‘Boss, I quit. Wanna be my customer?’

Strategies

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Erin Mundahl
Staff writer- Minneapolis / St. Paul Business Journal
Email

Gutsy: That’s how Alexandra “Ali” Farnsworth describes the business plan she first used to start Technology Solutions Group.

“Essentially, my company story is that I went to [MentorMate, her previous employer] and resigned, but said, ‘You can be my first vendor partner.’ And thankfully they said yes,” Farnsworth said.

At the time, Farnsworth worked in new-business development for MentorMate, a Minneapolis mobile app company. At MentorMate, Farnsworth worked to sell a single brand.

Her idea for TSG was to become a sales rep for multiple different brands and technologies, helping to connect vendors of products and services that streamline businesses with customers at information-technology businesses, as well as other chief information and technology officers. She likens her business model to that of a shared manufacturer’s representative, sometimes augmenting a company’s sales team and at other times serving as a small startup’s sales team.

“They don’t want to pay a fat salary to a hotshot salesperson,” she said. “We are the hot-shot sales rep.”

Her quirky model has paid off for TSG and its clients.

TSG’s year-over-year revenue has doubled since 2012. Starting with three vendor partners in 2013, TSG now represents 16 tech companies and has a waiting list of an additional 20 firms.

TSG is poised to grow. It has a staff of five: Farnsworth, two vice presidents, an administrative assistant and a scheduler. Farnsworth hopes to have a staff of 50 within the next five years, with each of her vice presidents eventually leading their own teams.

When Farnsworth started TSG, she had a wealth of connections with area tech firms and with the
people responsible for purchasing corporate software from her years in sales. She found that her position as an outsider frequently helped her to see solutions that someone within the firm might miss.

Each vendor partner is carefully vetted. To start, none of her vendor partners compete directly. When selecting vendors, she focuses on finding top local companies with proven track records.

Her success shows the value she brings to her customers, said James Williams, president of MentorMate, which is still a TSG client. Farnsworth has “demonstrated success in generating meaningful business for MentorMate,” meaning roughly $2.5 million a year in sales.

As she markets her firm as a great outsourcing option for her clients, Farnsworth embraces outsourcing key tasks in her own business, as well.

“In being self-employed, do not be the jack of all trades,” she said.

She’s farmed out accounting, advertising and other tasks to outside firms. This philosophy also led to her choice of vice presidents: people whose strengths complement, but don’t duplicate, her own. She knows that she was lucky to find them, and for this, she credits Minnesota.

“Minnesota is home to some of the strongest tech programs in the country,” she said, citing the University of Minnesota as well as large area employers.

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**Technology Solutions Group**

- **CEO and founder:** Ali Farnsworth  
- **Year founded:** 2013  
- **Headquarters:** Shoreview  
- **Employees:** Five  
- **2014 revenue:** $217,000  
- **Web:** tsg-mn.com