

# “Growth, Talent and Executive Leadership”

John Freebairn, President, Freebairn & Co.

Freebairn & Co. is a progressive, full-service advertising agency that is enjoying rapid growth. Founded in 1980 with no employees and no clients, the agency is today one of the top 400 independent agencies in the country. As the company grew over the years, it developed a fast-paced style of doing business, with people frequently communicating about accounts as they passed one another in the hallway. As the staff approached 25 people, however, growing pains set in. The “hallway” mode of management was proving ineffective. At the “25” mark they found they were dealing with more variance in experience levels, in personalities, in work and communication styles and in team capabilities. They needed a more structured communication system and a way to understand and meld the various people that were making or breaking the success of the company.

“In the early days, we were runnin’ and gunnin’ and making things happen to help our clients grow,” says John Freebairn, president of the agency.

“As we grew, it became obvious that we weren’t functioning as well as we had when we were a small group. We had to begin dealing with structural issues, process issues and inter-personal and inter-departmental issues, all without losing our client growth focus or changing our culture. That’s when we were lucky enough to find Bob Turknett. As a result of our work with Turknett, we have been successful in influencing the corporate folks to take our lead and accept our ideas and suggestions.”

Among the first services Turknett Leadership Group performed for Freebairn & Co. were organizational assessments and doing personality profiles of the majority of Freebairn personnel. After these initial assessments, John Freebairn and selected key individuals began Turknett’s more in-depth leadership development process, which involves a detailed individual assessment, a coaching process and a “360-degree” co-worker analysis.

The ultimate goal is to “roll it throughout the organization,” letting all personnel take advantage of the leadership development process. In fact, this opportunity has become one of the most sought-after perks in the company with employees telling their managers, “We want to do that next.”

“One development,” says John, “is that executive management meetings are much more direct, open and focused on moving our business forward.” Another result, he reports, is that the staff works together under stress in a much easier, more cooperative way, an important development in an industry known for high expectations and demanding deadlines.

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People also better understand their own personality and leadership styles and are more effective, thus enhancing their chances for sought-after account assignments and promotions. And, not surprisingly, an overall outcome of the process is that the company deals with clients more efficiently.

“The bottom line has been that people understand themselves and others better than they ever have,” says John. “That understanding has made our business run smoother, as well as more effectively and profitably. I’ve been in business for 25 years, but working with Bob Turknett has brought out elements of personality and work styles that I’ve never been aware of before. The work we’ve done with him has been an incredible experience and has had a big impact at all levels of our business. We are a fast-growing company. Working with Turknett Leadership Group taught us how to operate and change within the dynamics of that growth. Their input has been an invaluable investment for the current and future success of our business.”

