

## **Account Management has Changed.**

No longer a “relationship” manager, your AEs must be able to recognize and solve client business problems.

For some time now, the position of account executive or manager has been caught in a state of flux. As the market has changed, so have the requirements for top level account executives. We call these people Strategic Account Executives.

Over the last ten or so years we have stressed that client-facing staff be good relationship managers. We want them to get along with the client and be good at managing processes to get the work done on time and within budget.

We wanted our people to get the work from the client and handle it properly for both the client and the agency. We did not ask our account executives to “create business” by looking beyond the immediate assignments. We didn’t ask them to look for client business problems the agency could solve

The game has changed, if an agency wants to continue making good profits and do good work. I know the argument that great creative gets good prices, but not all clients can appreciate great creative. Now that we’ve entered the “procurement” phase, where non-marketing people buy the work, it is even more difficult to develop good work at the bargain prices clients want to pay.

All too often, these procurement people opt to shop for the lowest price. They have little if any idea how to tell the difference between what will solve and what won’t solve the problem. For the most part, they all think that the agency is overcharging them for simple copy and computerized layout / design.

Where our account executives were good relationship and process managers, we now need to supplement the group with strategic account executives that can talk the client’s business language, understand their business and contribute to solving key business problems. This is a different person than we are accustomed to having on staff.

I guarantee you that over the next ten years, if not sooner, the strategic account execs will outnumber the tactical ones. Why? Because they will build the agency’s business, not just manage the work.

Art Boulay, AMR’s strategic partner from Strategic Talent Management, and I have completed the benchmark profile for Strategic Account Executives based from the top performers we analyzed. The following characteristics are common to this group:

### **Communication**

- Strong, confident and assertive
- Very good writers (who are also good with numbers)

- Read body language well
- Good negotiators

### Management Style

- Competitive, entrepreneurial, business and bottom line focused
- Direct, but with strong interpersonal skills
- Lead by example and by making their expectations of others clear (may have a tendency to take on too much or delegate too little)
- Like to be in charge and in control; will accept responsibility for outcomes
- Have the capacity to be leaders, not just managers

### Skills and Capacity

- Creative problem solving skills; practical and prudent
- Strategic thinkers
- Selling oriented (even if they do not have sales skills or do not think of themselves as sales people)
- High energy; both enjoys and understands their work; future oriented, knows who they are, what they want and where they are going

Re-read the characteristics of the people you will hire as account executives now and in the future.

These people will build your business. You won't need a new business specialist because every strategic account executive you have on the team automatically builds the business.

Does the profile sound familiar? Does it describe a mini-you? It should, because the entrepreneurial characteristic and all the others tend to profile what we find in small- and medium-sized agency owners.

Today, there are many recent (1-3 years) college graduates with a B.S. in business. These folks are your prime target. Sure, they don't have agency experience, but what they do have is knowledge on problem solving, energy, the willingness to learn and the overall desire to see the work they do provide the results the client is looking for.

What you need to take away from this article is this: The AEs we have been working with cannot take you where you want your agency to go. The Strategic AE needs to be on board to expand your business. You don't have to replace your AEs, but you do need to add these new folks that have the knowledge and can-do spirit to build the business.

AMR conducts three AE BootCamp programs each year. The next one is scheduled for Chicago on September 20-21.

To learn more about evaluating candidates, talk with Art Boulay, Dave Wood or Mike Carlton. Call Art Boulay at 207.373.9301 (EDT) or write him at [aboulay@opi-inc.com](mailto:aboulay@opi-inc.com); Call Dave Wood

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