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INSIDER Edition

It's all too much

By Christopher Shulgan

Thursday, October 7, 2004, Page 46

Success is nice, but too much of it too fast can bring its own set of problems. After more than a decade-and-a-half of research and development, the big moment for Virox Technologies Inc. came in April, 2003, at the height of Toronto's SARS crisis. Ontario's Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care released a memo that recommended the use of several of the small company's products, including accelerated hydrogen peroxide, a recently approved disinfectant. Through such corporate partners as Bayer and JohnsonDiversey, Virox sold the germ fighter to hospitals, nursing homes, veterinarians and dentists. The week after the ministry's memo, then-Mississauga-based Virox was inundated with calls from hospitals asking for more information. There was a torrent of media calls as well--from television, radio and newspapers.

CEO Randy Pilon, who was an executive with Bausch & Lomb Canada before founding Virox, knew the media attention was likely to spike sales. But Virox had just 14 employees, about one-third of them R&D technicians working to find new uses for the disinfectant. How could the company cope? Pilon quickly added a shift of temp workers, which more than doubled production. But he also knew he'd need more help after the crisis passed, and that's why he called Bridgepoint Inc.

"We're basically a human resources department that's on call 24/7, offering just-in-time resources when our clients need us," says Bridgepoint president Monica Beauregard, who is also co-author of *Hiring, Managing and Keeping the Best: The Complete Canadian Guide for Employers*. Rapid growth creates its own pressures: Marketing strategies have to be developed, employees must be hired, news releases need drafting, and accounting, payroll and benefits quickly become major pains.

Fortunately, an industry's worth of consultants cater to special needs, allowing operators to outsource almost any task. At Virox, Pilon decided he needed four more permanent staffers. "We outsourced because we knew we didn't need a full-time employee to handle our hiring," Pilon says. "But we needed someone who was as good as a tier-one vice-president of human resources, because when we hire someone, they have to stay for a long time--we can't afford the downtime of staff turnover and retraining." "Virox was in an interesting situation because they couldn't afford to make a hiring mistake," says Beauregard. The company is ISO 9001-certified, meaning its operations and employees must follow detailed international standards. It also has relationships with some of North America's biggest companies. "We were a small company with employees that had to think and act big," says Pilon.

In effect, Beauregard became Virox's vice-president of human resources--but only when the company needed her. She wrote formal job descriptions for positions such as research technician. She advertised the jobs, conducted the preliminary interviews, then pared down the shortlist and worked with Pilon to decide on a final candidate. She also

drafted job performance evaluation procedures. "It works because I'm there for them on a just-in-time basis," says Beaugard. Outsourcing human resources can work, she says, until a firm grows to about 80 to 100 employees. Then it makes sense to hire someone dedicated to HR.

In Virox's case, the company sold about \$1.6 million worth of disinfectant in the six weeks following the Ministry of Health SARS memo--as much as the company shipped in all of 2002. There are now 18 employees, and Virox ranks among Canada's fastest-growing small companies. Sales for 2003 soared to \$4.2 million, and Pilon says they could hit \$6 million this year. Later this year, Virox plans to begin shipping a household disinfectant, Orange Glo. Longer term, the company plans to add to its roster a specialized product designed to disinfect sensitive medical equipment. And when Virox needs to hire employees to deal with the demand, Beaugard will be there to help.