

Minneapolis / St. Paul Business Journal - September 10, 2007

<http://twincities.bizjournals.com/twincities/stories/2007/09/10/smallb1.html>

MINNEAPOLIS ST. PAUL BUSINESS JOURNAL

BUSINESS PULSE SURVEY: [Hit by lending meltdown?](#)

Workshop

Intrinsic value

Grooming staff will help IntrinXec manage fast growth, says panel

Minneapolis / St. Paul Business Journal - September 7, 2007 by [Lauren Wilbert](#) Staff Writer

Jaime Nolan started her professional association management company, IntrinXec Inc., in 2004 with the idea of working as a consultant.

Business was sailing along just fine for her and one other St. Cloud-based employee. That is, until this year.

To say IntrinXec has hit a growth spurt would be an understatement. Since January, the company has gone from three employees to 12, and revenue has skyrocketed from \$100,000 to a projected \$750,000 for 2007.

The company also has grown out of the office space it moved into just last December. That hasn't left much time for Nolan to transition from working for the company as an employee to taking on more of the operational management duties, and she continues to wear many hats.

"I'm still doing everything -- training employees and working on clients," she said.

She needed advice on how to effectively educate her employees on her industry, her company, their roles in the business and expectations, all while forming a productive and happy work culture. As part of retention, Nolan also wants to know how she can make her company's benefits package go further.

"When you have high turnover, the client sometimes feels that," she said. "I want to make sure that now that I have employees, I ... keep them here."

As the head of a high-growth firm, she is unsure of how best to diversify her revenue stream. She wants to take on larger clients, but that would mean hiring more employees whom she would need to train. She brought these topics to a panel of experts, who met at the Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal.

Letting go

The biggest strain on Nolan at this stage in her company is knowing how to keep a finger on every aspect of the business, she said.

Nolan's passion is in working with clients, and she'd like to become the go-to person at IntrinXec when customers want help with developing their boards of directors. But that role conflicts with her need to also train and coach her brand-new staff.

In general, companies like to hire slowly and strategically, with plenty of time to incorporate new
All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.



Nancy Kuehn | Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal

Jaime Nolan, president of association management firm IntrinXec Management, sought panelists' advice on how best to educate employees on her industry and retain them.

[View Larger](#)

employees into the company culture and their jobs.

But Nolan's hiring boom has made it a running joke in the office that the staff should take a number when waiting to talk to her.

"The thing with this industry is that, to train someone into a position, it takes almost a full year," she said. That's usually the first task on her list: explaining what her company does.

IntrinXec offers management services to professional associations, ranging from event planning, marketing and budgeting to communications to clients' members and keeping up with board meetings or succession plans.

Nolan spends time each week with her new hires, teaching them what to look out for (many events for IntrinXec clients come up only once a year) and expectations of performance in the company, such as sending out board-meeting minutes within 48 hours.

She still signs off on employees' work before it's sent out to clients, which sometimes can slow response time to clients, she said.

Sue Lindgren, founder and consultant for YESS Inc., a St. Louis Park-based management coaching firm, said Nolan is essentially the bottleneck.

Nolan also is running into a common turning point for entrepreneurs in the midst of changing roles. She knows the clients and her operations best and is having a hard time letting employees take more responsibilities, noted Brian Carlson, a partner and chief financial officer of Ambrion Inc., an executive-search firm in Bloomington. He helped found Ambrion and has experienced many of the same growing pains as Nolan.

"The toughest part for me was letting go of those relationships," he said. "[You feel like] the service that your employees provide is never as good as when you did it."

But there's a simple solution. Nolan can let her employees take the wheel, but she still can keep an avenue open for clients to call her with any questions or concerns, Carlson suggested.

"The reality is you don't get that many calls [from clients]," he said.

Foolproof system

The panelists overwhelmingly suggested Nolan use a software database -- either general or industry-specific -- to track projects that employees are working on.

One of Nolan's biggest concerns is internal communication.

"There have been times when a client called another team member, and the right hand didn't know what the left hand was doing [on that project]," she said.

Lindgren observed that Nolan seemed overwhelmed by the thought of employing a database for employees to enter calls, track e-mails or update projects and an online calendar -- she noticed Nolan's energy plummet as they discussed the option -- but she said it's something worth checking into.

Sarah Murray, a business and education solutions manager for Anoka Technical College's Corporate Center, assured Nolan that once she learns the basics of a shared software system, her time- and quality-management needs would be solved.

Carlson also pointed out that Nolan requires the information to be documented anyway, so getting her employees in the habit of entering meetings or calls into the new system would be more efficient.

As far as training, the database would allow Nolan to enter alerts on a calendar that would prompt employees to work ahead on an upcoming project. She also could enter background information on clients, which could help new hires get up to speed on their accounts faster.

From a human-resources perspective, a database like this would help Nolan with employee reviews, said Sarah McCarty, administrative and development manager at Minnetonka-based benefits consulting firm Associated Financial Group.

"When you start having a struggle with an employee, you have to look at correction actions," McCarty said. "But what are you basing your corrective action on?" The database would provide tangible examples of strengths or weaknesses in an employee's performance, providing a better foundation for reviews, she added.

Get out of the office

One big aspect of IntrinXec's success is to form an effective company culture, Nolan said. With so much growth in such a short period, the business' core values have yet to be defined.

Kathy Shaffer, also a business and education solutions manager at Anoka Technical College's Corporate Center, suggested that Nolan take her company to an offsite training event led by someone outside the company.

"Sooner is better at this point, and do it in whatever slow time you have [in the business cycle]," Shaffer said. "It's another way to find out who's going to be a good fit for certain positions, too."

Nolan probably will want to interview a few people before she asks someone to lead a company retreat of sorts, Shaffer added.

Nolan cringed at the thought of taking the retreat offsite and leaving the office closed for a day. But Carlson suggested that if she were to give clients enough lead time, and leave an emergency contact number, perhaps she'd feel all right about stepping away from the office to focus on the staff.

"Make it a big, important thing to the clients, like, 'In order to serve you better, we will be unavailable for the day [for a retreat]," Lindgren said. "Then it becomes a branding thing. If [clients and potential customers] see you doing better, it raises the bar and they'll think, 'I'm a learner, and so that's something I want in a partner.'"

For questions or comments about this story, contact Mark Reilly at (612) 288-2110 or mreilly@bizjournals.com.

[Contact the Editor](#)

[Need Assistance?](#)

[More Latest News →](#)