



WTCA's new Professional Leadership Academy could hold the key to keeping your company on track.

5 Specific Actions to Help Your Company Survive & Thrive in a Weak Market

by Bill Bean, The Randall Wade Group

WTCA recently founded the Professional Leadership Academy (PLA), a training center featuring live and online training for the leaders of component manufacturing operations. Our company, The Randall Wade Group, was selected to partner with PLA to offer courses specifically for component manufacturers, developing people in skills and techniques critical to the success of their businesses. PLA training is offered in a variety of formats: seminars, web-based meetings, chapter meetings, on- and off-site customized training and workshops, and one-on-one professional coaching for any level of an organization.

The following story presents common business circumstances and communications that can dilute or destroy a company's effectiveness. It also provides examples of how PLA might help in those situations.

As I walked into my office at 7 on Monday morning, Dave, our Production Manager approached me and asked if he could have a few minutes of my time. Dave has been with me since I founded the company 15 years ago and I could tell he was deeply concerned about something. I knew he had been under pressure lately—the slow market had resulted in deep cutbacks and inexperienced people at some of his production stations. That combined with shorter production runs, more changeovers and an increased reject rate had resulted in higher costs, and poor morale (which is uncharacteristic in our company). We agreed to meet at 10 a.m. Dave came into my office at 10 and closed the door behind him. I knew immediately that this would not be an ordinary conversation.

Dave was uneasy, emotional and wandered from one issue to another, which was unsettling considering how long we had known each other. But after 15 minutes of venting, he had outlined issues beyond his control in leadership, communication, teamwork and sales. His concern was whether our company could survive in this market. I thanked him for bringing these issues to my attention and explained that I would carefully consider each of his points and have a response for him by Wednesday morning. That was a short turnaround but I knew that I could not afford to let the situation fester. The market had been through downturns before, and I knew that housing would eventually be strong again. While thriving this year might not mean increasing revenues or bottom line earnings, it was clear that renewing our commitment to strong fundamentals and taking the time to prepare ourselves for the market's inevitable come-back was worth some serious reflection. I realized that we had become a bit complacent when times were good, and we needed to renew our focus on the core values that had helped us to be successful over the years.

At lunch I put in a call to Tom, our Sales Manager who had been in the position less than a year, and asked if he could meet me for a few minutes at 5. He was promoted to management from a top sales position because of his great technical knowledge and relationships with customers, but I knew that his leadership skills were not yet well honed. I also put in a quick call to Sam (our Director of Finance) to set up a Tuesday breakfast meeting and to Mary (Design Manager) for a Tuesday lunch outside the office.

My 5 p.m. meeting with Tom confirmed that he was in over his head in his new position in this tough market. The sales veterans had become "order takers" during the good times. They had forgotten how to lock in our key customers and some core accounts were considering jumping ship. They had also forgotten how to make cold calls and develop new business. On the flip side, Tom said, the rookies had never seen a down market and had low income, low morale and no viable plans to build their territories. Tom himself was struggling in shifting from buddy to boss with his former peers. I appreciated the candor, but this was not good news. I realized I had become so busy with the tough decisions in downsizing that I had lost touch with the heart of our business.

My breakfast meeting with Sam on Tuesday confirmed that he had been ruthless in trying to get the entire team to document every detail of their costs and expenditures. This was done with noble intent, but inflammatory results. Sam came to us through a merger two years ago. He had exceptional financial skills but still had not embraced the culture of our "family." My lunch discussion with Mary unveiled a similar level of frustration, this time around salespeople expecting and promising turnarounds on drawings and repairs that were just not realistic with the current staffing.

All four meetings confirmed that our culture was faltering, teamwork had disintegrated, the sales management was unacceptable, and our sales approach was inadequate to survive in the current market environment. Heading home, it was painfully obvious that my job as the leader was to conceive and communicate a credible path for success....and I had promised Dave that I would do my homework and get back to him with a plan by morning.

After a dinner break, I Googled anything that might help toward our solution. One link referenced WTCA and a light bulb went on in my head. As a member, we had used their safety and technician training with success; I crossed my fingers in hopes that they might have offerings related to my current situation as well. I accessed the home page at www.sbcindustry.com, clicked on the WTCA Professional Leadership Training logo, and read that WTCA has teamed up with the professional leadership coaching services of The Randall Wade Group (RwG) to create PLA. Aha! Turns out the PLA was developed for manufacturers in the same predicament as my company: in a time of transition, adjusting to big changes, or ready to take the next steps to developing a professional, well-run team. Continued on page 26

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at a glance

- ❑ The pressures of a competitive market can result in significant personnel and cultural changes within a company.
- ❑ The WTCA PLA was created to help manufacturers with formalized planning and leadership development.
- ❑ Take advantage of PLA offerings through seminars, web-based meetings, chapter meetings, and one-on-one professional coaching.

Five Specific Actions...

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I was intrigued to read that many of my peers had benefited from the services of PLA. They said that the information they learned improved leadership, communication and planning skills, provided techniques and templates, unified cross-functional teams, and helped them set priorities to move forward more quickly and effectively. We had not invested time or money in formalized planning or leadership development in the last several years. Maybe that was part of the problem.

I decided to create a five-step approach: first I would work through PLA to develop a brief, customized electronic survey created for the entire company. That would make sure that I was aware of ALL of the outstanding issues. Then I would get PLA assistance in crafting a mission statement about our plan for the team so that they would all hear a single consistent message for our correction course.

Third, I would schedule a customized two-day PLA Leadership Development Workshop here in town, just for our company and including our entire management team.

Fourth, I decided to enroll my entire sales team in a 2-day Professional Sales Training Workshop. This would introduce a proven, repeatable eight-step selling process, using real life industry examples.

Finally, I concluded it would be helpful to engage RwG in professional, personalized coaching for Sam, to help him to be more empathetic, and Tom to help with his transformation from sales to sales management. As I finished the outline for my discussion with Dave, I breathed a sigh of relief for the first time in two days.

My breakfast meeting went smoothly as I described the solution to

Dave. I was confident in my plan and I thanked him for giving me the wake-up call. It was a relief to see his anxiety dissolve. Within 60 days we could have more professionalism, understanding, unity, and results in both the management and sales teams and would be back on the road to "family stability."

Looking back a couple months, I realize how important it was that I took aggressive action and made the investment in planning and training that was long overdue. The results were significant. Now the entire company can see that our management team has a clear plan for our priorities during the downturn. Our sales team has also shown progress. Tom's coaching has given him more confidence in his decisions and more credibility with the sales team. And the salespeople themselves have become much more efficient, carefully qualifying accounts and listening more closely to each customer. Sam's one-on-one coaching has helped him develop ways to get the information he needs while showing more respect for the rest of the team.

That concludes the story of the challenges typical for a small component manufacturer in these tough times. There is nothing easy about a weak market, and management and sales teams aren't perfect. But the new PLA offerings can help you survive and thrive in this downturn. Most importantly, PLA was created to help you develop the best leaders, the strongest teams and the most professional salespeople to improve your competitive positioning when the market recovers. **SBC**

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