



Make your Shop The Best Start with the person in the mirror

By Connie Burtcheard

It seems that recently I have been working with more and more agencies that have a common problem. The principals.

Before you get defensive, hear me out. They hire us to help them improve their agency. They want to grow, but just can't seem to get there. Or, they are growing - at what seems like too fast of a rate and they can't keep up.

So far, no problems. This is what we do after all - help agencies improve.

But, lately, the biggest problem in getting to that next step isn't to blame just on the staff, the processes, the financial management, etc. I'm finding more and more principals that aren't practicing what they want to preach.

Just this month, I was at an agency where 2 of the 3 principals declared that keeping track of time was keeping records of garbage and a waist of time. After all, their 2 biggest accounts (which by the way constituted about 95% of the agency's revenue) were on retainers.

I asked each of the principals the questions "When the time comes to negotiate these retainers with these clients, what documentation would they have not only to increase the retainer, but just to maintain the existing amount. Funny, but they both did the same thing. Gave me a very large, frustrated sigh and turn around and walk out.

Not to pick on just this shop - they are only a couple of months old. This is the same mentality we all have. Getting that monthly check that covers our expenses is what matters. Right?

Well, yes...and no. Just to continue to use my infant shop as an example. They, in their early stages, have been fortunate to win a small local pizza company as a client. And, they have a Creative Director/Principal who devote 90% of his time on this quaint (and good tasting pizza) client.

Since tracking time is just keeping track of garbage, the big client is actually not getting the attention they will need or deserve for a long term relationship. (Just to add a little salt to the

(Continued on page 2)



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wound, the contract with this small client calls for the agency to bill their time. Since it isn't tracked, they have never billed \$1 of time to this client.)

Why do I bring this up? In meeting with the employees, they were very understanding of the importance of this one little process. But they kept saying, "If they aren't going to do it, then why should I?"

So, when you are trying to improve your shop, be sure and take a good look at yourself. Think about how you can improve your processes first. Don't try to get your staff to do anything that you don't find valuable enough to do yourself.