

## Best Defense

For remodelers, a well-rounded game plan is the key to success in sales and production.

**T**he best offense is a good defense. Anyone who follows sports, football especially, has heard this quote. In fact, I've heard it the other way around, too — "The best defense is a good offense" — which for me was always easier to understand. As a salesperson, I equated sales with offense. Like an offense scoring lots of points, I thought that if I could make enough sales, everything else would fall into place. Now that I have broader management perspective, however, I've come to appreciate the valuable "defensive" role the production side of the business plays.

Think of it this way. In football, if you can count on your defense to get you the ball back in a timely way with good field position, your offense will perform better. With a good defense behind them, the offense can make pressure-free decisions and can even take some risk.

### **MOMENTUM SWINGS**

In remodeling, it's the production team that determines "field position" for the sales force. If a job encounters problems with workmanship or cost overruns, for example, the sales

staff will lose confidence. This makes them tentative and indecisive, which takes away their enthusiasm and with it, their edge. Plus, they may use production problems as an excuse for their own poor performance. The end result is unhappy clients, fewer sales, and less revenue.

On the other hand, the sales force gains confidence when it can go into each selling situation knowing that production will execute flawlessly. Instead of being fearful of questions about production, the sales staff can sing its praises and highlight production as a differentiator. They can concentrate on making the sale, knowing that production will back them up.

The results of a first class production team will live well be-

yond the project completion. Once the job is done, clients forget what went on in the sales meeting, but they live every day with the pain or joy of the production experience. Good "defense" by the production team helps you "get the ball back" every time a past client makes a strong referral.

### **NO FUMBLES**

So I've come full circle. It's now clear to me that strong production helps sales function more effectively and is an important ingredient for growth.

Here's how you can change your company to reflect this emphasis on production:

**Air out the issues.** Get production and sales people talking openly and honestly about the issues. Unless each group understands the underlying reasons for the others' performance, it will be hard to improve.

**Publish the revised "rules of the game."** For example, outline who will "own" different aspects of the communication, like change orders or pre-construction meeting follow up. Without explicit processes, systems, and policies, you will fail.

**Get buy-in from everyone (in blood, if possible).** Have people literally sign off on the rules and make them aware of the consequences of corrupting the process.

**Monitor progress weekly.** Failure to get the glitches ironed out in a timely manner is where most well-intended programs fail. Also, be sure to celebrate the production successes in the same way that you celebrate sales victories.

**Police it.** This is the tough one for most companies, but there must be consequences for those who break the rules, even the historically top performers.

Creating a new company culture of a balanced offense-defense isn't as easy as it looks. The traditional leader-follower hierarchy dies hard. But making the change will result in increased profits, better team morale, and more delighted clients. That's the kind of solid footing on which you can build a first class remodeling organization. —*Mark Richardson is president of Case Design/Remodeling, Bethesda, Md. (301) 229-4600; mrichardson@casedesign.com.*

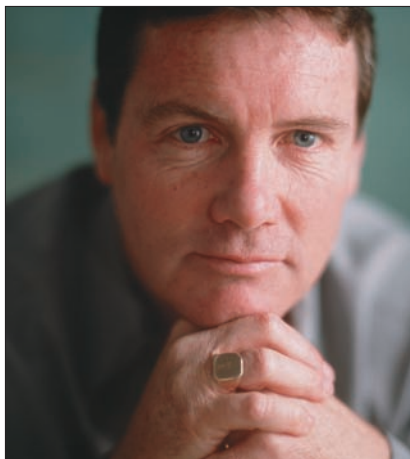


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