

## The 7 Secrets of Top Producers

In the world of sales, there are account executives who seem to soar and stay on the list of top producers year after year, and others who remain average producers or who struggle to stay on the grid. What makes the difference? Training and business solutions experts, Wynn Solutions, conducted a study of 5,000 top producers over a three-year period. Their results are interesting, and perhaps telling, about what makes a top producer tick. Following are their findings:

*"Contrary to popular belief, the most successful salespeople were not those who made the most phone calls or were the best presenters and closers. There seemed to be no common ground with best practices. We saw many top producers who had low closing ratios but set ten times more appointments and made more money than their competitors by being in front of more people. Also, we saw many number-one salespeople who could not cold-call or even work their referrals that well. They went where their customers were: to networking meetings, golf courses, and so forth. They met face to face with fewer people but were very successful.*

*We saw people who managed their time well and many who did not, but who made up for it by what we can only refer to as 'wasting their time with the right people'. What they had in common went beyond best practices. They focused on their strengths and were more competitive by getting better at what they already did well.*

*Wynnism: The key to success is doing very little of what you do badly.*

*We found a group we called the strugglers - people who work very hard to produce average results. We saw them working on their shortcomings over and over again, hoping for a different result. As it turns out, hope is not a strategy. The difference is that the top producers used their strengths to improve a weakness.*

*Wynnism: If you do nothing but focus on your weaknesses, you will ultimately feel weak.*

*We did, however, uncover seven beyond-best practices that we believe may be the keys to sales success.*

- 1. They explain the value of their service clearly in about 20 seconds.*
- 2. They develop simple and easy to maintain organizational processes that create client care.*
- 3. They are able to stay persistent because they have clearly defined outcomes.*
- 4. They spend approximately 50% of their time building relationships with top customers.*
- 5. They leverage existing relationships by being a solutions provider.*
- 6. They survey their customers to find out what services they like best and then focus their offering in those areas.*
- 7. They manage expectations and emotions by setting those expectations and making sure their customers feel heard.*

Think about your sales efforts and those of your sales team. Are you using the 7 beyond best practices mentioned above as you deliver on your sales plan? Learn a lesson from top producers on how to increase the impact of your sales efforts and boost business sales.

Wynn Solutions 2005. Author: Garrison Wynn, [www.wynnsolutions.com](http://www.wynnsolutions.com), providing keynotes, training programs and business solutions for success.

## Strategies for Managing Part-time Employees

As a small business, you've likely come face to face with the dilemma of whether to hire part-time employees in your business. Maybe you're just beginning to expand and know you need some help but can't afford a full time person. Maybe you've got several full time people but one has approached you about the idea of reducing his or her hours to achieve a family balance. Maybe your business tends to

hire younger workers who are in school or university and they can't commit to full time. Traditional thinking says that part-time workers don't have the same degree of involvement or commitment as full-time workers. That's not the reality any more. Due to cutbacks from the recession and employee work/life balance choices, the ranks of part-time workers have risen to permeate all staffing levels, including more senior, strategic positions and white-collar professionals such as doctors and lawyers. By offering the option of part-time employment, you can retain a high performing team.

Part-time employment can be a win-win for companies and employees. Employee management can take on all shapes and forms in today's economy. When a company's sales slow down, managers typically seek to keep labor costs down and rely on part-time workers and freelancers to fill gaps. But as businesses add more part-timers to their workforces, they must adapt to changing dynamics in everything from productivity and customer service, to meeting deadlines. Here are some tips to managing a part-time workforce to ensure productivity and engagement stays high, your customers' needs are being met, and your business continues to flourish.

1. **Make sure part-time jobs have an adequate job description**

Both the business owner and the part-time employee should be on the same page when it comes to the time commitment the job requires. There is a temptation with part-time employees to fly by the seat of your pants and apply those workers to whatever jobs need doing. This isn't fair to the employee, and it's not good for your business. Part-time employees must have a clear sense of what their role is, and what your expectations are. This clarity will create motivated workers who are willing to give you 100% while they are there, knowing what you need them to do and how they fit in the organization.

2. **Create opportunities for part-timers to feel like part of your team**

Even though part-timers are not in the office all day, they are still part of your staff, and you should make sure that part-time employees are in the loop with company communications. It's also important that your staff shares this attitude. Encourage part-timers to attend company social events and make sure you schedule staff meetings during times when your part-timers are able to attend. This minimizes any division between full- and part-timers and creates an environment where part-time employees are perceived as equals and in turn will be equally committed.

3. **Know how to reach part-timers when they are not working**

One of the challenges with part-time employees is that inevitably, there will be days when something urgent comes up and your part-time employee is out of the office. Most part-timers understand the need to make themselves available during off-hours, should an urgent matter arise, so make sure you know where to reach them when they are out of the office--and make certain they are clear about when they need to answer the phone. You can't expect your part-time employees to be on call at all times when they are not working, but there should be a clear understanding about your expectations for when they should be available, and how to handle things when they are not.

4. **Include them in your meeting schedule**

Regular staff meetings should be an extremely important aspect of your business strategy, and making sure part-timers are included in your meeting schedule is vital. If possible, they should attend weekly or monthly all-staff meetings, but you should also schedule other meetings that have a direct impact on their jobs, during times when they are able to attend. This makes them feel invested in the projects they're involved in, as well as connected to the remainder of your team.

5. **Understand the relevant employment laws and benefits requirements for part-timers**

Each province has its own laws when it comes to employment standards, unless you are in an industry that is governed by federal employment legislation. Make sure that either you, or someone on your team is well versed in what part-time employees are entitled to in terms of vacations/vacation pay, breaks, statutory holidays, overtime, etc. Getting yourself into hot water in this area can be costly, so knowledge is money in this area. Also, know what your insurance carrier (if you have one) requires to bring an employee on to an existing benefits plan, as the requirements will vary from company to company.

Part-time employees can be a great human resource solution for small businesses. Use these strategies to manage your part-timers so that they are productive, vital members of your team and contribute to your business growth and success.

## Spring Cleaning Your Office

With spring just around the corner, most of us feel a tug to do some spring cleaning. Spring brings freshness and a new light. When the weather starts to warm up, people can be seen washing windows, cleaning closets, organizing spaces, getting rid of clutter, cleaning their yards...but what about your office? When was the last time you spent some time giving your office space a good overhaul? After all, it is where you spend a lot of your time, and represents your business to others. What kind of impression do you make on potential customers or clients with binders piled up on the floor behind your chair, files strewn about as if they're not important enough to have a home, a desk piled high with papers, books and coffee mugs from the last three days? What goes through the mind of the customer on the other end of the phone line when you say, 'hang on just a minute while I locate that file', and leave them on hold for 5 minutes while you're looking? A cluttered, disorganized work space not only reflects poorly on your ability to manage your business, but actually may prevent you from working efficiently and effectively. Even if you don't have the spring cleaning bug, take the initiative to give your office a good spring clean. You'll notice the results right away. Here are some ways to get started.

### Filing

**Physical Files** - This includes everything currently on your desk, in your in-basket, sitting on trays or in stand-up files. Everyone is different when it comes to what system makes the most sense for them, and the system may also be dependent on their industry or business. The point behind this is to ensure that all your files have a place, and that you can quickly and easily find anything you need. There should never be pieces of paper or folders on your desk that don't have a home, unless you're actively using them. It doesn't really matter which system you use, as long as it works for you and that you keep it up to date. Get those files off your desk and into their rightful place.

**Contacts** - Go through your Daytimer, business card file and address book. Cross off or store any contacts you know are outdated. Update any information that needs to be updated (i.e. that new phone number for Joe's Body Shop you scribbled on a napkin should be transferred to your address book). If you keep your contacts on your computer or smart phone, do the same. Go through each contact and check that all the information is updated.

**Computer** - Does your computer desktop look like someone's filing cabinet exploded? Can you quickly and easily track down any file on your hard drive whenever you need it? Take a look at how your computer files are organized. Are there files you can delete? Are there items that have been saved to the wrong file? Keeping your desktop relatively neat and being liberal with folders and sub folders may help you to feel less stressed. It's the same as getting the physical clutter off your desk. Also, take a look at your browser bookmarks. Are there some you can delete? Is there some way to organize and categorize them to make finding sites easier? What about your email? When was the last time you deleted unnecessary messages? Have you created email sub-folders to make searching for that specific email from Company X simpler? Take the time to clean up your computer files. You'll appreciate how much time it saves you in the end.

### Physical Space

**Desk** - How much unnecessary stuff is on your desk? Does your desk look like a photographer's showroom with pictures everywhere? The clearer your workspace, the more efficiently you will work. Consolidate and simplify what is on your desk. Put away what you can in drawers to leave a clean, neat working surface.

**Bookshelves** - Are your books organized in some kind of order so you know where to look when you need something? Are they neat and tidy or have they become the receptacle for everything you don't know what to do with, photos from the Christmas party, the outdated company envelopes you can't bring yourself to throw away, disks and CD's you don't know what to do with? De-clutter as much as you can, and put the rest away.

**Floorspace** - Nothing says 'inefficient' like stuff overflowing onto your floor. Try to get everything off your floor that isn't a piece of furniture or equipment. It may be time to purchase another bookshelf or storage cabinet. A de-cluttered space leads to an increase in productivity.

## Office Equipment

**Computer and Accessories** - When was the last time you took your computer in for a cleaning and service? What about your printer, scanner, keyboard and mouse? Do they need a dusting or service? Your fax machine? Keeping your office equipment well-serviced and maintained will save you hours of frustration as they won't break down as readily.

Are you feeling inspired yet? Get to it. If you can't afford to set aside a day during the week, do it on a Saturday. You won't believe what an impact it will make on your attitude and the feeling you'll have when you go back to work on Monday. Increase your efficiency, create a space that's a pleasure to work in, and impress your customers and clients - a little bit of effort will go a long way!

## Making the Most of Your Marketing Dollars

### Big Impact Strategies that Don't Break the Bank

While you'd be hard pressed to find a company that hasn't felt the sting and been forced to cut spending in some way over the last few years, business analysts are seeing the signs of economic recovery. One of these signs is that small businesses are starting to regain confidence in the economy and are beginning to spend money on marketing and advertising again. Experts are seeing a slow but steady increase in marketing spending, so businesses are moving forward cautiously. Experts also say that recessions present opportunities that don't exist when times are good and that increasing market share while the competition frets about expenses is a viable business strategy. While this may be true, there are the realities of doing business and not every small business can afford to do this. As a small business owner putting your toes in the marketing waters again, you're likely facing those decisions of where to make the most of the marketing dollars you have available. Mark Koller, President and Founder of CGSM (experts in direct and digital marketing), suggests seven 'budget conscious' tips to give your marketing initiatives maximum impact.

1. **Focus on customer service as your top priority.** When times are tough, people stick with who they know as long as you provide unparalleled customer service. It doesn't matter what you sell, as long as you do business in a way that makes your customers feel valued. The cost of gaining business from existing customers is significantly lower than getting it from new customers, so take advantage of your already loyal customer base and serve them well. They'll stay with you.
2. **Ensure your website offers a customer-friendly experience.** Continually test your website for functionality and intuitive navigation. Your website should not be static. Be willing to try new ideas and use new media - video, blogs, social media. Don't talk yourself out of an idea because you think it might be too expensive. Be creative; it may be less expensive than you think.
3. **Partner with other businesses to reach more customers (cooperative marketing).** You'll have to share the cost of the mailout or promotion with someone else, but this strategy can extend your reach in a significant way, to people you may not be able to target in any other way.
4. **Negotiate, Negotiate, and Negotiate.** Media companies are still hurting from the downturn and are working their way back up to previous sales levels, which means they are willing to negotiate. Talk to your media representatives - if you're interested in spending money with them, they're

interested in making it work. Watch for special deals and promotions (they happen all the time) and be ready to strike when the iron is hot.

5. **Build your brand with social networking.** Take the time to actually create that business blog, and update it regularly (at least once per week). If you are not on LinkedIn - get an account. Create a Facebook Page for your business. Consider Twitter and a host of other social media tools that make sense for your business. This is the way of the future for business - don't get left behind. If you're not savvy in these areas, hire someone to help you. Or, check with your staff. Chances are, someone in your company has the technical knowledge you need to get things up and running.
6. **Try things you have not tried before.** If you've never tried radio, give it a whirl. TV commercials? They are less expensive than you might think. Promotional events are a great way to get people out to your business. Charity sponsorships contribute to community health and growth and are a great way to get your brand out there and can often be achieved through work 'in kind'. Don't assume anything about a new strategy. Look into it to find out if it's affordable. You never know what will work until you try it!
7. **Get out there to say and write something!** Comment on blog posts, write articles - and don't be afraid to be a little provocative, if it aligns with your image! It will make you memorable. Speak at conferences or forums, act as a host for a local charity event, or lead a community initiative. All these things increase your exposure and visibility, helping build your company's brand and reputation as well as your own.

While others are still waiting in the wings to spend their marketing dollars, get out of the starting gate! Move now on opportunities to claim your market share. These tips are not costly, but can help you achieve a greater impact with your marketing.

## 'Buy Local' is Big!

### Is Your Business Capitalizing on this Growing Trend?

'Buy Local' is fast-growing trend that will continue to impact small businesses in the coming years. This renewed interest in purchasing local products and services has grown even stronger as a result of the economic downturn, and is gaining popularity with people who are trying to live in a more environmentally conscious way. There is currently a growing consciousness around aspects of community-building and our responsibility to and interdependence with our immediate resources - human and natural. When you buy locally, you are investing in your own neighbourhood or town, its people and its products, and this leads to an increase in your area's economy. In each and every village, town and city across the country, the trend toward small businesses whose products rely on others in their community is growing, helping the local economy grow. 'Buy local' is going to continue its growth in popularity, and if you can find a way to create demand for your products with a local emphasis, you'll see business growth as a result. How do 'Buy Local' programs work and what are some of the steps toward encouraging one in your own community? Successful programs have a strong desire to boost sales and support for locally grown, manufactured and designed products and services. The entire effort focuses on teaching consumers to use local businesses whenever possible in order to keep and create jobs and further sustain the neighborhood economy. Here are some of the reasons behind this growing trend.

### 'Buy Local' Emphasizes Local Roots and Ownership

People are naturally and intimately connected with where they live. They cheer for the home town sports team. They love to brag about locally owned and operated businesses - especially if those businesses sell something you can only get in your town! Most people have home-town pride and care about the history and roots of their community. There is value in connection with the community; it fulfills our human need of belonging and relationship, and we form a pride in all that's around us. The motivation to buy local comes from a desire to support the little guy in your community who's offering something truly home grown, something we feel connected to and ownership with.

### **'Buy Local' Strengthens the Local Economy and Community**

There is a strong and growing sense of unity and commitment to independent business owners in many communities around the country. Buying local makes good financial sense too. Buying local puts dollars into the community and keeps them where everyone can benefit from them. Buying local supports local businesses growth. As businesses grow, they provide jobs for people in the community who then have an income to spend in the community. It's circular; if you can buy the same thing at a reasonable price from a small, locally owned business rather than at a huge big box store, why wouldn't you do it? Whether it's agriculture, technology, retail, or restaurants, people like the idea that their money is staying in and contributing to the health of their community.

### **'Buy Local' is Good for the Customer.**

Consumers know that the better their local economy does, the better their quality of life in that community, and business is the core of the local economy. When businesses can supply local products and services, they can keep their costs lower, which consumers like.

### **'Buy Local' is a Mindset**

Vancouverite Darren Barefoot made a commitment to cut back on imported goods and buy only Canadian products and services for an entire year (Read Darren's insightful blog at [www.oneyearonecanadian.ca](http://www.oneyearonecanadian.ca)). His message, ultimately, is about "thoughtful consumption," says Barefoot. "Looking more carefully at what I put in my home and put in and on my body." Barefoot joins a host of others who have undertaken similar personal quests and commitments to honour the fact that the choices we make at the till do have a ripple effect, on the economy and the environment. The way people buy is changing and becoming more thoughtful. The 100 Mile Diet, Farmer's Markets, Second Hand and Consignment shopping, eating at restaurants that serve local food are all examples of a shift toward greater mindfulness in peoples' decisions on how they spend their money. This is a mindset that will continue to grow as more people discover the benefits of growing their local economies by buying local.

### **'Buying Local' is a Green Practice**

No matter how you look at "Buy Local" efforts, they tend to be far more environmentally responsible in nature than shopping with national retailers. Not only does the purchasing philosophy benefit local businesses and spur the local economy, it also reduces the carbon footprint in each community where those practices are being used. Shipping and sometimes packaging is greatly reduced as goods do not need to be trucked cross country, saving fuel, avoiding carbon emissions and reducing landfill from packaging or goods that don't make it intact. Going green is an equally strong and prevalent trend that isn't likely to go away any time soon, so if buying local contributes to a greener community, it makes sense for people to do that. People care about the environment. They care about recycling, excessive packaging, and the costs (in both dollars and energy) of shipping goods from other countries. They care about a greener planet for themselves, their children and grandchildren. Focusing on what people care about is good business because their money will be spent in that direction.

How can your business benefit from the 'Buy Local' mindset? Get creative. Find out if you can order products from a local distributor rather than an international one. Investigate the possibilities of partnering with other local businesses to create a local focus. If your community doesn't have a formal 'Buy Local' program, talk with your local Chamber of Commerce or business development association about starting one. Small businesses often feel isolated in their business efforts, but there's strength and power in joining forces to create a stronger more self-sustaining community.