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TO THE POINT

Key change

Recently, I've been reflecting on some takeaways from the Thomson Reuters marketing partner forum in Miami, which several members of Pinnacle's global business development practice attended in January 2020.

With years of experience working in the legal business development sector, I find it strange that many firms still appear to be struggling to build a strong and vibrant key client programme. Many programmes are largely ad hoc and driven by the marketing and business development function – if they're driven by anyone at all.

Growing long-term profitable revenues (the ultimate purpose of these key client programmes) requires two things to be brought together and interlinked: leadership and a clear direction.

Clear direction is easily achieved through mining the data that you have. While assessing historic data is easiest, it's also the least valuable as it only tells you where you've come from – it doesn't tell you where you're going. Your business's most profitable future is with organisations that have the greatest and easiest-to-grasp opportunities.

Answering the following questions can help identify these opportunities:

- **Which clients have a similar footprint to our firm's?** You won't get work from client businesses that you can't support.
- **Which practice areas have been used a bit but not a lot?** It's easier to get more work from someone who is already using you a bit.
- **Which clients have the largest spend in the areas where we have strong capability?** Businesses that are

growing in the areas we're interested in are easier to work with.

Firms without this insight into the opportunities will find it challenging to create a successful key account programme. Also, it means that any investments in the form of discounts, entertainment and so on are made sub-optimally. Any key account programme must drive to change this.

Our experience suggests that driving change in an organisation requires effective leadership. But, if we want to move from investing sub-optimally to a higher investment performance, the executive committee must use all the levers of change: compensation, the meaning of roles, the responsibilities and accountabilities of these roles, and any new skills and resources needed. Feeding this into the assessment, measurement and ultimately remuneration might be one set of levers to drive better investment decisions within the firm.

We know it works: one global law firm grew its revenues from new key accounts by 20% within two years by focusing not on the largest clients of the last three years but on the easiest clients to grow. Change came from the top: the executive selected the key clients and asked client partners to deliver the identified opportunities; discounting policies were changed and metrics for personal performance were adjusted.

The point is, firms should change their data focus from historic data, captured as a function of day-to-day business, to looking at data about the future. It isn't about the technology: successful business development programmes are delivered by changing the data that we look at and leading robust change programmes. ▀