



**“I asked David to help me
leave a legacy of leaders
in my company.”**



--Charles "Hack" Sain, Founder and retired CEO, Sain Associates--

Situation Summary 1993:

At age 70, Charles "Hack" Sain was CEO of an engineering consulting firm he founded that had grown to serve in multiple states. Twice before, during extended illnesses, he turned over the company leadership. Each time, the company declined and when he got healthy again he came back as CEO. He wondered if his company would survive. Hack gave an inspiring invitation to serve, "...help me leave a legacy of leaders in my company."

Results he and his company achieved during 1993-2000:

- ◆ Revenues per associate doubled while earning awards for being "family-friendly."
- ◆ Retention of associates improved four-fold (turnover dropped from 20% to 5%).
- ◆ Employee "Attitude & Ability" improved "C" to "B+" and "Satisfaction" improved "C" to "A-."
- ◆ Professionals got prepared for promotion and increased profitability better and faster (one professional got promoted to lead a team three years faster than the previous best, his boss).
- ◆ Improved plans and personnel methods – recruiting, training, empowering, serving, promoting.
- ◆ In-house training increased without decreasing billable hours and travel expenses decreased.
- ◆ Randy Sain planned for how to earn promotion to president, gained support, and succeeded.

Sample Methods:

1. Advising/Coaching monthly with Hack as CEO to identify opportunities and barriers, design plans for the company and him, and outline company meetings and training strategies to implement. Three-level process: CEO strategy=>VPs improve and help implement=>train teams and individuals. Randy and I also worked together on his plan to earn trust and empowerment as president, thus Hack could retire.
2. Consulting to develop solutions: plans, assessments, rewards strategy, training.... When Randy became president, a sample need he requested was a written set of options for how he and the vice presidents could make decisions. Other practical applications included designing plan templates and processes for the company, divisions, and individuals. We developed best practices for recruitment and retention, strategies to boost revenue, streamlining operations, and helping associates take more initiative....
3. Training to present plans, assessments, rewards, and tools to help implementation.
 - ◆ Phase 1: seminars for the company at lunch: goals, best practices for professionalism, empowerment...
 - ◆ Phase 2: seminars for VPs and others invited to dig deeper for understanding and application...
 - ◆ Phase 3: "Lunch and Learn" course for those invited and others enrolling – 2 hours lunch/class with 2 hours outside work for 12 months. We assessed on *Attitude and Ability* and what they needed to earn "A-B" levels, then adapted curriculum to help them get more of what they needed to *go to the next level*. Deliverables: professional plans with mission, vision, roles, goals, time priorities, and actions presented to supervisors to boost focus on priorities, communication, alignment, shared vision plus mentoring, trust, and empowerment. We improved performance assessments and rewards systems to motivate more people to aim at desired plans, actions, and results. We learned more about: professionalism, leadership, motivation, planning, time, and management.
 - ◆ When Randy succeeded Hack as president, he added a workshop monthly of a few hours off site with the VPs in which professional, division, and company plans got presented and honed, strategies and results reviewed/improved, and leadership best practices learned for use and passing on....

A bit more of the story. In 1993, Hack attended a seminar, which I organized and was opening speaker to feature Dr. Stephen Covey, author of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. We had 10 corporate sponsors, including host Birmingham-Southern College and our personal leadership association in an audience of 1,000+. Soon after, Hack called and eventually asked, “help me leave a legacy of leaders in my company.” I felt “bumps on my arm,” as if my grandfather had asked for help saving the family farm!

Hack said that earlier he thought he could “do it all” (be an expert in his profession, plus business practices, and provide leadership training). Near age 70, he concluded, he wished he had invested years before to leverage his time so he could lead on professional services to clients and building his business with assistance from someone dedicated to helping him develop his people and organization.

On the first day I spoke to the company during an hour-long seminar, it became clear that almost no one besides Hack and me were excited to have a consultant there. I learned, I was the third consultant hired in a year. At the end of that session, Hack may have been the only person inspired with me being there! He encouraged, “Don’t quit on me.” He then told me, his decision to launch a leadership development program was not popular – some associates felt they were “too busy” and some “afraid” the expense of a coach would reduce their bonuses.

Hack was thinking long-term; he was thinking *legacy* of leaving his company at the next level of capacity. He demonstrated leadership. He stood before the company and said he would persist and prove the value of the program. Randy Sain came to me and said he was willing to try. A few months later, he help me teach my “leadership and empowerment model” to the company – and he told of his results using it. He actually apologized to a young associate for how he was treated before Randy understood the empowerment concepts. He did this at the company meeting – bold, authentic – another turning point.

As people boosted performance and some earned promotions faster, previous skeptics who wanted “show me” proof, asked to join our course. A few cynics never tried to give our efforts a chance. Hack, Randy, and a growing core persisted to learn new ideas, try new approaches, as well as improve implementation of ideas they already had. We adopted key performance indicators to focus our efforts. They raised standards, described them in their plans and practices, and boosted retention of those who matched – those who wanted to grow and be better. They opened themselves up to suggestions for how they could improve – as professionals, leaders, role models.

Prior to his selection as president, Randy presented his professional plan to Hack and me to prepare for and earn trust as the new leader. With Hack’s feedback, suggestions, and support, Randy earned the presidency within a year through his performance and developing capacities in identified areas of leadership, management, and business. They worked together at a higher level of intent and cooperation.

Hack was the key difference in the effort because without his determination the effort would not have started – or once begun, with resistance, likely would have stopped. That is a key difference between *leaders of legacy* and average executives who stop initiatives based on short-term feedback before achieving results. Also significant was Randy’s attitude to openly give our program a chance. He also opened himself up to feedback so he could earn the role as the new leader – from his colleagues as well as his boss – instead of “hide” needs to learn and improve.

I got to work with Randy for a few years when he became president. When he became sick with cancer, the executive roles consolidate, and I stepped down from my part-time role. Randy got healthy again, finished his term, and appointed the next president.

Operationalizing ideas:

1. A good *people and organizational development* program links to *plans, assessments, and rewards*, attracts and retains more of the people you seek, boosts ROI, and brands you as distinctive.
2. Corporate strategy should include helping associates develop “A-B” level attitude and ability, if you want to be a market leader, world class, or value stewardship of your resources.
3. Every associate should have a plan that links to priorities of the organization or your company will fall short of potential. Motivated professionals can get prepared for promotion better and faster....