

## FastLane: Getting Better How to Get the Most Out of Employees

By Brian Horn  
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Don Hoff is always trying to push his workers to be better. It's not that he thinks they aren't working hard or putting their best effort forward at American Slide Chart/Perrygraf, but he doesn't want his employees becoming complacent.

"It's not dissatisfaction with the way it's done," says the acting president of the 75-employee company, which designs specialized dimensional tools that help companies sell. "I try to position it in a very positive way that I think we can do things better."

*Smart Business* spoke with Hoff about leadership and getting the most out of your employees.

### Q. What are the keys to good leadership?

Evaluation and assessment of the talent. As a leader you can communicate, you can have the passions, you can have the energy, but you also have to have the right people in place to bring it all together. I think you need to be constantly looking for talented people. You need to have talented people surrounding you — people who can do the job better than I do it.

If I communicate the vision, I may not know all the ins and outs, but that's what I need the people for. I need to tell them why and let them figure out the how.

Then, just kind of stand back and make sure it happens. Then, along with that evaluation and finding of talent, is making the changes when they need to be made.

### Q. How do you find the best talent?

I network a lot. I look at our competitors in some cases. I look to people who are selling to me. I look within the company as well to see who I've got, what their skills are, and who's got the drive and the passion to go to the next level. Who's got that attitude?

But, I'm constantly looking around. I have the luxury of having a number of years of experience so I network with other people and I see what is going on at companies, and I look at their people and see if there are any opportunities that we have that I could tap into that.

### Q. How do you monitor something without micromanaging?

You have to clearly communicate what it is you are trying to do — what the timetable is, what the end result might look like in your mind, in your vision, and what resources we have at the outset.

Sit down with the person or the group or whoever is involved and just lay it all out. What do we need to get this done? Why are we doing it first of all, and then just lay out the timetable and make sure everyone buys upfront and agrees to it and address whatever issues you can address right there with the group.

### Q. How do you handle a situation when expectations aren't met when you delegate?

I go directly to the person that is handling the project and try to find out what some of the issues are. Why is it not happening? What roadblocks are you running into? If there is information or help you need from another source, is that not happening? Is it someone else's plate is full and they can't get to it right now?

First off, we try to set some realistic timetables, and then, through regular, informal meetings, just touching base. [It] could just be stopping in their office every other day or so. 'How's it going? Let me know if there are any problems.'

If we are running into roadblocks or it's being delayed, then I might pull the group together and say, 'OK, what do we need to do to get moving here?' I reassess things, and just emphasize from my perspective the urgency to get this done and marshal all the resources. Maybe we need to pull in more people to help out or someone's got to work a little extra to get this done because they don't quite see it with the same urgency.

### Q. How do you get buy-in for your vision?

The buy-in comes from ... 'Here's where we have to go, here's where the industry is going, and here is where we need to go.' We can't totally change the culture. My analogy is, if we are Volkswagen, we can't expect, without any changes, to go out and win the Indy 500.

We have to understand what our goal is. Maybe it's not to win the Indy 500, but maybe it eventually is, and what do we have to do to get there? ? What things are a fit for us that fit our culture that we can handle without trying to bite

Interview with Don Hoff  
Director of Sales & Marketing,  
American Slide Chart/Perrygraf

off more than we can chew initially? Then constantly communicate that vision, have that passion and let people know that this is what we're doing and why we're doing it.

Everybody needs an understanding of where we're going and why we are going there — from the guy who fixes our equipment or maintains our equipment to our head sales guy.

They have to understand, and we all have to be pointed in the same direction, and I think that's critical for any company, large or small. Communication is important so people are all on the same page — constant communication, constant checking. Asking, 'Do you understand what we are doing or why?'

Pretty soon, you see people [and] now they're coming back to you with ideas. It's not just following your vision. They're coming back with ways they think they can make it happen either faster or better.



Don Hoff,  
American Slide Chart/Perrygraf

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