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"To get what you expect, you must inspect!"

I am sure that people who herd cats for a living describe their job as being as "*hard as managing sales people!*" Advertising sales management is a challenging way to make a living. Sales people are by their nature independent souls, they gravitate toward sales because they enjoy the "freedom of the road." Advertising sales people tend to be even more free spirited than reps from other industries, because our business is very attractive to the notoriously hard to manage "creative types." Advertising sales managers find themselves leading a group of people who don't like to be told what to do, who are very creative in getting what they want and in an environment that makes monitoring their activities very difficult. Sometimes, I wonder why anyone ever accepts a job as an advertising sales manager.

What is a manager to do? The traditional answer was to give sales people an incentive to do the things their manager required of them. The theory is that sales reps who earn commission will do everything in their power to sell as much advertising as possible. We count on our reps being what economists call "rational actors." The idea is based on the belief that sales reps as rational actors will employ logic to pursue a course of action that is in their own, and coincidently the company's, best economic interest. The problem with this rational actor theory is that human beings seldom act rationally. Recent psychological and behavioral economic research has found that emotion is a much bigger factor in determining human behavior than logical thought. This explains why consumers will take on long term debt for short term gratification, why we don't eat healthy and ignore our body's warning signs. This is also why sales people avoid making cold calls, are afraid to ask for the order and do any number of things that hurt themselves in the pocketbook. A rational actor knows that the more calls they make, the more they will earn. A human being is more driven by the emotional pain of rejection and the fear of failure. This is why we need sales managers, in a world made up of rational actors we would only need to hire reasonably intelligent people, give them a good compensation plan, and get out of their way. In the world filled with normal, emotionally driven human beings, we need sales managers to make sure that reps do the things that are in their and the company's best interest.

W. Clement Stone was a highly successful entrepreneur and sales executive. He constantly reminded his managers "*To get what you expect, you must inspect!*" At every level of his organization, he created "feedback loops." The technical

definition of a feedback loop, a term borrowed from science, is: *"The section of a control system that allows for feedback and self-correction and that adjusts its operation according to differences between the actual output and the desired output."* More simply put, a feedback loop is simply a tool to gather data about what your people are doing and using that information to improve your team's performance. As a sales manager, I used feedback loops to make sure that my reps were following my direction and that we were accomplishing our goals.

Be careful what you ask for…

Before you can set up an effective feedback loop, you must know what you need to accomplish. I worked with a telephone sales manager who hammered his people about making a minimum of 50 calls per day. He used his phone system reports as a feedback loop and would use the call numbers to praise or chastise his people each morning. The majority of his people were making the required number of daily dials. I spent some time in the department and listened to the reps. I realized that the reps were not trying to make sales, because their focus was on making calls. I heard one rep complain about a prospect who had kept her on the phone asking questions about the paper. She was afraid that this time might prevent her from achieving her goal of 50 calls. This rep was doing exactly what the manager had asked of her, make lots of calls. Unfortunately, this objective was completely divorced from the company's goal of making more sales. This story highlights the importance of carefully choosing and defining the indices you want to track. Trying to track everything is worse than not tracking anything. Overly complex reporting systems accomplish nothing while consuming huge blocks of the rep's and the manager's time. The manager must decide which behaviors have the biggest impact on achieving their department's goals and set up systems to monitor those behaviors. In the example above, tracking presentations would have been much more effective in increasing sales. Once a manager has determined what he or she wants to track, it is the manager's responsibility to clearly communicate what they expect to their team.

If you make them write it, you gotta' read it!

Sales reps hate doing reports. They especially hate busy work reports. If you ask your people to do call reports everyday, you must read them everyday. This is another reason to limit and simplify the reports you request. You must be cognizant of the time required to review and analyze the feedback you receive. As a sales manager
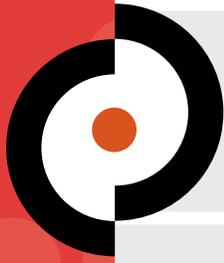
I talked to my reps everyday about their call reports and their previous day's activities. It isn't necessary to review the entire report, I would just ask one or two pointed questions about one or two of the calls. This told the rep that I was looking at their report and what they were doing, and gave me an opportunity to coach or train them. I also did daily "Quality checks" by calling accounts from a couple of my team's call reports to thank them for their time. I once took over a sales group when their manager was off on medical leave. Within a week, my "Quality Checks" reduced the number of entries on the team's call reports by more than 50%. It is a good idea to look at a series of reports because this will allow you to see patterns that may not be apparent in individual reports. From time to time, review the reports you ask your people to complete, eliminating any which are no longer necessary and making sure you have the information you need to get the most from your team.

Being the greater of two evils

Sales reps, like every other creature on the planet, spend a great deal of their lives trying to avoid pain. Pain avoidance is the root cause of call reluctance. Reps are avoiding the pain of rejection. In many situations, we are forced to choose between two painful options. For example, we get up and go to work because getting out of bed is perceived as less painful than losing our jobs. This might sound harsh, but as a sales manager, I tried to make the consequences of not doing what I wanted my reps to do, far more painful than doing the required task. I accomplished this by holding the reps personally accountable for their activities. I refused to let reps "fly under the radar" and required them to report on their sales activities. As social animals, we hate to admit our failings to others; we actively avoid the pain of embarrassment. I did not have to demean the reps or insult them; they were usually harder on themselves than I could ever be. I often gave my reps ads clipped from competing publications and asked them to call on the advertiser. Before I did this, I copied the ad and when I gave the original to the rep, I asked them to write their name and the date on the copy. I placed the copy in my follow-up file. The reps knew that I would get back to them in a week to discuss the lead and the outcome of their call. They soon decided it was easier to make the call than to make up an excuse to tell me why they hadn't. When my team was working on a major project such as a special section, I set up "benchmark" meetings at the 25%, 50%, 75% points in the canvass and at the conclusion of the project. With their peers seated around a table, each rep had to report on their progress and answer my questions. I found that the reps would work

very hard rather than have to admit they had failed to their teammates. As managers, it is our responsibility to make sure that doing the job is far less painful than failure.

"Managers must manage"—Hal Geneen

The quote above should be a mantra for every sales manager. Managers must manage to achieve and exceed the goals assigned to their team by senior management. We must manage to motivate our people to accomplish their individual goals. To do this we must establish and communicate clear objectives for our groups and then set up systems to track their progress toward them. Most of all we must hold our people accountable for their performance. Good sales managers expect a lot from their people. Great sales managers not only expect a lot from their people, they use feedback loops to make sure their people reach these ambitious goals. Great managers know that if they are to "get what they expect, they must inspect!"

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