

AB's Agnes Gajewska discovered among a roomful of successful brokers that having the right mindset and recognising the opportunities in the 'perfect storm' go hand in hand with growth in times of turbulent change

Negativity, not commission cuts, are a broker's number one enemy in 2009 – at least according to a group of brokers attending the latest *Front Runner Consulting Group's* coaching session.

In discussing the main challenges and issues facing the industry in the current environment, the gathering of top performers, which included two MFAA Excellence Awards finalists, said the main thing holding brokers back was their attitude.

However, brokers armed with the right mindset have an opportunity to grow and develop their business in today's market.

The perfect recruitment storm

While most recent talk of 'the perfect storm' has been tied to commission cuts, tightening lending criteria, a contracting market, unemployment and similar notions of doom and gloom, the *Front Runner* brokers saw it in a different – positive – light.

The group said that while the financial sector had been hit hard, the industry was now brimming with qualified people in search of jobs. And with fantastic candidates being thrown into the market, it was a recruiting mortgage broker's perfect storm.

"There are a lot of people in the financial world without a job – and they're good people," Phoenix Financial Solutions broker, Mark Rogan says.

"You can pay people to do a job and train them to do a job, but you can't pay them to care about the job they do," says MO'R Mortgage Options broker, Michael O'Reilly.

"And if you look, you'll see that the banks are failing in that aspect because they're all too focused on the bottom line."

National sales manager of Vision Finance and Property, and MFAA Excellence Awards finalist, Kurt Armbruster agrees: "The banks are answerable to shareholders so if they need a dramatic and immediate impact on the bottom line, they get rid of people – and

they often overdo it and then try to get people back later, but they can't.

"People have a relationship with people and not the institution, so it's a fundamental flaw of the structure – and that's where we can fill the gaps."

The brokers were unanimous – now is the time to think about business expansion and finding staff with the right skill sets to build a strong foundation for sustainable future growth.

Coming to an understanding

However, brokers also have to be mindful that since most will have started their business as a one-man band, taking on the right staff, at the right time, and delegating is vital to successful business expansion.

"Getting staff that are a strength to your business, but who also have complementary skills sets themselves, and then knowing at which point you should do a handover – going from loan writers to business people – is vital," says Astute Mortgage's Aneta Dimovska.

Smartline broker Karen Le Comte – also an MFAA Excellence Awards finalist – agreed that changing from a solo to a business mindset was a challenge for most successful brokers.

"It's really hard to let go and entrust someone else with your task – especially if you're a perfectionist. [After all] when you started, it was all about you. Clients want to talk to you," she says.

"But I found that if you empower your staff, and promote yourself as a team, eventually clients are happy and comfortable speaking with your staff once you've done the initial consultation and analysis. And that's great because then you can get the rest of your day done."

Selection criteria

In order to take on the right staff however, it is essential for brokers to understand their business, as

well as to form a solid vision of where they would like it to head.

“Before you’re looking at staff, you have to look at how you want your business to be modelled. What do you want to be offering your client, from the time you pick up the phone to the ongoing client relationship? And, based on that, who are the perfect people to surround yourself with to give the client that experience?”

Dimovska asks.

She says that once those basics are established, a broker can move on to what the perfect job description for a person fitting their business would be, and only then talking to those people.

“I think what most people are – or at least I am – typically guilty of is finding the people first, and then discovering that they aren’t capable of doing a particular duty. And then you end up taking those duties back on, and therefore you’re still stuck in that one-man-loan-writer-doing-everything position and you can’t grow your business,” she says.

Front Runner’s Doug Mathlin agreed that brokers needed to be clear on what they were delivering, what was required by their clients and how to communicate this to staff in order to ensure recruitment prospects suited the role.

“When we hire, we really need to ensure that we hire people that enhance the business and our goals,” he says.

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Outsourcing?

However, if the promising recruitment environment does not appeal, brokers can also capitalise on other options available to them.

Armbruster suggested that in order to increase efficiency and cut costs, brokers can consider outsourcing the backend of their operations.

He says that rather than trying to find, or train, a person to join the team – and possibly mount up a huge overhead, only to see that staff member move on – a good approach was to outsource the backend operations to a third party.

“That way, a broker has time to do what they do best – meet with clients – while the back office work is done for them by a well resourced and capable staff,” he says.

Whichever path they choose, it seems that brokers need not be the battered victims of the global credit blow-out if they just concentrate on the silver lining it has provided. ■



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