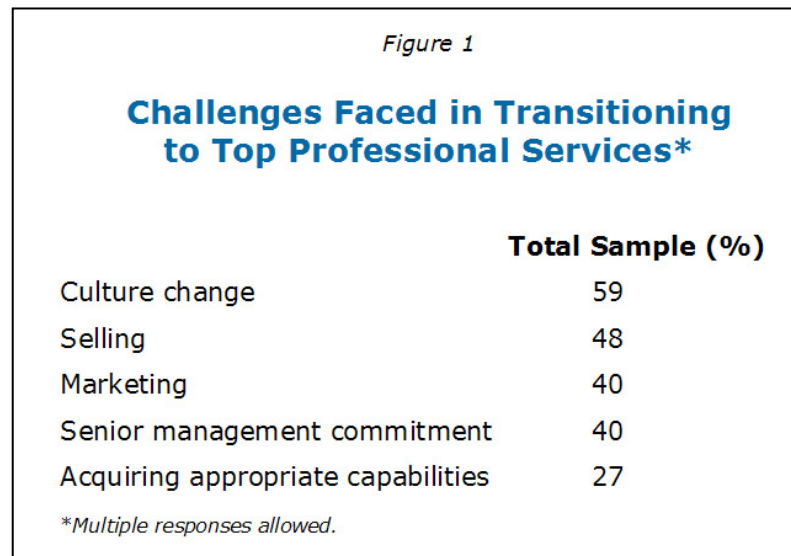


Kevlar Vests and Iron Underwear

By James A. Alexander, Ed.D.

Culture change is the number-one challenge of professional services leaders within product companies attempting to take their professional services organization to the next level of performance. *Figure 1*, below, taken from our most recent research, shows that after culture change, the next four challenges in order of importance are selling, marketing, senior management commitment, and acquiring appropriate capabilities.



Furthermore, when top-performing professional services leaders were asked to give recommendations to others making the transition, the top two recommendations were to “commit senior management” and take responsibility to “guide the change.” Great advice, but what does it mean?

When delving deeper, the services executive committed to professional services excellence must make these three personal modifications:

1. New Role

Here the role shift moves from services business manager responsible for contributing profitable growth to professional services champion accountable for changing the organization. Quite a difference, don't you think?

2. New Skills

The business skills of managing, organizing, directing, and monitoring must still be in place, but added to that set must be strong persuasion skills. As an agent for change, your ability to sell your ideas inside and outside of the company become the biggest variable to success. Look at the very best key account managers and you'll see this in action.

3. New Mindset

This is not a task for the faint of heart! Leading a professional services organization in a product-centered company is like being a stranger in a strange land. Every day you must prepare for resistance from people who may not have a clue what you are talking about...every day you must face and deal with losing battles with those "who just don't get it." As one of our research participants aptly put it: "The key to leading the transition to professional services in a product-centered company is Kevlar vests and iron underwear."

If the time is right and you are up to the challenge, suit up and play--it certainly won't be boring!

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