

CASE STUDY

ENERGY AND RESOURCES
START-UP CHALLENGES
COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWNS
SALES RISK

THE CHALLENGE

Over just two years, American electricity and natural gas start-up Accent Energy underwent huge growth, seeing its sales balloon from \$3 million to \$400 million.

While that earned Accent Energy's executives the title of Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year, the growth took its toll on co-founder Dana Saucier and his sales and operations professionals.

Taxed by the torrid pace and a rapid addition of new employees, Dana's teams had fallen into bad office communication habits. People were not listening to each other, collaborating or participating in new idea discussions.

Many team members had become defensive to criticism. Meetings became predictable and uninspired.

The sales team's bravado dominated conversations and decision-making, while operations staff resisted speaking up if they disagreed with a strategy, content to bite their tongues and complain in private.

After the sales team developed a special promotion to reward customer loyalty without fully consulting the operations crew, the promotion launched without proper back-end support to make it a success, leaving customer service personnel feeling let down.

As Dana explained: *"A breakdown in strategic idea generation and collaboration between sales and operations can be the demise of a company's competitive advantage and new business."*

Had the rift continued, the team – and the company – risked missing millions of dollars in sales. Dana wanted to see if he could improve things with stronger leadership, management and communication.

“Everyone was having fun again and we were doing amazing work”

THE APPROACH

Dana agreed to instigate The Leadership Circle Profile. His initial survey elicited feedback from more than 20 people, including his wife. It zeroed in on two leadership domains: creative competencies and reactive tendencies.

“The biggest surprise was the difference between how you view yourself and how others view you.”

Many perceived him as guarded. He'd always praised others but found people also wanted negative feedback.

What began as an exercise to improve his professional effectiveness, spilled over into Dana's personal life: *“My wife started commenting on subtle changes in my behaviour at home.”*

Dana decided to extend the program to his entire team. Over time, each employee discovered how others viewed their behaviour, communication and productivity. They began to realise the sales team hadn't recognised the work involved with completing sales. Operations felt that, once sales did something, they were the ones expected to deliver, but had little input beforehand. The customer support team felt there would be fewer errors, quicker execution and higher customer satisfaction if they were involved earlier.



The Leadership Circle®

CASE STUDY

THE IMPACT

After completing The Leadership Circle Profile and leaving their first offsite meeting, however, everyone in Dana's teams felt empowered to change the way the group communicated, each coming away with a personal development plan.

As Dana noted: *"But the big 'ah-ha' moments would happen during our bi-weekly team meetings.*

"These were the true test to see if the individual transformation work was being translated into improved team performance."

Dana said it was amazing to see the sales team step back and the operations team step up.

"We began to generate more innovative ideas than ever in meetings because everyone was contributing.

"Other divisions in the company began approaching me because they had noticed a remarkable change in my team's productivity, creativity and overall satisfaction.

"Everyone was having fun again and we were doing amazing work."

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