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The Three Roles of a Sales Manager Part 2 The administrator/enforcer role

Last month's Link and Learn discussed the complexity of managing a sales team and looked at the Leader/Cheerleader role in depth. This month we will look at the administrator/enforcer role. In my experience working with new managers, I find that while they embrace the leadership role quickly, they find the administrator/enforcer role much more challenging. Leadership has much more in common with what they experienced as a salesperson. A salesperson must motivate a prospect to buy; a manager must motivate their sales team to sell. A salesperson can not demand that customers do what they say, but sales managers have to assert themselves with their teams. Sometimes we need to lead and sometimes we need to push our people. Sales management is situational; a manager must be flexible and adapt their behavior to suit the conditions which exist at the moment. The trick is to know which course of action to take. As one of my mentors once told me: "Sometimes a manager has to deliver a pat on the back and sometimes they need to deliver a kick in the pants, the trick is knowing which one your reps need."

Leadership and the administrator/enforcer role are complementary. A leader sets goals and points the team in the right direction. The administrator/enforcer ensures that the team will reach their goals and that everyone is going in the right direction. In an ideal world, we would only need to communicate our goals to the team, give them the tools they need and then step back and watch the magic happen. Unfortunately, we do not live in an ideal world.

If you are lucky, you will be able to attract a few "self-starters" who are highly motivated and take direction well, but these "dream reps" are few and far between. Behavioral economists have found that people often fail to take actions that are in their own best interest for emotional reasons. This is why some commissioned sales reps avoid making the calls they need to increase their earnings. These reps are essentially "picking their own pockets", but they continue to do so to avoid the emotional pain of being rejected. Success as a sales manager depends on doing what is required to ensure that every member of your team performs at an optimal level.

Accountability is job #1

In 1985, I was promoted to my first sales management position. My boss stopped by my office and gave me a small gift for my desk, a small frame holding the following statement: "**HOLDING PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE**



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IS THE CHIEF RESPONSIBILITY OF A MANAGER!” He reminded me that he would hold me responsible for the performance of my team and that to be successful I needed to hold the members of my team accountable for their performance. These ten words proved to be one of the most valuable gifts I have ever received. In twenty-five years of sales management, I’ve never missed a quarterly sales target. I believe I was successful because my people knew I held them accountable for achieving their targets.

Management Tasks

Sales management can be broken down into four basic tasks:

- 1) Establishing standards and goals for the team
- 2) Setting up controls to ensure that reps are following the plan
- 3) Track and analyze the team’s progress toward their goals
- 4) Take corrective action to keep the team on pace to achieve their objectives

Task #1: Establishing Standards and goals

One of the key management tasks is to set clear standards and goals for your people. People need to know exactly what you expect them to do. These goals should be committed to writing and as specific as possible. Your sales goals should list the exact dollar target you need your reps to sell. If you sell multiple products, goals should be established for each product. In addition to financial goals you should establish goals for customer and ad counts. All of these goals should be based on the historical performance of the territory and the potential business you believe the area can produce. Goals should be aggressive, but achievable.

Your reps should also have specific activity goals. Set standards for the number of calls you expect your people to make, how many appointments they should set and how many proposals they should prepare. These should be broken down further into prospecting calls and calls on existing accounts. Establish the definition of each target. For example, does a phone call constitute a prospecting call or not. These goals are important because they discipline your reps to take the steps which will lead to achieving their financial goals.

Task #2: Set up controls to ensure rep compliance to your plan

By definition, a sales manager will always be outnumbered. You can not be with every rep, every minute of the work day. This is a challenge because you are held accountable for how your reps spend their days, so you need systems to track your rep’s activities and performance. Your accounting department

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will provide you with the data needed to monitor a rep's sales performance. Work with them to make sure that you have the data you need and that it is presented in a format that is easy to read. Tracking a rep's daily activity is more of a challenge. I required my reps to provide me with a sales plan each Monday detailing what areas and projects they intended to work on during the coming week. This gave me the opportunity to help them manage their time effectively. I also required the reps to turn in a call report at the close of each day. These two documents told me how effective the rep was at planning their time and how disciplined they were at working their plan. The call reports also told me how many calls the reps made and what percentage of their time they spent prospecting. I found that my best reps embraced call reports and used them as a time management tool. I've found that the reps who complained the loudest about doing call reports were the ones who seldom hit their goals.

My call reports were designed to be completed quickly using simple checkmarks. Call reports are an indispensable coaching tool. Since I required my reps to submit daily call reports, I disciplined myself to review them daily and to give the reps feedback on them every morning. At some point during the day, I would make two or three "quality check" calls to accounts or prospects listed on my reps' call reports. I would introduce myself as the local manager and ask if my rep had "answered their questions and given them the information they needed." This practice not only kept the reps honest, but on numerous occasions, resulted in an appointment for a follow-up call. While very time consuming, using plans and call reports gave me the information needed to hold the reps accountable for their sales activities.

Task #3: Track and analyze your rep's progress toward their goals

I had a "no surprises" pact with my sales teams. I expected them to come to me with any bad news, such as an account moving to a competitor and I would let them know where they stood at all times. Staying abreast of your sales numbers allows you to give reps real time feedback on their performance. You should touch base with reps on a regular basis, daily if practicable, to discuss their current progress and their projected sales. Reps should always know where they stand in relation to their goals and exactly what they need to achieve them. Likewise, they should know when they are falling short of their activity goals. You should post your sales numbers so that everyone knows where they stand against their peers. Managers should establish benchmarks for major projects such as special sections. You should meet with your team at the 25%, 50% and 75% marks in the campaign to allow time to take action to ensure the project comes in on target.

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Task #4: Take corrective action to keep the team on goal

I always found the hardest part of being a sales manager was holding difficult conversations with my under performing reps. Most people try to avoid confrontations, but addressing poor performance is an important part of the sales manager's job. Disciplining or dismissing a rep may be difficult, but often it is the only means of building a team that can consistently hit their targets. If you have done everything possible to motivate your people, provide them with the tools and support they need, and endeavor to treat the offending employee with respect, you should never regret taking corrective actions.

Conclusion: It's a tough job but somebody has to do it

Management is not for everyone. It is a hard job; I almost always worked harder and longer than my sales people. Managing can be emotionally trying and frustrating because we must rely on others to achieve our goals. Why do we do it? I love management because it gives me a chance to make a difference, to make what Steve Jobs called a "dent in the universe." Making a real difference means we have to lead people and we have to hold them accountable, pushing them to accomplish more than they thought possible. Management guru Tom Peters has spent his life analyzing world class organizations, so I'll conclude with this thought from him: ***"We found that the most exciting environments, that treated people very well, are also tough as nails. There is no bureaucratic mumbo-jumbo... excellent companies provide two things simultaneously: tough environments and very supportive environments."***

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

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