

Message from the Chair



Building Your Team

BY WILLIAM BROWER, CMA, CFM

One of the critical responsibilities of any manager is to build a strong, cohesive team. There's just no substitute for having the skills and talent available internally to get the job done. Unfortunately, too often now firms are becoming penny-wise and pound-foolish by relying on short-term support to get the job done instead of taking the time to hire and train the right staff.

I'm an advocate for using consultants and temporary help with new and difficult assignments or to meet interim demands. But we need to take a step back and challenge whether the consultant or the temporary employee has become a crutch for management to lean on. For example, do they continue to roam the halls of the office long after the assignment has been completed? If we let that happen, then not only are we wasting money, but we are also losing the opportunity to build a team who has a true understanding and appreciation of the history and culture of the firm. We are also losing the opportunity for our staffs to develop and to step up and take on the more difficult assignments.

Even more importantly, if consultants become a primary input to

management decision making, then the management accountant is forfeiting the opportunity to truly participate in and influence the business. If we are to manage a firm for long-term shareholder value, we must have team members with excellent knowledge, strong experience, and solid personal skills and who are committed to a shared vision for the future.

The question is: In today's environment, how do we achieve a strong team? During my career I was fortunate to have worked for a company with a very strong culture that valued and celebrated long-term personal growth. Once you have created a winning environment and have a history of and prospects for solid company growth, it's easy to continue the process of recruiting

outstanding individuals to the team. For many firms, however, creating the strong team is a challenge.

My suggestion is to start at the beginning. Johnson & Johnson set a goal to hire 50% of new accounting and finance employees directly from the college campus. Developing solid relations with targeted schools, establishing a strong co-op program, and utilizing summer interns are excellent ways to identify the outstanding recruiting targets. I also think that many of us in the Institute of Management Accountants (IMA®) need to create and cultivate a strong bond with an IMA student chapter. What better way to develop a close relationship with a local college, professor, and interested accounting students than to help enhance the student chapter program? Have you considered visiting the school to make a presentation on your role in the firm in which you work or perhaps having the student chapter visit your company? Creating interest in your firm and type of work can significantly improve the likelihood of recruiting your number one choice.

I recently attended the IMA Student Leadership Conference in Cleveland, Ohio, whose theme was

“Management Accounting Rocks.” I can assure you that firsthand interaction with the approximately 400 people in attendance was a rich personal experience and an outstanding developmental opportunity for the students and professors who participated. While I am often disappointed by the slow conversion of IMA student members to regular members, I have no doubt that IMA’s commitment to the student program is an important initiative. Our members provide insight for students into the business world that is based on practical experience and by so doing can greatly influence the career choices that students may make.

IMA’s Stuart Cameron McLeod Society (SCMS) supports this effort by awarding student scholarships annually. I believe encouraging students to continue their education in management accounting is important to fill the predicted looming shortage of accountants and professors of accounting. IMA provides the opportunity for our members to feel connected to this effort. It also provides us with an excellent way to get involved in the college campus and get a head start on recruiting and building our team. All in all, the student program is another great reason to be an IMA member.

What do you think? Please share your thoughts with me at bbrower@imanet.org. ■