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## A DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW: LOOKING AT YOUR BUSINESS FROM THE OUTSIDE

In a time when it seems like every business that isn't asking for a bailout is announcing massive layoffs, it's imperative that companies fix whatever problems they might have before they're forced to close their doors. When it looks like there's no more growth, incentive programs are no longer working, and a significant management change is imminent, it might be time to call The VisionLink Advisory Group.

VisionLink focuses on business growth through the creative application of incentive programs related to the goals of a particular company. Through what it calls Strategic Performance Development, VisionLink helps a firm find a way to bring the employer's and employees' visions together so that the company can flourish.

Tom Miller founded VisionLink in Irvine, California, in 1999, and the company now has 22 member firms around the country. James E. Moniz, who has known Miller for 20 years, runs the Northeast VisionLink firm, located in Braintree, Massachusetts.

Moniz has a master's degree in finance from American College as well as chartered financial-consultant and chartered life-underwriter degrees. He began his career 32 years ago in the financial-services industry, with the first 15 years spent mostly in management roles.

At a conference, Moniz met Miller, who in addition to creating VisionLink, would become one of Moniz's mentors.

The two communicated over the years, and when Miller started his new venture, it seemed like a natural fit for Moniz. "It's been great sharing ideas," Moniz says of the relationship he and Miller share. "It's a real partnership, and I've enjoyed the years that we've been directly affiliated."

Both men are also members of a program based in Toronto, Canada, called Strategic Coach. It's a program for entrepreneurs, that touches on subjects such as time management and relationships with clients. Moniz credits much of his success with VisionLink to Strategic Coach.

With the main VisionLink office located on the West Coast, Moniz is more the face of VisionLink in the Northeast. "Things are centralized, so we can be much more cost-effective for our clients," he says of the organization. "There are no in-house accounting, legal, or design teams in the Braintree office; the teams are all in California."

VisionLink gets to know and understand a company through what it calls Strategic

Performance Development, this allows VisionLink to identify a company's goals and compensation philosophies.

"We actually get very involved in positioning people," Moniz says. "We find some people who are ill-suited for their roles, and we find other people who could be great at a certain role but they're in another position. Then what we do is unlock the entrepreneurial spirit by honing in on everybody's best abilities and making sure the company is taking advantage of that." Through this process, Moniz says that incentive programs can be created that truly yield results.

Take for example the Christmas bonus, which in Moniz's opinion, is one of the least effective incentive programs out there. By offering a holiday bonus, a company expects to see some sort of return. But what ends up happening is that most employees are only motivated two weeks prior to and one week after the bonus. Moniz wants to see high performance levels 52 weeks a year, not just three.

"A bonus should be an incentive," Moniz says. "A salary is what you get for doing your job. And an incentive is what you receive based on what you're doing to help the company achieve its strategic goals."

After The Discovery Process comes The Executive Wealth Builder, a process that helps companies create successful compensation plans. Moniz gives an example of a company that wants to grow

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from a three-million-dollar business to a 15-million-dollar business. If everyone helps achieve that goal, we are able to carve out some of that growth as an incentive. This leads to a much more invested group of workers.

VisionLink will then design, implement, and fund the incentive program. It will also show a company how to communicate the incentive program to its employees, because one of the worst things a company could do is the exact opposite. According to Moniz, communicating the incentive to the employees through as many avenues as possible is crucial to the success of a

business.

VisionLink typically works with middle-market businesses, which are the Fortune 400 companies, down to small mom-and-pop operations. But VisionLink will work with any company that realizes the key to growth is the people it has. "I'm not saying the people in the chairs now will be there when we're done. But if they're looking for growth, we can give them strategies to significantly improve their results," Moniz says.

Since 2000, Moniz says he's worked with several hundred companies in different capacities, but he likes to keep the number small and on a yearly basis. Northeast VisionLink currently has 10 active clients.

These days, with money tighter than companies would like it to be, choosing VisionLink is much more cost-effective than doing the work themselves. Instead of hiring a full-time human resources person to make an impact, companies can hire

VisionLink for for significantly less than of that full-time person. "As far as strategic alliance and giving our clients access, we become one of their most important advisers," Moniz says.

With Northeast VisionLink, true marketing is accomplished through relationships, because people want to work with those with whom they feel comfortable. The best way to form those bonds is in a social setting, so Jim Moniz puts on at least two major Client Appreciation Events a year.

On March 18, Northeast VisionLink will host the CEO Leadership Summit at Boston's TD Banknorth Garden for CEOs of Massachusetts-based firms. There will be a presentation on leadership issues in a time of challenge, followed by networking and a Boston Celtics game, enjoyed from their own suite. Not a bad way to build some new relationships. ★