

LeaderLinx

Beyond Executive Search



CREATING TOMORROW'S ORGANIZATION TODAY

by Joan Farrell



The new Margo facility in Bethlehem, PA

THE CHALLENGE

Michael Rubenstein, vice president and general manager of Margo, a division of Alcan Packaging, was the architect of a new greenfield venture in Bethlehem, PA. He had given his leadership team the mandate to create the organization of the future for the US facility. Leaders are dreamers with a deadline and the Margo Team was no exception. The first task: build the new management team... and do so fast! Under the guidance of Julie Cirillo, director of organizational development, this milestone was realized with the support of **LeaderLinx**, an executive recruiting firm.

THE CONTEXT

Under Rubenstein's leadership, Margo has established a reputation as the total packaging solutions provider for over-the-counter and ethical pharmaceuticals. The strategy is clear - an uncanny understanding of customer needs, innovation and speed to market. The delivery is surgically precise, drawing on a "Can Do" culture in their base of operations outside Montreal. The growing business and strong success in serving the primarily US-based pharmaceutical market mandated that they look to the US for expansion. Alcan has supported a greenfield venture, a 142,000 square foot state of the art facility in the Lehigh Valley Industrial Park in Bethlehem, PA. The US flagship facility, scheduled to open in February 2002, will manufacture folding cartons as well as operate as a full-service contract-packaging site. "Margo is thrilled to be joining this dynamic business community," stated Rubenstein. "The

world class packaging facility we are building is a clear example of our commitment to the strategic partnerships we form with our customers. By combining our expertise in contract packaging and specialty cartons, and by providing innovative and responsive services, we have become a full service provider for several industry leaders.”

By the time that facility plans, site and equipment selection were underway last winter, Cirillo was focusing on assembling the management team. “We had a vision of what the organization would look like in terms of processes and systems,” she said. “ We knew we had to hire the best people. We needed basic operational expertise—it was a given—and we also needed visioning capabilities and a set of manners in terms of teamwork and organizational effectiveness.”

Downham started **LeaderLinx** after a 30-year career in the packaging and printing industries. He rose to president and CEO of a North American division of a \$2.4 billion printing and packaging conglomerate. As an industry executive he has the hands-on experience often lacking in executive recruiters. This makes him a quick study on the needs of packaging clients, focusing on their core competencies and management expectations. He drew heavily on this experience in founding **LeaderLinx**. Part of his impetus in founding the firm was his perception of the executive recruiting industry as lacking continuous customer service, and a desire to offer value-added services well beyond executive placement.

“What Jim brought to the table was prior experience in actually staffing and running a US Greenfield, but beyond that, a

“Understanding our vision about teamwork was the biggest challenge when speaking to personnel agencies and headhunters. Teamwork is assumed to be project-based rather than cultural. Our focused customer-orientation (both externally and internally) is the key to our success as an organization. It was key that we communicate our passion about vision, about managing the white space in our organization, about shared values and behaviors.”

Most vendors were connoisseurs of the industry and of the strong technical skills that were needed, but it was the soft skills with respect to leadership, vision and entrepreneurial spirit that were critical. Jim Downham, president and CEO of **LeaderLinx**, an executive recruiting outfit whose mantra is “Beyond Executive Search”, had the solution to Cirillo’s challenge.

business experience of what it means to deliver results within a conceptual framework,” Cirillo said. “He understood the challenge of creating a team, of playing on individual differences and strengths. He helped us fill individual roles and assess the team dynamics of this diversity working together.”



Julie Cirillo and Jim Downham

THE JOURNEY

What **LeaderLinx** proposed was crafting a customized situational and behavioral interview process that deftly drew out not just the candidate’s operational successes, thought processes and knowledge, but also the cultural values and interpersonal behaviors that can make or break a team or organization. More science than art, the screening process would also reveal enough about organizational expectations to allow candidates to deselect based on organizational fit.

Andy Harakal, who came on board as Quality Assurance Team Leader October 1, had been interviewing with several other firms when he got the call about the Margo opportunity. “The Margo interview process was much more dynamic,” he said. “My meeting with **LeaderLinx** was a fast-paced, two-hour interview with lots of thought-provoking questions.” What sold him on Margo? “It’s a growing company offering the opportunity to see lots happen in the next few years,” he said. “We have the potential to double our market share and

earnings, and it's an exciting place to be. We have a good team, a diverse group of people, and we will mold it together and make it happen."

"The recruiting process as designed by **LeaderLinx** gave us access to a wider variety of talents than a traditional search," Cirillo commented. "Through the process we redesigned our organizational structure. We knew what functional roles we needed to fill, but as we met people and got Jim's insight, we decided to focus on and promote individual strengths."

For example, the finance team leader, Michael Melley, came with strong skills in costing, so he absorbed the responsibility for estimating and pricing, functions that usually fall within operations. The supply chain team leader, brought with his extensive purchasing experience a solid knowledge of folding cartons, and was therefore tapped to take on the prepress and customer relations functions. "At Margo we use role profiles and combine them based on individual talents, which lets people play in a bigger sandbox," Cirillo says.

This kind of creative application of talent is often necessary in a new business startup or expansion, particularly where production and the accompanying revenue stream are well into the future. "If we had the luxury of importing talent for every position, recruitment gets easier," Downham said. "We dealt with limited relocation funds, so we had to be as creative as possible in finding talent in the immediate geographic area. We were initially on a tight timeline, with a requirement to have the entire management team in place within 90 days. Some adjustments elsewhere in the schedule extended the allowable lead time, but we were ready with good candidates based on the original schedule."

As a Canadian, and living in Quebec, Cirillo was faced with the challenge of the cultural issue of starting a business across an international border. Downham, based out of Chicago at the time and a dual citizen – both American and Canadian – has lived and worked extensively in the packaging and printing industries on both sides of the border. Cirillo was focusing on the business culture issue much more so than the country culture. She said, "It starts with understanding our business vision. Jim has both Canadian and US cultural experience, and has global experience and understanding from an inside perspective. I felt comfortable dealing with that mosaic of benefits from our recruiter."

"We want to create and experience a culture that makes it painful for our customers not to deal with us. We focus on differentiating ourselves, not only based on our state-of-the-art equipment and our building but also on how our people come together to produce results within a high performance team structure. With Jim's previous experience, he is aware of the

many pitfalls that wait on our journey. Jim is not only a headhunter or recruiter, but also a consultative advisor. **LeaderLinx** plays in a bigger arena than just the recruiting business."

Downham emphasized how his experience in greenfielding a team-based organization mandated that Margo use a single point source to manage the selection process for the leadership team. "If a number of recruiters were placing individual candidates without some thought as to how the group will interact in terms of both diversity and team skills, the outcomes would be less certain," he said.

The team in Montreal has created a compelling culture that challenges the customer to "Experience the Difference" — a difference that has helped the organization grow.

Cirillo responded readily. "We will have different ways of doing things internally—setting up training programs, our compensation structure, how we empower our associates, but we will get to the same results—delighting the customer, anticipating their needs, knowing that they will "Experience the Difference" regardless of location. When you look at our business that way, you understand how important understanding the vision is, not just for our business leaders, but for everyone involved in shaping the business." And she clearly expects all their suppliers to be involved, especially the recruiter.

THE DESTINATION

Today the team is in place. "Through **LeaderLinx**, we have hired qualified people with great strengths, diversified backgrounds and different personalities. Our challenge now is to unblock their potential," Cirillo said. **LeaderLinx** provides continuity with respect to coaching and integration. They brought in the whole team and are helping to foster early growth and development not only of the individual leaders but of the team as a whole. We will definitely go through some ups and downs and for sure all will not embrace our culture; we are dealing with a lot of ambiguity and transformation and our comfort zones are forever being affected. As business leaders, we must be able to manage this as part of the strategy.

One of the interesting aspects of the recruitment process was that even internal candidates were thoroughly screened by **LeaderLinx**. "We were consistent with the entire process and thought it would be effective to have our internal candidates be screened and assessed by Jim as well," Cirillo said. "We did not alter our contractual partnering arrangement."

Two of the leaders of the new business ultimately came out of the organization, one directly from Margo's Montreal operations and another from a sister company in the UK. Graeme

Bennie, the senior director of operations, is a British citizen who had most recently been managing director for a group of four manufacturing facilities in the UK.

"Graeme is a talented operations professional with a broad range of talents who is also great with people," Cirillo said. "He definitely has the entrepreneurial spirit that we seek, and Jim's assessment of how Graeme would fit into the overall picture was extremely helpful."

Bennie commented that although the recruitment process was reasonably conventional in terms of the mechanics—testing and interviewing—he did have a number of interviews with Rubenstein, Cirillo and Downham. And this was someone who was a known entity. Although he described his last position as managing director of a group of four manufacturing facilities as one of "managing by information," he jumped at the chance to work hands-on in the Margo organization in the US and lead the development of a greenfield facility. Aside from the cultural shift in moving across the Atlantic, the change in roles means a shift in viewpoint. "In my last role, I worked in a highly autonomous environment. I managed four plants, but they were each separate business entities with a lot of freedom. The Margo Montreal team has been highly involved in the initial phases of this project, therefore we will need to establish ourselves on our own merits quickly." Cirillo's appreciation for the ability for organizations to reach the same result through different paths bodes well for Bennie and his team.

The Montreal team's involvement in the new facility was demonstrated throughout the recruitment process. Downham had to quickly learn to manage the expectations of multiple stakeholders—Cirillo, whose priority was on the cultural and team issues while also ensuring all other competencies; Rubenstein, who had an eye on fit, technical capabilities, and the bottom line; and the Montreal management team as a whole, who played a consensus role in the candidate approval process.

Marjanne Troost-Meyer was appointed director of manufacturing for the Pennsylvania operation. She comes from the Montreal facility, where she was director of contract packaging. "Again, we wanted to optimize our management's team

effectiveness and interaction," Cirillo said. "When recruiting there is always a temptation to fill positions quickly based on "job/technical know-how. As I mentioned earlier, our recruitment goal is to fill roles and assess whether our candidates have the capability to contribute to the team as a whole."

The recruitment project was a success, especially in the eyes of Graeme Bennie, the leader of the Bethlehem site. "In order to build the world class business that we envision, we need the right people with access to the right technology," he said. "We also need to constantly benchmark ourselves against the competition in order to drive continuous improvement. One of the benefits of the team we have put together is that we have insight now into what the competition has been up to, not just in terms of technology but in terms of thought processes."

Harakal echoes Bennie's comments in explaining why it's a strong team. "Our diversity is about backgrounds as much as anything else. Graeme brings an entire philosophy from Great Britain that is a fresh approach for us; Marjanne has the benefit of the Montreal experience; Mark comes from a Fortune 50 company and I bring regulatory knowledge from the medical device field."

From left to right: **Julie Cirillo, Andy Harakal, Michael Melly, Graeme Bennie, Mark Todd, Marjanne Troost Meyer and Joanne Louzides-Bates**



The entire management team is now in place and **LeaderLinx** is still there, working together with Cirillo to help the new team build an organization. "We just had a session last week with Jim and one of his consultants," she explained. "We called it 'Creating Tomorrow's Organization Today'. That is what this partnership is all about".

To learn more about Margo and their "Can Do" culture contact Julie Cirillo, Director of Organizational Development at Julie.Cirillo@alcan.com.

Joan Farrell, the author of *Creating Tomorrow's Organization Today*, is a consultant specializing in organizational analyses and alignment. Her credits include work as diverse as the complete human resources strategy for a team-based manufacturing startup, the recovery of a wire fabricator from a crippling strike, and the organizational restructuring of a major shipyard from a craft focus to a project management approach. Much of her life's work has included substantial re-staffing of organizations undergoing significant change. Joan's engaging style is captured in the name of her practice, Exertia Consulting. Originally educated as a physicist, she defines exertia as "the opposite of inertia." She helps businesses and people get "unstuck."

To learn more about **LeaderLinx** and its capabilities contact James D Downham, President & CEO at jdd@leaderlinx.com or check out the new web site at www.leaderlinx.com.