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# Realizing The Benefits Of Top Performance

In this, the second of two articles in this issue of *Agency Sales*, we describe how an agency has consistently raised that performance bar for itself over its 40-year history.

Spending the better part of four decades establishing, nurturing and maintaining business relationships has allowed one family-owned agency to raise the bar of their professional performance to the point that they recently broke \$1 billion in annual sales.

It's a 40-year effort at relationship building with customers and manufacturers that Stephen Rehman, Robert B. Rehman & Sons, Inc., Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, points to as the number-one reason why the firm has experienced uninterrupted success since its founding in 1964.

According to Rehman, "My father founded the agency for a couple of very good reasons. He was selling for a company that manufactured windows and doors for new construction. In the course of his travels there were too many incidents where he had a frightening experience in an airplane, and he had four children at home to provide for."

With those factors providing him with the impetus he needed, he went to the company he worked for and asked if he could serve as an independent rep covering Maryland, northern Virginia, and central Pennsylvania. Following that beginning in 1964, he was followed into the business

by his three sons during the 1970s.

Today the company has branch offices in Philadelphia, and Baltimore and Silver Spring, Maryland. They represent a variety of products, including: wood, vinyl replacement, aluminum replacement windows/doors, new construction total program vinyl/aluminum/wood, preformed millwork, and flexible millwork.

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## Getting Paid for Working Hard

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In describing how and why he was attracted to the rep business in the first place, Steve Rehman says, "I started working with my father when I was 15 or 16 years old, and the rapport that developed between us was tremendous. Add to that the fact that my per-



*From Left to Right: Steve; Michael; Bob, Sr.; Doug; and Bob Rehman, Jr. continue a 40-year tradition of working closely with customers and manufacturers through the family-owned business, Robert B. Rehman & Sons, Inc.*

***"I wanted something that would pay me more the harder I worked. That's what being a rep does for you, and that's exactly the way my career has worked out."***

ception of work was that I wanted to work all the time — 24 hours a day — and get paid for it. I wanted something that would pay me more the harder I worked. That's what being a rep does for you, and that's exactly the way my career has worked out."

What's made it even more agreeable as a career choice for Rehman and his brothers is the fact that the building industry "is very close-knit in the territory we cover. There are relatively few players, including salesmen and distributors. As a result, we all know each other and get together frequently. It's a great feeling to have your name out there the way we do in the territory we serve.

"Of real benefit to us is that since we have been in the territory so long, people know us and we're not strangers anywhere. As a result, they know we represent quality products and will be here to continue to serve customers. This is simply a good example of how we've spent all the time and effort in getting established, and now we're realizing the benefits of that work."

One of the major tools the agency has taken advantage of in order to maximize its presence in this relatively close-knit community is technology. According to Rehman, "My sister, who is the company secretary and works out

of our original office in my father's basement, is the one who has kept us up to speed in technology and communication. However, all of us have had to learn to use technology to our advantage. I went back to school and attended night classes, and right now we're all very dependent upon the computer and e-mail to communicate with customers and principals. E-mail is an integral part of how we stay in touch and we use it for quoting, sales reports and other purposes."

### **Meeting the Demand for Time**

In addition to mastering the use of the computer, Rehman notes that another challenge he and everyone else in the agency has had to deal with is the demand by manufacturers to have more and more of the rep's time. "In general, manufacturers are requiring more and more accountability on the part of the rep. It seems that each of them wants to be the one we're constantly talking about with customers. For our part, we've met that demand by dividing our principals up among all of us. I, for example, am in charge of two lines and I make it a point to communicate with them on a daily basis. And, I'm sure that whatever I'm telling them about an order or a customer is important. That way they know I'm constantly out in the field representing the line."

Another approach he takes to let his principals know he's always available and always working the lines is to let the manufacturer sales managers know that the agency is working the line no matter what time of day it is. "If I'm working early in the day or late at night and something comes up, I'll never hesitate to give them

a call. That way they're confident I'm working for them."

Then he tells of the time one of his sales managers called him at 2:30 a.m. "The first thing he asked me was why I answered the phone in the middle of the night. My response was, 'I answered the phone because you called.'"

### **Reaching a Milestone**

Proof that the Rehman & Sons approach works is the fact that the agency just this year passed the \$1 billion sales mark.

As the agency achieved that sales mark, Rehman recalls a story his father tells about the first check he ever received as a rep. "He borrowed money to open the agency in 1964, and he worked the entire territory by himself. When he got his first month's commission check it was in the amount of \$3.42. He often says how much he wishes he still had that check to display on the wall, but at the time he needed the money badly to keep things going. That experience was reflective of the fact that his territory had zero business when he started. He was an innovator in sales and a great teacher. He's the one who planted the seed for all of us, and look what's happened."

While Rehman and his brothers celebrate their sales accomplishment achieved in the firm's 40th year, they're also aware of the fact that a good deal of that business is attributed to the firm's number-one line. "That's something we're working on in terms of building up all the other lines. I'm well aware of the fact that the ideal setup is to have your sales spread among your lines as evenly as possible. In the future I'd like to think we'll come close to that mark." □

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