3 Keys to SUCCESSFUL SALES MANAGEMENT

By Mike Brooks

If you are a business owner or sales manager responsible for getting your team of inside sales reps to make their numbers or achieve sales quotas, then I feel your pain. If you're like many of the sales managers and owners I work with, then I know you're being pulled in many different directions. You're busy: you have endless meetings to attend, reporting to do, and, on top of it all, you have many different personalities to deal with. On one team, each person has different skill levels and experience levels.

To make matters even more difficult, each of your sales reps have different motivation levels as well. Some are comfortable earning $3,000 a month, while others wouldn't settle for anything under $10,000. So how do you move someone with a lower expectation level into a higher level? It can seem like an overwhelming job.

In addition, you've probably never had much real sales management training either. When I ask sales managers what their career path to management was like, they usually reply that one day they were the top producer on the team, and the next they were offered a management position. When I ask them what type of formal management training they were then given, the common answer is either none or very little.

Added to all this is that the actual sales training you are supposed to give your team probably isn't very highly structured or developed either. Most companies' training programs I review seem to be put together randomly. Instead, sales reps hired should already know how to handle selling situations. Instead of sales training, they offer lengthy product training that stresses features and benefits over actual selling techniques. I just know readers are nodding their heads and thinking, "Yeah, you got that right. Now what?"

Well, here's what. Sales management is actually easier than you might think and straight forward if you break it down to its three most important elements. If you concentrate on these three keys and actually make it a priority to implement them, your job will get so much easier, and, more importantly, you and your team will start closing more business deals and making your numbers more consistently.

1. Define your sales process best practices. Provide your team with clear, easy to follow best practices in terms of the specific sales techniques and skill sets that are the most effective for your product or service. Then give them specific scripts and rebuttals to follow, specific qualifying questions, and proper closing tools. Then make sure they are clear and easy to follow.

In other words, identify what actually works in your selling cycle and what the best approaches are. Then develop them into a solid selling system and make it company policy that this is the best practice. Consider every part of your selling process from the first call, to qualifying, to leaving voice messages and emails, to getting back to your prospects, and to closing the sale and handling objections.

The easiest way of doing this is to record what your top producers do in each of the selling situations your product or service goes through and write those down. Ask yourself, "What kind of qualifying questions do they ask? How do they handle the stall at the end of the demo? How do they build rapport? What kinds of commitments do they get at the end of each call? How many times do they ask for the sale?" and so on.

Again, once you have those answers, write them down. Build them into your script book and make sure everyone is trained on your best practices. Remember, you absolutely must make this selling system clear enough for anyone to understand and follow.

2. Implement and monitor the use of this best practice system. Think of a great football team. What do they do? The coaches come up with the best game plan (the system), and then they teach it to their players and practice every formation, every play, and every technique. They drill it over and over, and they watch film of each practice and of each game to make sure their players are following the plan and using the best techniques.

That's what you need to do with your sales team as well. Once you've given your team the best practices, it's up to you to train them on it and reinforce adherence to it. You do that by role-playing in sales meetings and one-on-ones. You do that by observing your sales reps as they are on the phone with their prospects and customers. You record their calls and review them with each rep, and then you make sure they are using the best practices. If you can actually get your team members to use the best practices that you know work, they will begin to get better, and they'll begin making more sales. Very soon, you'll come to realize the old saying is true: "Practice doesn't make perfect. Only practice of perfection makes perfect!"

3. Discipline your team members when they aren't following your sales best practices. First, let me say a word about discipline. Discipline comes from the Greek work that means "to teach," not "to scold or make others feel bad." The proper role of a teacher, coach, or sales manager is to point out when a student or sales rep isn't following the proven tools and best practices needed to succeed. Then, the rep must be *taught* to do it better. That's where your skills as a manager—and where your time—will be most effective.

You could give feedback in your one-on-ones with a sales rep. Recordings of reps who are using the system correctly can be played in sales metings. You could even help by feeding lines to a rep while he/she is on the phone or by instant messaging him/her while you're listening in. Role-play can be helpful for training as well as in this stage as reps may need reminders about how to do better. The bottom line is that it's your job to give your team the right tools to succeed, train them on those tools, and then monitor and teach them to use them consistently.

If you implement all three of the above keys in your selling environment, you will see the quickest and easiest return on your time and investment. Suddenly, coaching will be easier because both you and your reps know what is expected of them. Your time spent working together will be more productive because now you'll have a common language. Your best practice sales playbook will not only allow everyone to navigate through to a close faster, but it will increase people's confidence as well. And that is what drives motivation.

If you miss one of these keys, then you will spend your time wondering what's wrong, and your frustration with the team, with your company, and with your efforts will only get worse. Sales reps will continue to be demotivated, and the talk around the office will turn negative. This is the sales environment you want to avoid and is avoidable if you follow the steps mentioned.

Look at your current selling environment and see which one of these keys is missing. Once you find it, you'll now know what to do! **N**

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