

The Staff Manager: Taos' Invisible, Unsung Hero

By Erin Boyd, Staff Writer

In this economy, it's a given that every dollar counts. No company wants to waste money on consultants who can't meet their needs. And, consultants don't want to be put into a position set up for failure, possibly negatively impacting their career, and/or reputation. To eliminate these fears during a Taos engagement, we employ a behind-the-scenes Staff Manager who effectively equips our consultants for success, triggering long-term client satisfaction.

The Staff Manager is one of Taos' many "personal touch" attributes who, although often invisible to clients, is key to fostering and enhancing our consultant relationships. Taos has learned over the past 20 years that keeping consultants happy and successful also leads to happy and successful clients. The Staff Manager is one of Taos' key differentiators. We've discovered that the role is incredibly unique in this field, as are the limits we'll reach to ensure the consultant is at his/her best and, therefore, that clients are receiving all the Taos value to which they're entitled.

The Staff Manager assures achievement of this goal via direct management responsibility of consultants, partnering with sales, and serving as a liaison with the client's staff. A Staff Manager makes certain the consultant is provided with all of the necessary tools to be successful, from technical assistance to professional skills coaching. The Staff Manager also serves as a continual link back to the Taos home base – a crucial feature of this service.

For example, it's common practice in the consultancy industry for a consultant to be placed with a client with only nominal preparation, and then never hears back from the home office. Isolation ensues. Feedback is minimal, if existent at all, and is usually reactionary to a client's complaints or other issues. Morale declines. Projects suffer. Consultants feel abandoned and, subsequently, look for work elsewhere. And the client is dissatisfied. No one benefits in this situation.

Part of Taos' continual success is the elimination of this scenario via the Staff Manager's role and the resulting "high touch" approach. It's often times why our consultants become clients and our clients become consultants again; they understand and appreciate the support backbone that is engineered into the Taos model.

The hands-on approach begins before a consultant is even assigned to a project. Since the Staff Manager has a history with the client and truly understands the client's organization, a consultant is selected based on not just technical acumen, but personality types are also taken into consideration to eliminate the possibility of a mismatch.

Upon a new assignment, the Staff Manager meets with the consultant to:

- Review the client's history and objectives of the project at hand;
- Explain the environment he/she will be stepping into and how to handle it appropriately; and
- Examine the business objectives to achieve, allowing for a seamless transition to a new project.

Then, regularly scheduled meetings occur throughout the assignment. The Staff Manager also serves as the first line of defense for a consultant. If an issue arises, whether it's a technical dilemma, an internal obstacle inhibiting a deadline, or perhaps a political situation, the Staff Manager is always easily accessible and will wrangle all available resources to quickly and effectively resolve the problem.

The Staff Manager also plays an integral role in helping Taos to create the desired perception that we commonly hear our clients refer to: Taos is genuinely concerned with the client's success and the relationship is not just about making another sale. This is true, and by serving as a neutral resource with a main objective of ensuring the client's work gets completed to their satisfaction, the Staff Manager works diligently to accomplish the project's goals by heading off problems before they even occur.

We know how catastrophic certain issues can become if our Staff Managers didn't have the awareness and the good sense to act quickly in a proactive manner. The client, with little or no effort, gains an invaluable team member who will save them time and headaches by handling the "sticky" situations.

In the end, all the client really knows is that the project went well.