

ACHIEVING THE IMPOSSIBLE IN EXECUTIVE SEARCH

Case Study 106

The Situation

An **executive search partnership, a subsidiary of one of the largest search companies in the world**, was a strong company of 25 young people with a great track record. Then things took a turn for the worst. **A fierce internal battle was raging on among the 8 leaders of the firm as they sought to find the source of their declining results.** New competition from internet-based search companies was taking away many of their best clients. Not only were they worried about losing their jobs, each member of the top team had secured a large personal loan to buy into the parent company. *Will I be able to generate enough money to pay back this loan?*

Some of them said they should do something different, others argued for continuing on the same path while still others argued that if they would just streamline their back office procedures, all would be well. Meanwhile their debt to the parent company was mounting. When we met them, they were having their worst year ever and the phone had stopped ringing. **They were nearly frozen into inaction with some team members engaged in arguments and sarcasm to mask their true thoughts and feelings.**

Work of Best Year Yet

In our first meetings with them, they seem determined to focus on standardizing and making replicable processes for the back office as the only solution to their problems. **Little attention was being paid to sales and bottom line performance** because there seemed to be no way out of their current predicament.

When in our initial planning meeting, someone suggested that their **plan include a goal to match the results of their top year, there was uncomfortable laughter** along with a strong undercurrent of their being victimized by the state of the market as well as their situation with their parent company. However, they eventually agreed to make it one of their top ten goals for the year, along with stabilizing the platform of the back office.

While several members of the team felt that this ‘American system’ would make no difference, **gradually they began to become disciplined in their focus** and deliver the monthly goals to bring them toward the performance they had targeted. Even the most dubious team members **succumbed to the ‘positive peer pressure’ that leads to personal responsibility for delivering their part of the plan.**

The Results

At the end of the first year the most sarcastic executive pronounced that they ‘had achieved miracles!’ They **not only matched their best performance ever, but exceeded it.** At the same time they **streamlined the back office, doubled their research staff and improved their overall search system.**

Above the **team dynamic became positive, cooperative and focused on delivering results.** In addition, their new leadership resulted in **100% retention of staff** over this same period. And, yes, they were able to pay off the personal loans to buy into the parent company.

But the result that pleased them most was their **new level of confidence in their ability to face big problems and deliver the results, no matter how impossible the challenge!**