popular in many companies. Unfortunately, in addition to potentially wasting a lot of time, meetings often leave people drained and unable to focus. As a result, even more time is used up getting back on track after the meeting.

### To Meet or Not to Meet?

Meetings are popular, in part, because they can create an illusion of progress. Although that illusion tends to evaporate in the cold, hard light of upcoming deadlines, when people are uncertain about how to proceed or feeling overwhelmed, meetings can provide a certain level of comfort and security. They make the person calling the meeting feel productive.

This is especially common with inexperienced managers or CEOs, who feel a need to be constantly observing every step the team or company takes. The price for this comfort is time taken away from actual work, which leads to discomfort, and hence a desire

to hold more meetings.

In businesses that have too many meetings, the greatest dangers are that too much work time will be lost, and critical information will be lost in the noise: brought up in a meeting and quickly forgotten by people anxious to get back to work.

On the flip side, some companies refuse to hold any meetings. Oddly enough, this approach doesn't work either.

There are times when it can be very valuable to spend some focused time working on a problem with other people, exchanging ideas or brainstorming.

Not all information is easily conveyed over email. In businesses that don't have meetings, the greatest danger is that time will be wasted trying to figure out what to do, and critical information will never be communicated.

In fact, the two extreme positions of too many meetings or too few meetings produce remarkably similar results, none of them good.

The goal is to have exactly as many meetings as are necessary, control their length and make them work. Fortunately, there are a number of simple techniques to make this happen.

### Only Hold Important Meetings

Ask yourself what purpose the meeting is serving, and if there is a more efficient way to accomplish the same thing. For example, status meetings make managers feel good but achieve little else.

Instead, encourage the relevant people to send out brief email announcements whenever they complete a task. Everyone will have the information in their mailbox instead of having to remember it.

### Start on Time

Most people don't do anything right before a meeting because they know that they'll be interrupted. If the meeting starts late, employees will lose time

waiting. Habitually starting meetings late sends the message that you don't care about your employees' time, thus decreasing motivation and increasing irritation with management.

### Have an Agenda

Know ahead of time what you want to accomplish in the meeting. Make sure the important items are dealt with first. Don't let the meeting wander off in search of a topic.

### Limit the Meeting Duration in Advance

This helps keep you honest and keep people focused. It also lets people plan their day better, allowing for more efficient use of time.

### Moderate the Discussion

If you're running a design meeting or brainstorming session, don't allow one or two very vocal people to dominate the discussion. Quiet people can have good ideas, too.

### Develop Good Decision-Making Metrics

Don't let ideas plop to the floor. After the meeting, review it and see if you accomplished the goals you defined in your agenda. If not, understand why not: inappropriate or incorrect goals, poor process, unnecessary meeting, etc. Adjust accordingly.

A meeting is a tool, nothing more. Like all tools, it must be used properly in order to reap the benefits. ■

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# Executive Portfolio

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## What's In a Portfolio?

Essentially, a portfolio is an extension of the traditional résumé, which experts agree is still a necessary component of job search materials. The components typically included in a portfolio range from the résumé, press releases and letters of recommendation to PowerPoint presentations, copies of speeches and video presentations.

Through the portfolio, executives communicate the results they generated for previous employers (in terms of revenue, profit and size of the business) and how their performance compares to other competitors in the industry, says Weiner. "I've seen people who have a one-page résumé that provides the names of companies, titles, dates of employment and then they'll have additional pages that include vignettes of achievements," Weiner explains.

"Regardless of what the portfolio contains, everything should clearly show in dollars and cents or in some other production measurement (key management indices) what the results were," says Brendan Cunningham, president of New York-based Excelleron Business Consulting LLC.

Brian Walker, president and managing director of executive search firm The Wise Group, notes that a PowerPoint presentation isn't a valuable addition to a portfolio unless it conveys something of interest to a potential employer. "Show me a presentation on how you plan to carry out the job in the next 30, 60 and 90 days, and to me, it is worthwhile," says Walker.

Video is likely going to become an increasingly valuable addition to executive portfolios going forward, notes Weiner, as streaming capabilities online continue to improve and companies post videos of executive presentations on their websites. If an executive is a strong public speaker, that could provide yet another compelling reason for an employer to consider hiring him or her. "I wouldn't say it is necessary, but it does give the employer a sense of your image," says Walker.

Creating their own personal websites

## Before the Portfolio: Add Clarity and Focus into Your Strategy

Experts agree that envisioning your career goal is one of the benefits of having a portfolio. Another document that helps executives gain focus and an overall career related clarity is a "career record," which recruiter and HR consultant Peter Weddle discusses in his new book, *Work Strong: Your Personal Career Fitness System*.

"The career record idea is that it's important to have an understanding of where you are in your career," says Weddle, who also runs WEDDLE's, a job search, recruiting and employment website. "We all know that managers, supervisors and executives aren't as attentive as they should be for recognizing their accomplishments." He explains that the career record enables individuals to "pat themselves on the back" and recognize themselves. It also provides an ongoing record of an individual's career development and helps determine what needs to be adjusted in order to accomplish additional goals.

Weddle says the career record should be continually developed, and he suggests individuals conduct a personal review once a quarter. He believes one's résumé should suggest continuous career development. "It should be one that looks like a work in progress," says Weddle. For instance, if you're in the middle of taking a course, that additional education will signify that continuous improvement is important to you.

The career record can also help keep your accomplishments top-of-mind. Weddle notes how the best opportunities appear quickly, and you have to be prepared for that. "It's easier to build a résumé if you already have everything there," he says; you don't have to create a résumé from scratch and risk excluding important details of your achievements. "The details are key. [Employers] don't want a good fit. They want an ideal fit," says Weddle.

## Positioning Yourself for Success

Another way in which to help clarify what you can offer a potential employer (your unique value proposition) is to conduct a classic positioning exercise, suggests Bryan Mattimore, president and co-founder of The Growth Engine Co., a Connecticut-based agency that consults with companies to help them create and market new products. Mattimore explains how similar principles can apply to executives (as new products) seeking new career opportunities. Mattimore illustrates how individuals should conduct the positioning exercise themselves and include it on the top of their résumé. He offers this example: "For those companies who are looking for X, John Smith is the *only* executive who can do X because he \_\_\_\_\_."

"It's a fun exercise to force clarity and uniqueness," says Mattimore. "It has to have the *only* statement because, if not, you're just like everybody else."

Mattimore also suggests conducting a mind-mapping exercise to help you (and others) visualize your career skills. Place the subject matter in the center of the page and then create branches extending from the center to illustrate different facets of your career.

"You can turn something difficult to read and create a mind map of it to make your achievements come alive and more memorable," Mattimore says. He adds that this could be especially helpful in the marketing and advertising sectors; jobs that may involve more creativity. "But you might stand out more if you're not in a creative field," Mattimore notes.

on which they display the contents of their portfolios is also becoming a strong option for executives. These sites, which can include resumes, articles and related materials are also referred to as "webfolios." Only 15 percent of ExecuNet surveyed executives said they maintain such a site.

Just as résumés must be tailored to fit a particular industry, company and position, the portfolio must be created in the same way. "You can show that you've done research and know what a company

is going through," says Weiner. "You can put together a one- or two-page document of how your skills can help. The more specific you can be about demonstrating your skills and how they apply to [an organization's] opportunities and challenges, the more powerful the meeting."

"If you are pursuing several potential, but divergent employers — different products or industries — tailor your presentation," says Walker. "One size does

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## Executive Portfolio

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not fit all. Put their company name and logo on it, and address it to the person you want to connect with. You're selling here, and any personality you can filter into the presentation will not be lost."

Cunningham cautions against being redundant when highlighting your accomplishments across the slate of materials contained in an executive portfolio. The impact of your achievements may be diminished if they are mentioned too often throughout the portfolio, he notes. "The purpose is to create a believable impact," says Cunningham. "You need to develop a point of differentiation so blatantly obvious between yourself and the competition that the decision-maker is forced to say, 'Wow, this candidate is a moneymaker, and I can't afford not to hire this person.'"

Weiner adds that when preparing the contents of the portfolio, do not include proprietary information owned by their current or previous employer. "Never betray a confidence as you're putting these documents together. If the industry custom is not to discuss details, don't do it," says Weiner. "The long-term damage isn't worth it."

### When to Open Your Portfolio

The last thing an executive should do is inundate a potential employer with too much information from his or her portfolio. Jan Melnik, president of Absolute Advantage, a career management and résumé writing firm, suggests sharing the majority of the contents with a recruiter at the beginning of the relationship. She also recommends a more conservative approach when communicating with hiring managers. "The executive should

carefully select those components that will bring the most value at the most opportune time, but be cautious of 'overkill,'" she says.

Experts agree that, during an interview, executives should wait for cues to offer documents from their portfolios. Andy Borkin, president of Bridgewater, N.J.-based Strategic Advancement Inc, says it's important to be respectful of an interviewer's time. "Be invited to show it," says Borkin of the materials included in a portfolio. Don't present the content unless it fits seamlessly into the conversation.

Some of the documents can be presented to the interviewer for his or her review after the interview. "Many of the add-on components (addendum, career briefs) are excellent leave-behind tools, useful to present at the close of an initial interview," says Melnik.

### Protecting Your Good Ideas

When meeting with hiring managers, executives need to communicate they are ready to implement a plan if hired. Oftentimes, interviewers want to learn exactly how a candidate plans to help the company succeed and will ask for a sample business plan and/or an outline of what the candidate expects to accomplish during his or her first 90 days on the job.

Yet, with that plan, comes candidates' apprehension of revealing too much of their intellectual property. Experts say it's possible to use some of the portfolio's contents to provide a glimpse of a business plan without offering all of the related details.

"Be specific in identifying opportunities/challenges and more general/discrete in laying out plans for addressing," suggests Melnik. "In other words, share methodology, style and approach without completely divulging the 'secret' to

exactly how a product launch, turn-around or acquisition might be handled." Walker agrees executives must exercise caution in how they reveal information related to business plans and notes the importance of presenting just enough detail to attract appropriate interest. "You want to offer broad strokes of what needs to be done so that they need to get you back in to do what you know needs to be done," he says. "Take a look at almost any ad on a sales-related book or program and you will see how masterfully the outline of what you need to do is laid out. But the tactical steps to get there are never revealed until you buy the program. Simply use these as a guide to prepare your presentation."

Still, some experts feel that a simpler approach is the best way in which to share your knowledge and present yourself as a unique candidate.

"I understand people may think, 'How can I make myself different from others?' But I still feel that a well-written two-page accomplishment-oriented résumé is your most important piece of literature," says Borkin. He suggests creating a focused résumé that includes as many numbers as possible and being prepared for interviews. "Have that focus on what [the potential employers'] needs are," adds Borkin. "If they're looking for a strategic thinker, this is what you need to focus on."

### Bottom Line: Selling Yourself

Mike Cooper, an in-transition sales director in the consumer products industry, has an executive portfolio for his current job search.

"I'm a sales guy; and for all of my sales calls, the bosses required us to have a pitchbook and a camera. So I developed the pitchbook over the years," says Cooper. "Right now, I'm a product. I'm selling myself."

Cooper's portfolio contains his résumé, strengths and weaknesses, a job description, individuals he can immediately reach out to as sales prospects and work samples, such as presentations that have resulted in successful sales opportunities. Cooper believes his portfolio has helped him keep his goals in sight. "It keeps me focused," he says. ■

### Expert Resources:

- Andy Borkin, Strategic Advancement Inc ([sai-hr.com](mailto:sai-hr.com))
- Mike Cooper ([mike@saleskitchen.com](mailto:mike@saleskitchen.com))
- Brendan Cunningham, Excelleron Business Consulting LLC ([ExcelleronConsulting.com](http://ExcelleronConsulting.com))
- Bryan Mattimore, The Growth Engine Co. ([Growth-Engine.com](http://Growth-Engine.com))
- Jan Melnik, Absolute Advantage ([JanMelnik.com](http://JanMelnik.com))
- Brian Walker, The Wise Group ([WiseSearchGroup.com](http://WiseSearchGroup.com))
- Peter Weddle, WEDDLE's ([Weddles.com](http://Weddles.com))
- Paula Weiner, Weiner & Associates ([pweiner@weinerassoc.com](mailto:pweiner@weinerassoc.com))

## Learnings from Landings

# Member Adjusts to New Job Search Environment, Lands New Position Quickly

**F**or many executives entering the job market these days, it's the first time in many years (or ever) that they've found themselves actively looking for a new career opportunity. That was certainly the case for ExecuNet member Mark Winters when he began his search for a new job last October. Winters says that he wasn't as prepared for the task at hand as he expected to be. But he had been employed "non-stop" since graduating from college 18 years ago and had spent 11 years with his last employer.

As a former vice president of sales for a multibillion dollar company, "I had formulated our recruiting process and had been involved in (at least) hundreds of interviews," he says. "It is a totally different game when you are on the other side of the table. I was rusty initially. Most people will be rusty. That is why it's important not to get down on yourself and to get out in front of people and get excited if you mess up a couple of times because you are that much closer to nailing it."

### Adjusting to New Search Processes

Even before Winters sat down for interviews, he noticed a difference in the marketplace related to both employers and recruiters from the last time he sought a new job. "There seems to be a shift in the way companies are hiring people, managing candidate data and the recruiting process in general, which is changing the way companies are hiring people," says Winters. "It is important for everyone (individuals and recruiters) to understand how the global marketplace, employee law trends, new technologies, decreasing product life spans and micro-customer segmentation are impacting the new workplace."

Winters says he noticed that employers don't seem interested in hiring individuals with the idea that these employees will be valuable workers for many years.

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The key, in my opinion, is relationships and continual skill development.

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"Increasingly, companies are looking for employees to deliver on specific projects for a specific time period and are creating temporary teams from both internal and external talent," he says. "The scary part is that lifetime employment is becoming rarer. The exciting part of this change is that this creates a free market for free agents and will provide an opportunity to earn substantial increases and enjoy quality of life. The key, in my opinion, is relationships and continual skill development."

### Creating Your Own Opportunities

Winters says he was busy during his three-month job search because of the time he spent cultivating his network and taking advantage of the latest technologies, adding that traditional methods (job boards, recruiters, cover letters and résumés) of finding a new job weren't nearly as effective during his quest. "I do think that companies and hiring managers are overloaded with data and information," says Winters. "Just sending cover letters, résumés and responding to boards is working less than it ever has before because people are numb by the vast amounts of data being pushed to them. Using social networking platforms and boards that create a community were extremely helpful."

Recruiters can also be helpful during the job search by serving as valuable resources for information, preparation and career consulting, and Winters stresses that

it is important for job seekers to "find a few good ones and form a relationship and always be on the look-out for good ones. Don't waste your time when you find someone who is not qualified." At the same time, Winters says it's also important not to rely too heavily on recruiters. "Do not limit your search to recruiters," he says. "Searches through recruiters (much to their chagrin) are taking longer."

One thing that surprised Winters about the entire job search process was the prevalence of negativity in the marketplace, especially within the recruiting community. "Many recruiters were extremely down about the opportunities in the marketplace," he says. "The fact is that we live in an imperfect world, and some of the biggest messes are where the biggest opportunities lie for transformational change."

Overall, he notes the importance of taking control and ownership of your own job search and making things happen. Winters attributes this mindset for yielding a short search that ended with him starting a new role as an executive vice president with a multimillion dollar organization this past January. "I think the biggest challenge in a career change is between a person's ears," says Winters. "This comes down to deciding many things, and one of them is your time frame. Many things can impact the length of time it takes (economy, industry, location), but I am convinced that leaving your 'baggage' and moving forward is the one thing that lengthens many people's searches. In my case, I owe a lot to my network of friends who assisted me in moving forward. Hence, things proceeded relatively quickly." Winters says that in addition to working with his network of contacts, he also found it helpful to meet and talk with friends, help others find jobs and use the Internet as a resource. He says that he found ExecuNet and LinkedIn to be the most helpful during his search. ■

## From the Forums

# Signing an NDA Before a Job Interview

*ExecuNet's Forum is the online community area where members can meet and help one another network their way into their next assignment or share information and experiences. [Access the Forum under "Make Connections" on the ExecuNet member homepage.] In this excerpt from a recent Forum conversation, the question about signing an NDA (non-disclosure agreement) before a job interview is discussed. [Some content has been edited.]*

**ExecuNet member HChavez:** Please advise if you see anything wrong with this NDA: "In due diligence and protection of confidentiality during the hiring process, Potential Employer requests any and all candidates interviewing for position of, to agree to non-disclosure of any information discussed prior to the interview with the client representatives, during the interview or thereafter of any information discussed or disclosed during the interview to any other entity other than Potential Employer or client representatives participating in the interview.

Confidentiality of information relating to the potential hire of as includes any and all information shared during discussions relating to this position with all representatives of the Potential Employer and client representatives.

Acknowledges that any breach or evasion of the terms of this Agreement will result in irreparable and continuing damage to the Potential Employer and client and shall entitle the Potential Employer to injunctive relief and money damages as well as to all other legal or equitable remedies."

**ExecuNet member RicardoTechExec:**

Unless it is a military or government contract, an NDA for a first-round interview sounds like overkill.

But if this is the fourth interview and now you are getting into some detail, it may be a way to safeguard the information provided. (For example, if you are talking to a start-up working on the next Google).

**ExecuNet member BobB:** Sometimes a public company that has not announced it is looking to replace a senior executive will ask that you sign an NDA for fear that the imminent action will leak to

either the individual who will lose his or her job or to the public. Private equity firms also like to have NDAs signed, especially if they are looking to acquire a company or if they own a company with public debt. Private equity firms also just don't like people knowing the performance of their assets.

There are a number of reasons for this to happen, and I am personally seeing it more and more. Most of the time, if you decide not to sign you will not be included in the search. That said, companies will be flexible with the wording of the NDA if you have any real problems.

**ExecuNet member RicardoTechExec:**

If you have to sign an NDA, have a lawyer look at it before you sign. You don't want to have a situation where you create an unreasonable liability for yourself — for example, a limitation on the type of companies you may contact for a period of time after your interview.

**ExecuNet member HChavez:** The reason I asked for advice is because it was the first time I encountered a situation like this, where a position's title and location were advertised, but not more. I didn't want to be in a situation where I could be prevented from sending my résumé to other companies that may be in the same industry, field or city.

I suggested an amendment that would allow me to receive information about the position only, not the company, specific project, pay, etc, and was informed that an amendment was not possible, and no additional information about the position was offered or given.

**ExecuNet member Michael Milian:**

Another reason for an NDA prior to an

interview is because they will be discussing projects or products which are in new market segments or a product which is in the development phases and has not been released yet. I had to sign an NDA when I interviewed for a job with a software company that was introducing a new product to the market. On the same note, a company may be introducing a project which will significantly reform the company, or they may be looking for talent to help them move into a new market.

You mentioned some concern about signing an NDA and it affecting your ability to interview with other companies. An NDA does not provide blanket coverage for any and all information. In order for information to qualify for protection from an NDA, it must be some sort of trade secret, provide economic value or provide a competitive advantage. Additionally, reasonable means it must have been taken by the organization in order to keep the information confidential. The information protected by the NDA is also usually detailed in the NDA. If, for instance, a competing organization already knows the information, or is able to find it out, that information is not protected by the NDA. The bottom line is, you should have no problem interviewing with any other companies after signing an NDA with the organization you originally mentioned.

**ExecuNet member Stan:** If the company is unwilling to make reasonable modifications to an NDA, then that should be a red flag about the company. I've negotiated many NDAs over the years, and in only very few cases did I get any pushback on reasonable requests. In those cases, I chose not to do business with the companies because it was an indicator of how difficult the company would be to work with. An NDA should be very specific about what information is considered confidential with the requirement to mark information as such. ■

## Executive Toolbox

# Seven Steps for Inspiring Employees During Difficult Times

By Terry Barber

**W**ith a suffering economy, looming layoffs and threat of bankruptcy, there is the temptation to operate our corporations and business in fear.

Focusing on raising the inspiration factor through developing people yields incredible value for stakeholders, customers and employees alike. Raising the inspiration factor one step at a time will change the culture of your organization. A company with a high inspiration factor attracts and keeps good talent, and its employees forge long-term profitable relationships with customers.

Here are seven steps organizations should take to inspire employees during these difficult times.

### Authenticity

Get out of the image management business, for yourself and your company. Share with the people in your organization where you are weak. Verbally express just how much you need them. Let them know that you know your limitations. Invite them to partner with you.

### Connect with Others' Dreams

Use these difficult times to uncover the latent dreams and ambitions of your key talent. Tell them you are more commit-

ted than ever to helping them get to where they want to go. Be creative in aligning their tasks for today with their dreams for tomorrow.

### See in Others the Abilities They Don't See in Themselves

Take time to be observant. Quit the craziness long enough to notice the talent in those around you. This principle works best by breaking it down into three steps: notice, name and nurture.

After you have noticed a talent or strength in a person, let him or her know you noticed it and be specific about what you noticed. Don't just say, "I noticed you are a hard worker." Instead say, "I notice you care very deeply about making sure the details are in order," or "I notice you are very articulate on that subject." Look for ways to bring that talent out by providing opportunities and training to support that particular talent.

### Speak and Live with Credibility

I also refer to this principle as leading with moral authority. It does not mean much for you to say, "Let's keep looking for the opportunity ahead," while living in fear and operating with a scarcity mentality.

### Inspire With Great Stories

This is the principle of overhearing.

The emphasis here is looking for and telling stories that have a lesson. What can you learn from the story of a mountain climber? What can you glean from the story of one who has gone from rags to riches or better yet, from riches to rags? Pull your team together today and use stories to inspire.

### Help People to Live on Purpose

Remind them that what happens at work is only a portion of their life. As important as that portion is, it is not all that there is to life. Help people write down a vision statement for their life first and then for their job.

### Create a Culture of Inspiration

Following the example of John Wooden, UCLA's iconic coach, become teachers committed to excellence and character development. Chasing numbers and making decisions by looking only at the "bottom line" causes us to be reactive and impulsive. ■

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