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## Gikow Bierman & Talesnick teaches clients art of the deal

by John Fuller

ROSELAND, N.J. — Closing the deal. It's a phrase often identified with fast-talking salesmen that strikes fear into the hearts of some accountants.

Gikow, Bierman & Talesnick wanted to overcome their sales anxieties and so developed a sales training program with one of their clients. The program worked so well that they have been selling their expertise for a year-and-a-half at an average of \$15,000 per program. The training consists of five classes, field observation and follow up. For their innovative thinking, the Roseland, N.J.-based firm received an Accounting Today Gold Medal Award for Achievement in Client Service.

The firm wanted to improve its sales closing statistics, but nothing seemed to work. The sales gurus would come and go, but their advice was soon forgotten. Firm accountants wanted a customized sales training program, and they discovered the solution was closer than they thought.

A client, Andy Gole, president of AMG Corp., convinced the firm that, although his successful sales record

was as a distributor and wholesaler of toys and novelty items, his sales methods were universal. Gole said that he could provide the training the firm needed.

Gole spent six months working with the partners, going out on sales calls and observing their selling techniques. He developed classroom training and had the accountants role play to deal with a series of customer objections. Gole built his sales technique around teaching sellers to overcome the customers' natural skepticism.

"Salespeople have to know the closing conditions and be in control," Gole said. "You have to earn the right to ask certain questions and have to know when to ask them. We also developed a routine on how to overcome objections."

Gole tailored his sales techniques to the needs of the firm and helped the CPAs become more at



Burt Bierman, right, of Gikow, Bierman & Talesnick, and AMG Corp. president Andy Gole know how to make clients sign on the dotted line.

ease with selling.

"Andy saw our sales technique and stayed with us," said partner Burt Bierman. "I think most accountants have a hard time closing, and Andy helped us develop closing questions that we were comfortable with."



Gole's training worked. The firm's closing rate of new sales calls increased by 25 percent. Eventually, the firm decided to sell the training to accountants in other markets, but they weren't buying. They shifted the focus of their sales campaign to their clients.

"Everybody has clients that are on a level plane," Bierman said. "Their sales are stagnating and we thought these types of firms would be good candidates for our program." After three years of little growth, one client increased its sales by 11 percent a year after the training.

"The sales principles are the same," Bierman said.

The firm sees its sales management training as a way for clients

to complete the planning cycle. If the sales people do not understand the plan the firm helps them generate, it is doomed to failure, he added.

The firm wanted to attack the commercial market with their sales program and thought banks could help them develop contacts. It turned out that the banks themselves were interested, leading to a contract with West Paterson, N.J.-based Lakeview Savings.

Lakeview has 10 branches in Bergen and Passaic counties and wanted to convert from a thrift to a community bank. In January, they hired Bierman and Gole to train their managers. "We had to change the culture of the bank and become more sales oriented," said Lakeview Savings chief operating

officer Kevin McCloskey. "A community bank manager has to solicit business."

The bank has almost doubled its monthly equity loan average since applying the techniques taught by the firm. "The results have been measurable and we've been very pleased," said McCloskey.

McCloskey thinks that the training has made a lasting impact on his staff. "The culture here has changed," McCloskey said. "We're more confident and successful. It's hard to accept rejection, but part of the training is failing first and learning from your mistakes."

His staff committed themselves to practicing what they had learned, but something about the training surprised McCloskey.

"It was fun," he said.