

## Performer's Podium >

### Debra Albert

COO, Director, Organizational Development  
Sequent Learning Networks, Inc.

Sequent is a global company in reach, but we're a small organization in terms of staff. We are in the process of building our own sales and marketing team. However, given the nature of our services, we certainly have ample opportunity to observe how sales and marketing interact within a variety of companies, and I can also speak from my own past experience at large corporations, such as two global market research firms.

While it's always risky to generalize or stereotype, my personal observation has been that disconnects often originate in the basic personality differences between the two groups. Salespeople tend to have strong, innate "people smarts," while marketers are often more cerebral. Each group tends to believe that they are the true drivers of sales, and people get caught up in trying to rule the roost.

This is part of the backdrop for integration challenges, and it's one reason that, in my view, true integration is not going to happen within companies until they do what ever is necessary to establish a culture that supports and requires that people work together as a true cross-functional team.

This is easier said than done, but there are a few critical elements involved.

One is to structure incentives so that people are rewarded for working effectively together to achieve overall goals. People will not work as a cross-functional team if they are rewarded primarily or only on meeting the directives of their own bosses in their own functional or divisional silos, and therefore unable or unwilling to devote time and energy to the broader team effort.

For example, in a past position at a publishing company, I spearheaded a supplement project that required pulling salespeople, editorial, graphic artists and other together to make it happen. Since this meant time taken away from their normal day-to-day responsibilities, the first step was to get buy-in from their direct superiors by convincing them that they would benefit from the overall dynamics created by

this project. That done, I incentivized the team based on the success of the project in terms of revenue and other metrics, and tied the entire effort to their personal professional development plans.

The other very critical component in successful cross-functional integration is creating a totally open communications environment. It should be obvious that integrating goals and efforts requires frequent meetings and an atmosphere in which people get to know one another and become comfortable with being open and honest. But this is far too infrequently the case.

I've seen the benefits that an open culture can produce. People stop passing the buck. They're sharing ideas and suggestions, and since everyone knows what everyone else is supposed to be doing, they are even willing to own up to it when they have dropped the ball.

Of course, hiring practices also come into play. Companies serious about integration should be focused on hiring people who are motivated to use their abilities to bring value to and improve the company as a whole, as opposed to oriented toward working and achieving within their own little domains. We need to hire people who are grown-ups, rather than people who can't play together nicely in the corporate sandbox.

### BIO

**Debra Albert** joined Sequent Learning Networks, Inc. in October 2006. In her current role, she is responsible for managing the operations of the company, with a special emphasis on the creation and execution of a sales and marketing department, and managing the sales and marketing team. She continues her involvement in business development activities, and has increased the revenue of Sequent's publicly offered courses by 150%, in addition to opening doors to many large, corporate, on-site training engagements. Operationally, she has enhanced the basic Web-capture system to a fully functioning CRM system. In her executive management role, she is a key contributor to the company's strategic direction.

Prior to joining Sequent, Albert spent two years as Senior Vice President at TNS, the second-largest market research company in the world. There, she was instrumental in instituting a business development function for the first time in the company's history, and acted as a liaison between the market research experts, CMO's and other high-level marketing executives at some of the largest companies in the world. While active in many different business sectors such as Financial Services, Industrial, and Technology, and responsible for managing some new-business efforts on a global level, she was also instrumental in creating the Employee Research category at TNS.

Albert spent the prior six years at the global market research company Datamonitor. There she had three different roles. She ran the burgeoning U.S. division of the British-based company, growing revenues by a factor of five and growing the staff from nine to 66 within a year. She then focused on growing a single, vertical industry, technology, for the company, building that area into a \$5 million business. Finally, she started a team of

seasoned new-business professionals from within the company to create joint ventures and alliances with other content providers and online and offline distributors. During her tenure at Datamonitor, sales training was a part of each role, and she left a legacy of growing sales talent who have themselves gone on to increasing roles of responsibility in the sales arena.

She also worked for News Communications, Inc., becoming the company's first VP, Corporate Sales. Earlier in her career, she sold print and television media, as well as working in account management at a Washington, D.C.-based ad agency.

Albert holds a BA in Communications with a minor in Business and Advertising from The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. She also studied at the American College in Paris. Her interest in and success with helping others to reach their full potential is led her to obtain a Professional Certificate in Organizational Development and Leadership from New York University. She is also currently pursuing a Professional Certificate in Organizational and Executive Coaching from NYU.

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