

Poor employee relations. Lack of expense management. Running at a loss. Name the problem, and this newspaper probably had it. The publisher who had preceded me was not well liked by the staff and he wasn't effectively managing the business. The combination was lethal. When I arrived, young and untried in management, there was a lot to do.

First Steps

The first couple of weeks, I watched, listened, and asked questions. I saw how the current publisher was running things. I listened to what the staff had to say about how things were going. I noticed how they handled production and customer service duties. I asked their opinions on how they thought things were going. I met the advertisers and heard what they had to say. I also had some expert help. My corporate office sent a former successful publisher to be with me those first couple of weeks. He gave me tips on what to be on the lookout for, and I listened carefully to his advice.



Eventually those first weeks of soaking up the details of the operation came to an end. Now it was up to me and the staff to turn things around. I met with the staff and brought them up to speed on the financial situation. I asked for their help and for any ideas that might help get things back on the right track. While I wasn't always able to implement every idea that came to me, and not every idea worked, we worked on as many as possible and eventually things started to turn around. The staff was excited with the progress and rewarded this effort with hard work and enthusiasm.

Getting Revenue on Track

Of course, the management issues with the staff were only part of the solution. The newspaper's revenue was falling and profits were gone. That had to change. I worked with the advertisers to ensure their customer service was satisfactory and remedied any past issues that were still causing problems in the relationship. In addition, I worked on bringing new advertisers into the newspaper. I explored nearby areas and created new sales routes. I also worked to enhance training for the sales people and reworked the commission structure to help get them excited about making sales.

Next I went through the yearly promotion schedule to see what had been done in the past. Then it was time to see what additional promotions could be put into place. The Taste of



Home Cooking Show was added to the schedule, much to the delight of the local population and the advertisers. In addition, I started working on a local drive to collect warm clothing and coats called Warm the Children.

Other changes were also made to help pull revenue numbers up. Classifieds went from a six column to an eight column format. The masthead was updated and full color was added to the print schedule. We also did a circulation drive to help build up our circulation numbers.

Managing Expense

Revenue was on its way to recovery. The next step was managing expense to maximize profit margins. The paper was historically late going to press which was costing a fortune. Deadlines were adjusted and that bad habit was put to an end. In addition, I worked with the local postmaster to determine how we could minimize our distribution costs. Other tweaks to ongoing expenses were made and everyone was conscious about how the newspaper's time and money was spent.

The Results

The results were amazing. The constant turnover of staff that typified the paper prior to my arrival eventually slowed and then stopped. Advertisers who had stopped working with the paper returned. New advertisers came on board. Circulation increased. Two years later when I was transferred to a new location, revenue had increased by a little over 20 percent and profits were up by over 125 percent. At the next location I was assigned to, I achieved nearly 130 percent increase in profits within the first year.

