

## Bandwidth Partnership

Sometimes my firm partners with a client's in-house team, other times we *become* that team and an *extension* of their company. Here are examples:

- ⚡ A distributor asked to outsource all marketing to us, not to reduce headcount, but to allow their people to stop focusing on marketing in their spare time as they tackled sales or customer issues.
- ⚡ A powersports company hired us to play the role of strategists for their training department, providing their programmers with inspired creative content for their learning and development modules.
- ⚡ An iconic brand turned to us to join their launch team to add the resources and creativity needed for a worldwide product introduction.

A few decades ago, when my company was young, North American Van Lines asked me to acquire their in-house marketing team and become their advertising division. It's embarrassing as an entrepreneur to say this, but I just wasn't comfortable taking over a department of a huge corporation, so I declined. This began a sequence of them unsuccessfully asking me to reconsider, as I even went to the effort to introduce and recommend other firms for them to interview.

Finally, after a year of these overtures from them (I remember the exact room I was in and the time of day, vividly), I received a call from the North American VP pleading, "Barry, will you please acquire our marketing department?" Exasperated, I replied, "I've given you the names of a dozen other companies to work with, why do you keep asking me to do this?" He simply replied, "Because we trust you." His response leveled me. I said, "Let's do it" and got off the phone wondering what I had just agreed to. I share this because it shows how

clueless I had been to the opportunity as it turned out to be a positive, career-altering decision.

Now, before you assume things went smoothly, I can honestly say what I acquired was close to a disaster. But it educated me on the challenge of in-house departments and how they are often unfair for all concerned. I tackled the assignment immediately, and found I inherited not only their staff, but a backlog of two hundred projects that were in disarray. That problem stemmed from the enterprise looking at the in-house team as order-takers who could not say “no” to any request. This resulted in missed deadlines, subpar work, and a long list of unfinished projects (many of which were no longer viable).

Another challenge was that the people in the department were former truck drivers who dabbled in photography, video, and design. They were “hobbyists” who in the long run were not best suited to execute marketing and media at a professional standard. And surprisingly, many of them told me they were tired of producing work for the moving company. It took a while to get things in order, but for over a decade, my firm successfully partnered with North American. I’m grateful that I finally said, “Let’s do it.”

## **Take Time Off to be Human**

Today, there is great pressure for leaders to perform and meet expectations. Give yourself time to feel and react as a person, and it will help energize you to fight the antipathy and fear of change you may feel from your team. You’ll need that because differentiation doesn’t “belong” to one department; it’s an enterprise-wide pursuit.

Discovering and celebrating your brand’s differentiation may well be one of the most rewarding experiences of your career. Many clients have told me precisely that. Like any great journey, it takes time. You will surely experience a few twists and turns along the way, but, trust me, it will be worth it!