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D-I-Y Sales Management

During my years as a sales person, I worked for some great sales managers and for others who barely rated that title. The toughest sales manager I ever worked for was the guy I saw in the mirror each morning. A sales manager's job is to help their sales people be successful. I welcomed my manager's help and advice but I always knew that the ultimate responsibility for my success or failure rested with me. Sales managers have to spread themselves around their entire team, I was my only concern. Sales managers are rewarded for the production of their entire team; I was only rewarded for my own production. My manager could only observe my actions and listen to my statements; I could monitor everything, good or bad, that was running through my head. For these reasons I was the best possible person to manage my sales career.

Goals

One of the key functions of a sales manager is setting goals for their sales staff. I never limited myself to my assigned sales goals. I set my personal goals a notch or two higher than my "official" target. I had several reasons for doing this. First, my family was depending on me to "bring home the bacon", so I wanted to maximize my earnings. I also knew that there are many variables in sales and that unexpected problems can crop up at any time. Reaching beyond my target created a safety net; I was still likely to be on target no matter what obstacles I encountered. Finally, I did not want to be "the average sales person." I was ambitious and wanted to excel. No one ever made a name for themselves by just being on target.

In addition to revenue targets, I also set volume and activity goals for myself. Revenue is certainly important but I knew the dollars would only come if I did my job properly. By selling more accounts, I not only generated more sales but also reduced my risk by spreading the revenue over a wider base. If one or two accounts dropped out, the impact on my sales results would be minimal. Since both revenue and volume can only come from effort, I set personal activity goals. I set goals for the number of calls I made and for every activity that affected my sales.

"The drudgery of the numbers will set you free!"

This quote is from Managing written by Hal Geneen. This book taught me the value of metrics, of tracking the numbers. If tracked properly and carefully

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analyzed, numbers can paint a very accurate picture of your activities. This is important because humans are highly skilled at self-delusion. I can convince myself that I am working as hard as possible until I see that my call volume has declined significantly. While my manager asked for a daily call report, I collected much more data about my sales activities such as:

- Sales contacts are the baseline number needed to manage your territory. The number of businesses you've contacted in person or on the telephone is a good measure of how hard you are working. Looking at this number over time will document how consistent you've been. If you notice that your call volume is declining, this is an early warning sign that your sales are about to drop.
- Presentations are defined as a meaningful conversation about advertising with a person who could purchase or recommend advertising. The number of presentations I made told me how effective I was at reaching decision makers and if my opening statement grabbed their attention.
- Closes Any call where I engaged the customer in a discussion of their needs and uncovered enough problems to make a recommendation, I counted as a close. My closing number measured my ability to engage customers long enough to learn something about their business and attempt a sale. From this I learned when I needed to improve my probing and closing techniques.
- Sales Aside from telling me how much money I was going to make, my sales number showed me how effective I was at closing sales. If my sales to closing ratio dropped, I knew I had to work on my probing or on making better recommendations.

Analyzing your numbers: Collecting accurate data on your daily activities is critical to your growth as a professional sales person. I created a form that allowed me to easily track all of the indices listed above. I would keep this on a clipboard in my car. I disciplined myself to record this information in real time as I went through my day. At the end of the week I would look at my totals and how they related to one another. I calculated the ratios of contacts to presentations, presentations to closes etc. The trends in these ratios told me where I needed to step up my efforts or improve my skills. From this data I could learn how many contacts I needed to make a sale and how many calls were needed to achieve my goals. I calculated the average dollar value of my

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sales which helped me to see if I was “leaving money on the table”, or if I was offering small programs to get a quick sale. By analyzing my sales by product, I could see if I was under performing in any category and if I needed to hone my selling skills in that area.

Coaching and Training

When asked what their most valuable asset is, most people will talk about their home, their car or perhaps their stock portfolio. Economists agree that for the vast majority of people, their greatest asset is their ability to earn a living. In sales, our ability to earn is tied directly to our selling skills. Just as I would not trust another to manage my financial assets, I would not trust my “intellectual assets” to strangers. I have been fortunate to work for companies that offered great training programs, but I never stopped looking for ways to improve myself. I set time aside each week for self development. A half hour each morning devoted to business reading is equivalent to three weeks of training each year. In addition to reading books on advertising and business, I subscribe to several sales magazines plus a number of online newsletters. I usually have an audio book in the car. This is a lot of work, but these efforts have paid off royally over the years in increased sales. Taking the time to learn your trade increases your competence and this competence increases your confidence. Customers will sense that you know your business; this coupled with your evident self confidence will cause them to be more receptive to you and your ideas.

Coaching is observing a behavior and then refining that behavior to make it more effective. It is very difficult to be a detached observer of our own actions. We have a tendency to either beat ourselves up or deny our mistakes. To become better, we must reflect on what we’ve done and make every encounter with a customer a learning experience. We need to think about what we said and did and the prospect’s reaction. We should constantly ask ourselves the Dr. Phil question, “How’s that working for you?” By taking a detached look at our behaviors, we can say to ourselves, “That worked well, I will do that again” or “That didn’t go so well, I won’t do that again.” Your territory should be your laboratory. Continually try new ideas and concepts that you have learned from other people or from your reading. If you can learn something from every call you will grow as a sales person throughout your career.

The most important thing you can manage is your time. In the hustle bustle of running a territory it is easy to lose track of time. Good records will help you

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monitor exactly how you invest your time. Every few months, keep a time log recording what you do through the workday in 15-minute increments. This exercise will reveal many small time wasters that when combined; consume large blocks of your time.

No pain, no gain

Exceptional people are willing to do the things that the average person is unwilling to do. I know many people will finish this article and say, “*These are great ideas but they just take too much effort! Or time! Or any one of a hundred excuses.*” The truth is that following these recommendations does require a great deal of effort and discipline. I can personally attest to how hard it is to follow this program. I forced myself to do these things throughout my sales career. I can also attest that they work. In more than two decades of selling through recessions and tough local economic and competitive conditions, I never missed a quarterly sales goal. You can count the months I missed my target on one hand. For most of that time I was ranked at or near the top of the sales ranking. I have taught this system to many people and those that have embraced it; increased their sales. These are not things the average sales person is willing to do. These are the things the exceptional person knows they must do. The choice is up to you—*easy and average or challenging and exceptional.* Becoming an exceptional person is the ultimate Do-It-Yourself project.

This article was written by Jim Busch of the Pittsburgh Pennysaver.

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