

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

You're On the Team, Now Make It Count!

You don't need to obtain membership in a product development team. You're already there. What you need is a way to become more strategically valued.

So you've become a regular member of a product development team. You're excited because you can predict and support up front the supply needs of the product. But you're concerned. You sense that the team recognizes your role as more of a support function rather than a contributor to energizing the product development strategy. So what's your next step?

According to the Goldense Group, Inc. based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, purchasing and supply management is perfectly positioned to bring its expertise to a nontraditional area of involvement. The Goldense Group, which specializes in new product development, cites intense competition, decreasing product life cycle, and advanced technology as the forces influencing organizations to become more focused on improved product development.

Your Strategy for Strategically Standing Out

Every product development team needs contributing members. Some members have more influence than others. The key for purchasing and supply professionals is to demonstrate the added-value contribution they bring to the team, not only by helping to source new or improved



materials, but by more importantly helping to find solutions to problem processes in the product makeup. Here are some tips.

- **Think like an engineer.**

A simple way to understand the engineering approach is to spend time with engineers. Ask the engineers on your product development team to share their greatest concerns. How do they approach the development of a new product? What expectations and goals are they establishing for this latest project? In addition, it might help to take a course in engineering or product development.

- **Be a hero.**

Engineers invariably want material samples and

prototypes yesterday. Be their best supplier. And remember to follow up throughout the process.

- **Co-locate close to engineering.**

For critical projects, purchasing and supply professionals will physically locate close to the engineering team members to improve the degree of interaction among cross-functional team members.

- **Provide advice on the implications of the designs currently under consideration.**

Don't wait to be asked; begin to analyze immediately what impact the new product or improved product design will have on required materials, supplies, delivery, and cycle

time. Employ total cost modeling and forecast the product's future requirements.

- **Create visibility.**

This can be accomplished by providing informative reports to upper management and key players on cost reduction and new purchasing strategies that saved the company money. If you work for a manufacturing firm that purchases raw commodities and large volumes of component parts, inform team members of changes in the commodity markets, new and emerging materials that may serve as substitutes, and new technology. Become the team's source for information.

- **Be the supplier issues leader.**

Show the team that you're the expert in supplier involvement, relationship, and development issues. This includes bringing supplier performance issues to the table early in the design and decision-making process. With your coordination expertise you'll consult and involve key suppliers early in the process. Finally, you'll be a proactive second-source champion, and will provide advice and input on past strategies associated with single- and sole-source items.

Helping an organization develop and improve its product or service is a rewarding part of anyone's job. The purchasing and supply professional can serve as a critical and needed link in the process. But it takes creative purchasers to make their value on the team recognized and appreciated by the other members. ■

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