

Understanding and managing talent



S.I.Partners

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In our survey of agency leaders, talent was ranked as the most important business issue, ahead of clients, creativity, growth and profitability.

Introduction

What we do

S.I.Partners advises marketing services businesses on the creation and realisation of value through insight and behavioural change.

Only by changing people's behaviour is it possible to improve the performance of your business and increase its value.

Why talent?

When S.I.Partners was asked to conduct a series of seminars for the AAR, we first conducted a survey of agency CEOs / MDs / Partners to find out what issues were most important to them.

Talent was the most popular topic, and yet it was interesting to note that only one of the agency leaders we surveyed mentioned talent as being central to their responsibilities.

What to expect from this booklet

This booklet will explain why we believe that talent should be an agency leader's top priority and the practical steps you can take to attract, retain and nurture talent within your organisation.

Feedback from our seminars suggests that while most agency leaders know what steps they should be taking to manage talent, few were actually taking them.

As with many things in life, the theory is sometimes easier than the practice. In our experience, the hardest part – changing people's behaviour – is also the most important.

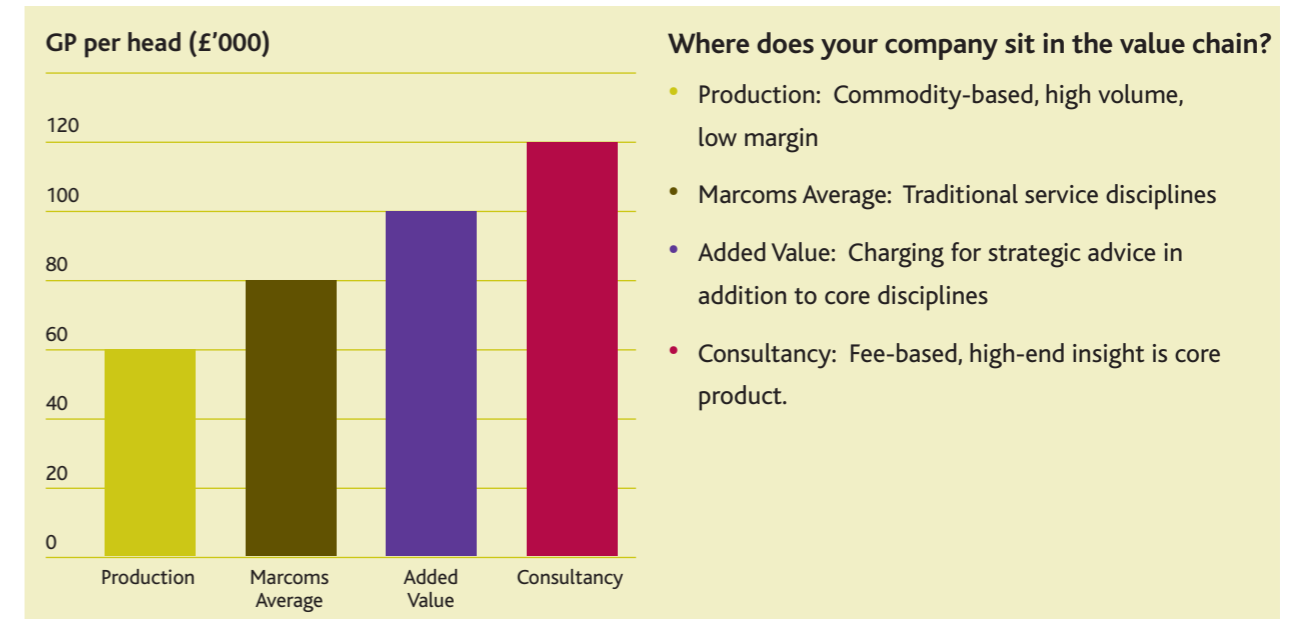
S.I.Partners has a great deal of experience in helping marketing services businesses to make the changes necessary to improve business performance and value.

If you would like to discuss how we could help you, please call Charles Fallon on +44 7970 409 268 or email charles@sipartners.co.uk.

People are the greatest asset and the greatest cost in a marcoms agency. Managing talent should therefore be an agency leader's top priority.

Why is talent so important?

- The most common issues that agency leaders seek our advice on are talent-related.
- Staff represent by far the biggest cost in an agency – usually around 60% of gross profit.
- Talent is directly linked to profitability which is why gross profit per head is a common measure of an agency's productivity.
- Talent is often your only raw material and it provides your competitive advantage.



To understand your agency's talent you need to engage with your staff, and this is a continuous process.



Understanding individuals

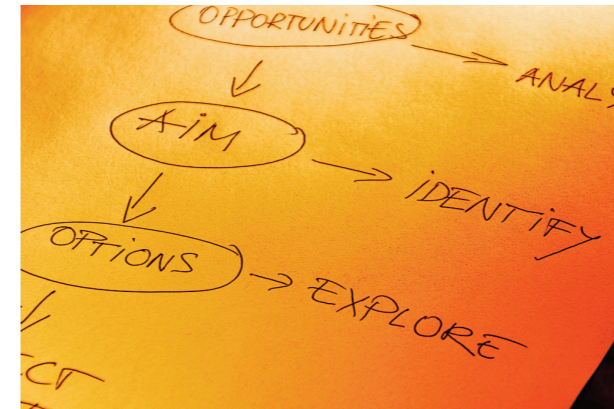
In order to change people's behaviour we first need to understand and measure it.

We asked our seminar delegates what methods they used. Most used a combination of the following:

Proprietary Tools	Other methods
Myers Briggs	Line manager appraisals
Colour Works	360° appraisals
FIRO-B	Staff surveys
Belbin	Joiner interviews
Facet 5	Exit interviews
Thomas International	

- Don't rely on the data in isolation – a layer of intuition is required in the use of these tools.
- You need to create an open and honest environment – the management team should use the same tools to assess one another.

The most successful agencies have a clear talent proposition that is very close to the agency's central proposition.



How do you manage talent?

a) Develop a Talent Proposition

- Define your company's culture and values – your Talent Proposition must reflect these.

What should your staff expect from you and what will you expect from them?

eg. The longest hours of their careers.

What characteristics are you looking for?

eg. People who can communicate verbally as well as electronically.

Be targeted – don't try to be all things to all people.

- Adapt to change and continuously develop the strategy – company size, client size & type, trends in service offer, ownership and age (of leaders and recruits).
- What is your differentiator? We suggest that culture and values expressed as the human experience (your brand experience) can give you an edge.

In other words...

Your differentiator is your Talent Proposition.



b) Motivate

- Reward 'correct' behaviour – i.e. that which supports your values and talent proposition.
- Use both 'hard' and 'soft' measures:

Hard	Soft
Salary	Dialogue / conversation
Bonus	Express values in everything you do
Share option scheme	Entertainment Events – to reinforce proposition
Perks and incentives	Soft objectives in targets

- From our surveys we noted that everyone offers a mix of hard and soft measures.
- Are different targets appropriate for each type of internal function e.g. creative, finance, account management?

c) Monitor

- Measure company performance.

Retention
Talent type i.e. Gross margin per head
Efficiency i.e. Gross margin : Salary ratio
Age profile
Identify the strong and the weak

- Track attitudes and behaviour through appraisals

d) Develop

Individuals

Look after your stars, weed out the weak and remember that your recruitment process is as important as your new business effort.

- Review roles regularly; demand vs. skill:

Is the current team right for the future?
What is your client need / demand?
What skills and roles do you need to meet these?
Who best fits these roles?

- What is your succession plan? Will you have the depth of management to enable others to take over from you?

Company

- From what you have learned from monitoring, what needs to change and how?
- How does the company structure need to evolve?

Departments
Client groups
Client champions
Buddies / pairs

- Company identity / personality needs to evolve with the business.
- Make sure you have the infrastructure to support the talent proposition i.e. office layout?

e) Process

- Sounds dull, but process is vital.
- The CEO should be responsible for the Talent Proposition and keeping talent issues at the top of everyone's agenda.
- HR / department heads should then run the process.

f) Get help

Much of the above will sound familiar, perhaps even clichéd. The devil is in the detail, and in the implementation. If you need help to implement these measures, ask.

Summary

- Managing talent is a long term, continuous effort.
- Understand your people.
- Develop a Talent Proposition.
- Link motivation & rewards to your Talent Proposition.
- Review & develop continuously.
- Don't forget the process – and lead it from the top. This is the CEO's responsibility.

S.I.Partners

Much of the advice in this booklet will not be new to you. But how much of it are you really following?

As a knowledgeable and sympathetic outsider, S.I.Partners can help by monitoring, coaching and challenging your management team. We will encourage the changes in behaviour that your company needs in order to succeed.

For more information please call Charles Fallon on:

+44 7970 409 268

or email: charles@sipartners.co.uk.

About the S.I.Partners seminar series conducted for the AAR:

- S.I.Partners created bespoke seminars for the AAR, covering 3 core topics in 2008:
 - Understanding & Managing Talent
 - Turning IP into Products
 - Profit Improvement
- More than 60 CEOs attended the 2008 seminars.
- All delegates completed surveys on each topic prior to the seminars, and this data was used to inform and enhance the sessions.
- Agencies from all marcoms disciplines were represented, including Advertising, Design, Direct Marketing, Media, Public Relations, Sales Promotion and Digital.

Some comments from delegates:

"You have given me so much to think about. I feel enthused and inspired. Great to take some time out to think about key business issues."

"Very thought provoking – really practical advice. Thank you."

"Not only was the course content relevant and well presented, the calibre of the attendees made a real difference."

“ This series of seminars has proved to be an extremely successful and popular initiative. Charles Fallon led each presentation with great panache, prompting lively, productive debate and delivering real value for the delegates, as evidenced by the high feedback scores – an average of 4.6 out of 5 from all delegates.”

Kerry Glazer, AAR

S.I.Partners

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