

BCBR Article

Five Star plan enhances corporate team building

By Jeff Thomas

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BOULDER - Serial entrepreneur Chris Bentley doesn't stand on formality when describing the state of his competition in corporate team building and goal achievement.

"I've been a consultant for various businesses for 25 years," said Bentley, a founding partner in Aspen Pet Products in 1992, which is now heralded as the world's largest designer and manufacturer of pet accessories.

"The No. 1 cause in business failure is not because companies don't have a good strategy, it's because they don't have good execution."

About 18 months ago Bentley dropped the first \$100,000 into the Boulder-based Five Star Institute, which he describes as an innovative hybrid of the existing - and decidedly lacking - methodologies employed by corporations to enhance strategy and teamwork execution.



Christopher Bentley, CEO of The Five Star Institute, left-center, works with team members to categorize goals during an Aligning for Execution session.

The institute has attracted another dozen or so organizational experts from the top tiers of international corporations. They have joined the firm as equity partners.

Bentley pigeonholes the competition into three methodologies: the "seagull," the "binder" and the "install companies."

"Seagulls are the training companies that fly in, dump their load of methodology du jour - situational leadership or whatever the favored method of the day is - and fly off again without being heard from again," Bentley said.

The binder companies come into a business, spend hundreds of hours interviewing and analyzing corporate structure and communication, and create a report that is several hundred pages long.

"When we were selling off parts of Aspen Pets we probably had three of these written," Bentley said. "They sat up on a bookshelf gathering dust, and I don't think any of us ever read one of them."

The final flawed methodology, according to Bentley, is the "install companies," which require employees to install and populate a proprietary database. The problem with many of these companies and software is that the information is not well reviewed or shared with managers attempting to measure how well their employees are reaching their goals.

The Five Star approach is decidedly more intense, especially in commitment of time and resources. The program lasts at least a year, and companies spend between \$50,000 and \$100,000 to focus the energy and approach of their management team during that time.

Five Star has a proprietary model to help business leaders derive their strategic initiatives. The entire management team is brought in for the second phase - a facilitated planning process where clearly defined actions are formulated to reach those strategic initiatives.

"Once team goals are developed they are entered into Vector 5 - the Five Star Institute's proprietary software tool for tracking action progress and goal achievement," according to the company's Web site. "The team enters individual actions in support of team goals and learns how to use Vector 5 for improved collaboration, communication and ongoing accountability."

Boulder-based People Productions developed the Web-based technology for Vector 5, which can be accessed by team members through an ordinary browser window. The software allows for updates of team goals and personal productivity. It also creates an interface for discussing and updating results and goals.

"You could be on a beach in Jamaica with your BlackBerry and still be able to see what all the other teams were doing," Bentley said.

Bentley did not reveal his company's revenue during the initial 18 months, but the listed clients on the Five Star Web site - McKesson, Baylor Hospital, city of Northglenn and Westin Westminster - indicate a level of success.

Five Star officials said it's not just evolving companies that need to focus their efforts. One of Five Star's favorite marketing statistics is that of 100 multibillion-dollar mergers during the last decade about 58 were failures.

"Most of them failed with no increase in shareholder value," said Jenner Marcucci, Five Star's vice president of client

solutions. "The highways are littered with companies that failed to deliver on a good strategy."

Marcucci has more than 16 years of Fortune 10 experience in sales, sales training and leadership development, including a long stint at Pfizer Inc., where there were almost unlimited resources for management development, he said.

That giant budget "didn't create return in terms of shareholder value," Marcucci said. "'Edutainment' is what I called it. Three months later, you don't remember almost anything of what the speaker said."

Joining Five Star gave him the opportunity to address the lack of business execution with more measurable results and definable actions.

Bentley started his entrepreneurial endeavors at Consumer Health Services in Boulder (1-800-DOCTOR or DENTIST). He then launched Bentley Marketing Plus and served as chief executive officer of Best Year Yet before throwing his hat into Five Star.

"This is the fourth company I've built out," he said. "But no matter where a company is (in terms of development) they all have challenges. We don't tell them how to address those challenges; we help them execute on their strategy."

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