



Summer 2007 AMA Educators' Conference High Impact Sessions

Session 8.4: The Director's Chair: A Panel Discussion of the Challenges Faced by Center Directors

Session Moderator: David Berkowitz, University of Alabama in Huntsville

Participants:

Raj Srivastava, Director, Emory Marketing Institute, Emory University

Roland T. Rust, Executive Director, Center for Excellence in Service, University of Maryland

V. Kumar, Executive Director, ING Center for Financial Service, University of Connecticut

Eli Jones, Executive Director, Sales Excellence Institute, University of Houston

David Berkowitz, Director, Center for Management of Science and Technology, University of Alabama in Huntsville

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At a time when faculty are increasingly expected to find outside sources of funding the appeal of forming and running a research center is obvious. Beyond funding potential, centers not only allow researchers the opportunity to connect with businesses thereby providing new and rich avenues for research, but they also contribute to the business community creating good will for the university, and allow students to connect with businesses before going on the marketplace. While the benefits of a research center are undeniable, the founding of a research center is not to be undertaken lightly as the time and energy necessary to found and run a center is considerable.

When establishing a new research center, there is no "one size fits all" business model. Rather a variety of business models have been applied by the panel members. Both the Emory Marketing Institute and the Center for Excellence in Service are based on corporate support or partnership in which value is created through research and members enjoy varying levels of benefits depending on size of their commitment and investment in the institute. The ING Center for Financial Service is based on a stability model in which a small but consistent level of funding can be counted upon each year. The Sales Excellence Institute has taken on more of missionary model, in which the goal is to connect all levels of scholars, from undergraduate to professor, with the business community and in which students play an active role in relationship building process. Finally, the Center for Management of Science and Technology receives its funding on a per project basis.

Regardless of the form that a research center takes, the panelists had several pieces of advice for anyone considering starting a center. First, do not even think about it until after you have tenure, since taking on such a project is a huge time commitment. Second, because acquiring funding is so time consuming and requires significant cold calling in the beginning, panel members recommend having partners sign multi year contracts that renew automatically. Third, keep any consulting completely separate from the center so that it is clear that findings will not be used commercially but can be published academically. Finally, do not be afraid to reach out for help from colleagues and hire a manager to take care of the details.