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## Sales Management Newsletter

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How to Boost Your "Bench Strength"

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When executives hear the dreaded "R" word – recession – their first move is often to break out the scissors and start cutting. From advertising expenditures to head count, nothing is sacred when times are tough. That's bad news for employees nervous about pink slips, but can be good news for sales managers looking to bolster their numbers. "There's a lot of talent on the bench," observes Sean O'Neil, principal of One to One Leadership, a sales and management training company. And now, he adds, is a great time to reach out to that talent. "It's a 'buyer's market' for sales talent. Exceptional talent might not come this cheap ever again."

But acquiring top talent today is easier said than done. First, it's an expense at a time when expenses are being slashed. Second, many executives are demanding that sales head counts shrink along with everyone else. And finally, a sales leader arguing for an expansion of the sales team can appear self-serving. So how do you bring on new talent when the message coming from above is "cut, cut, cut?" Here are O'Neil's recommendations for boosting your "bench strength" when other departments are shrinking:

**Re-evaluate territories.** Some of O'Neil's clients are taking a hard look at their territories. Is there an opportunity to break any of them up and bring in a high performer? "Managers," says O'Neil, "are in a unique position right now to sit down with a rep and say, 'Here's our situation. I think we could probably get more revenue out of this region than you can cover.'" If you slice up the pie, lower the base, and bring someone in to cover the extra piece, you may well be able to get deeper coverage of a territory, thus expanding the revenue coming out of it.

**Consider new verticals.** Is there an opportunity to get a foothold in an entirely new market? O'Neil is working with an outsourcing company looking to do just that. They're moving into health care and the logistics/transportation field – and they're bringing in sales reps with experience in those industries to launch them.

**Make the numbers palatable.** Executives are going to be wary of any added expense, so look at ways to make talent acquisition a low cost or no cost proposition. Start by weeding out ineffective reps. You know who they are and it's worth moving them out in order to bring in high performers. Second, experiment with retooling your compensation package. Is there a way to shift the mix of pay so you can bring on talent without altering your overhead too much? Finally, make a business case for bringing on the new reps. Based on their experience and past performance, what do you expect their bottom line contribution to be? "Sales talent is pretty cheap in terms of downside risk," says O'Neil.



**Team with HR.** To avoid the appearance of being self-serving by arguing for an expansion of the sales team when other divisions are cutting back, partner with HR behind the scenes to construct a plan. "At the core of the case must be a thoughtful, strategic, HR-driven process that involves objective data, analysis, and a justifiable plan for sustainment and/or growth," says O'Neil. While company leaders are likely to resist increases to training budgets, he adds, "HR execs can make a true business case for aligning the sales force and boosting efficiency."

For more information, visit [www.one2oneleadership.com](http://www.one2oneleadership.com).


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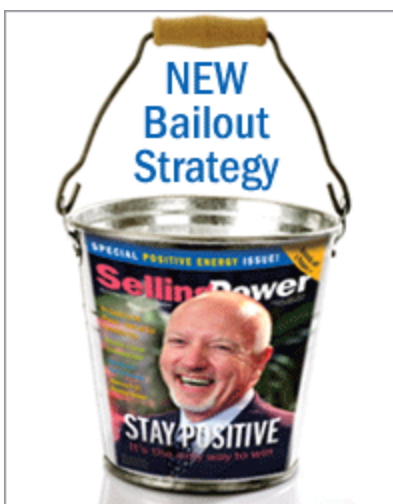
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