

## The crisis of rising expectations

IT WAS THE WORST POSSIBLE thing that could have happened to John-Paul Cody, Director of Marketing at volleyball Canada. Little more than a week into the job, Cody landed a four-year, six-figure equipment deal with Mizuno. Now, Cody is the Rainmaker. Already he's feeling the pressure from athletes and the board of directors to deliver another major deal. And this after little more than a month on the job. It's a problem that surfaces with alarming frequency, though seldom in so dramatic a fashion as with Cody. A minor sport, or a not-for-profit, decides that it is deserving of more corporate largesse. It hires an agency, or brings in a marketing director. Twelve months later, when new revenue falls below agency fees or salary, the relationship is terminated, and everyone goes home bitter. In Cody's case, the problem is compounded by the fact that a sweet deal simply fell into his lap, raising expectations that very likely were pretty high to start off with.

"That was dumb luck," he says of the Mizuno deal. "That should have taken months, years." So many immature properties enter the market ill-prepared and poorly equipped, says Judy Haber, Senior Partner with Performance Sponsorship Group, near Toronto. Salespeople in those organizations are rarely given the time or the tools they need to be successful. They devote their time to making the organization ready to take on the market, then get penalized for not delivering the goods .

**Full-time sales pros like Haber spend time educating boards of directors about the reality of the marketplace, the implications of category exclusivity, and the need to ensure that in-house staff are allowed to succeed.** Folks like Cody, whose responsibilities include consolidating the inventory of assets, developing new properties, reporting on activities to date and now leading the servicing on a six-figure contract, have to find time to toss a damp blanket on the overblown expectations of line management , the volunteer board and the communities they serve.

At Volleyball Canada, line management is not a problem. Director General Caroline Sharp has a strong marketing background and understands the process, says Cody.

With respect to the board of directors, he will make his first presentation to them at the Annual General Meeting, and he will use it as an opportunity to discuss the cost of sponsorship, such as building inventory and sponsor servicing. "They're visionaries," he says, and need to be reminded that a six-figure deal does not mean six figures in the bank. He also plans to use major events as opportunities to put board members and sponsors together. These meetings won't be serendipitous, nor will they be entirely unscripted. He coaches sponsors to stress what they want out of the relationship if it's going to move forward. For Cody, and others like him, it's an essential element of the job if he has any intention of keeping it, and succeeding in the future. If he fails at the task of managing expectations, he may look back at the Mizuno deal as the worst one he ever negotiated.

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