

Building a bioenergy team

Like a bobsleigh squad, you need a driver, you need those who can push the project forward... and you definitely need a brakeman

Putting together a strong team requires choosing people to fill specific functions and is the second building block in developing and financing a successful bioenergy project.

As I stood with thousands of other Canadians in downtown Vancouver earlier this year, yelling "Go Canada, Go," I couldn't help but feel the passion and enthusiasm. The determination of the Olympic athletes was awe-inspiring, and the joy of cheering on a winning team can be one of our greatest memories.

Similarly, in your bioenergy project, there is a need to build a championship-calibre team. Each member is critical to the project's success and needs to be prepared for the Olympic-like competition.

Let's consider the Canadian bobsleigh team. In the four-person team, there is a driver, two pushers, and a brakeman. Each person brings a specific set of skills to the sled and trains hard for a specific role. Each team member is committed and is prepared to jump in and trust his or her life to the driver.

MANY OF THESE PROJECTS BEGIN WITH A VISIONARY

■ Many bioenergy projects start with a visionary, but is that person the driver or the pusher? The reality is that many visionaries are pushers, working tirelessly at promoting their ideas. But when it comes to sound business decisions, they often need the help of other experienced team members.

I do not make light of the role of a pusher, as each bobsleigh needs two of them, and a fast start is extremely important. One of my clients said, "I'm definitely a pusher, as I push hard enough for two men." My response was, "awesome – that is what is needed. But who is driving?"

Make sure your driver/leader is someone who knows how to steer through the twists and turns of a bioenergy project. Do you trust his/her decision-making skills enough to jump into the sled at the top of a very fast track?

When I asked another client if he trusted his

driver/leader, he paused briefly and then said, "I definitely trust him. So much so, that I left my other job and invested my own money in the company." I immediately knew that this was a team that trusted its leader and was willing to push hard and follow his lead.

WITHOUT A LEADER, THE TEAM IS DOOMED TO FAILURE

■ One of the most frustrating scenarios to come across is a bioenergy team that has multiple partners and no clear-cut leader. This team is doomed to failure, as each member wants to steer, and when it comes to making a split-second decision, it is in immediate danger as the team members steer in different directions.

Last, but not least, you need to consider the fourth member of a bobsleigh team, the brakeman. He/she is always the last one into the bobsleigh, the one that



By Reg Renner

Reg Renner, of Atticus Financial in Vancouver, finances equipment ranging from biomass boilers to greenhouse structures. He has 38 years of industry experience. • rrenner@atticusfinancial.com.

Every project involves teamwork and leadership.



gives the final push, and also the one that applies the brakes. The brakeman only uses the brakes during training runs and at the end of the race, but never during a competitive run.

EVERY TEAM NEEDS A GOOD BRAKEMAN

■ Who is your brakeman? Most likely, this is your accountant, but it can also be the naysayer or the realist. Every team needs one, and you need to choose carefully this very important person. Is this person able to release the brakes when it is time to push off? If they are constantly on the brakes, there is no point in competing. It is advisable to take practice runs, but at some point, the team leader needs to ask the team if they are ready, and then the brakeman is going to have to push hard, jump in, and trust the leader.

A successful bioenergy team will have a driver, a brakeman, and pushers. Most potential funders will look carefully at your team's experience, skill sets, and ability to make timely decisions. A strong, cohesive team with clearly defined roles can be a key factor in determining whether your project will obtain sufficient financing.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD SUPPORT STAFF

■ It is also important to round out your team with support staff. No bobsleigh team can compete on the world stage without technicians, advisors, therapists, nutritionists and sponsors. Make sure that you do not underestimate the need for experienced support staff who have competed at a high level. You have only to watch the winter Olympics for a few minutes to know that it is a team effort.

Remember, the strength of your bioenergy team is not only important in attracting the necessary financing, but also in ensuring that you have a high potential for success throughout the project. With the right teammates, you will be able to encourage each other as you make the daily decisions that are required to launch and maintain a successful project. You should now have the starting points of "the dream" and "the team" in place.

In my next column, I will discuss the topic of building your credit strength prior to meeting with an investor. Until then... "Go bioenergy, go!" ■

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