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HOW TO MOTIVATE YOUR TEAM

Keeping a sales team motivated is every owner's and manager's responsibility. These tips will keep you on track.

BY MARK OKUN

The people you work with are your company's most important asset. Having a motivational strategy is the way to build and maintain a high level of enthusiasm with staff. The result is not only a better experience for all employees, but that emotion transfers to their clients.

HUDDLE, DON'T CUDDLE

Each day brings a fresh start, and the morning meeting – or huddle – is the most crucial group meeting you can have. Yes, I mean daily! This is the opportunity to set the tone of the day, pass on useful or critical information, and remind each team member of the overall mission of the company.

The late Steven Covey (author of *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*) stated as Habit #2: "Begin With the End in Mind." For us, the goal is happy clients who buy products. In order for the daily huddle to make an impact, it must be the energizing highlight of the day. It is not the time to share anything negative. When a sales day starts with a negative, it takes extra effort to recapture the positive feelings we want our teams to share with clients. In some instances, the negative emotions cannot be overcome and are evident even when hidden by a smiling façade.

While the preceding paragraph may seem like I am suggesting you gather each morning and sing kumbaya, I am not. There is a strategy to having productive morning meetings that start the day right, and as the morning huddle becomes a habit, many team members will look forward to them.

GUIDELINES FOR GETTING OFF THE SIDELINES

These daily meetings are so essential to the team, and the company, that attendance is mandatory. The way to demonstrate the organization's commitment to the compulsory morning meeting is to start on time, every time. I know that social courtesy in close-knit showroom environments may be to wait for all to arrive before starting, but this is business, and it demands we follow a structure.

Most sales huddles happen 15 to 30 minutes before the opening of the showroom. Approximately two minutes before the meeting is slated to begin, the team should be assembled, the phones are answered or put on hold, and the door is locked.

This practice has a two-fold benefit: first and foremost, it assures that interruptions are kept to a minimum, and it lets the team know that these sessions are to be taken seriously. What happens when someone is tardy? Let them in, but limit participation. After the meeting is complete, assign a "buddy" to review the information with them.

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TAKE A STAND

Keeping the meeting short and on a topic is the keystone to a successful outcome. Standing – not sitting – helps that become a reality. The huddle is not the place to solve or express problems; that would require more time and detail than this purposeful interaction can afford.

After conducting thousands of these types of meetings, I can assure you that issues will be brought up – and that is fine. They must be acknowledged, noted, and when the session is complete, you need to set a time to resolve them.

Standing at the meeting communicates to the group that the gathering will be short and to the point. It's not a problem if someone wants to sit or lean, as long as the huddle stays on point.

DON'T WING IT

Your sales meetings must have a distinct agenda that follows a theme for that month or a specific time period. During the huddle, explain what your focus is and express the goal that you wish to accomplish. The purpose of the huddle is to create a positive interactive dialogue that presents new ideas, skills, and information. What this means is everybody speaks at the meeting.

Having a way to assure that everyone shares can be as simple as going around the group and asking each to take a turn speaking, or make it interesting and let the speaker toss a ball or hand off a "talking stick" to facilitate the next person's turn. This is a lighthearted way to get all involved and have some fun. There is only one simple rule to follow; the person with the "ball" or "stick" is the only one who can speak, except for the meeting leader who is in control.

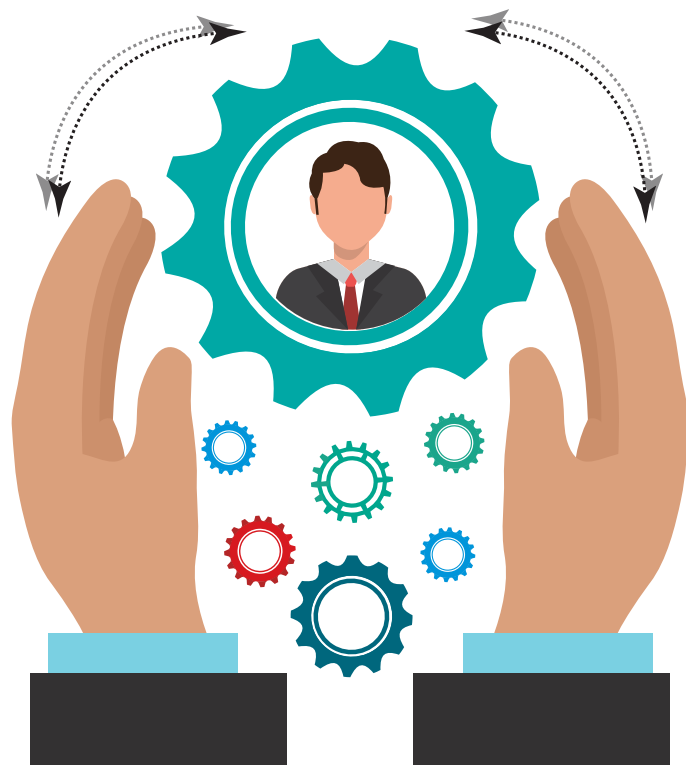
To see results, you need to invest time in these huddles to gather information, create activities that reinforce skills, or introduce new ones. A good time ratio of Meeting Time to Create Time is two to one. If the planned huddle is 15 minutes, the time investment is about 30 minutes.

CATCH THEM DOING SOMETHING RIGHT

Remember, the morning huddle is about starting the day feeling good. The result of a positive morning huddle is that the sales teams leave energized, enthused, and a bit more knowledgeable. These outcomes cannot be reached if we have distilled the morning meeting to facts, figures, and an admonishment of errors.

The activity of "catching" them breaks out two ways. The first is positive acknowledgment of an observed act that is expressed during the huddle. Applaud these team members in front of their peers for notable situations that are positive examples of their role. Then, positive reinforcement must be done throughout the day. The second "catch" is of the "above and beyond" variety. When any staff member is caught going beyond expectations, provide a simple reward. In the past, I have used rewards ranging from small food or gift cards to gift certificates for dinners out, concert tickets, and even a weekend away. This lets the team member include a friend or family member in the celebration of them doing a super job.

"People say that motivation doesn't last. Well, neither does bathing, that's why we recommend to do it daily." –Zig Ziglar



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The morning huddle
is about starting the
day feeling good.



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If your budget is a bit tight for monetary gifts, trophies of all kinds can make an impact – for example, think about unique parking spots, a recognition photo of the employee at the store’s entrance, or a day off that does not impact their PTO.

MOTIVATION IS PERSONAL

While the phrase, “Walk your talk” has been a staple in the management playbook, it is more important than ever in our transparent society. As companies seek to build and maintain a positive reputation with clients, the same is true for the reputation we make with our teams. The team scrutinizes the actions of leadership, and motivation occurs when we ask that they “Do as I say and as I do.”

Leadership motivates by being in the trenches, demonstrating, and mentoring in real time. One of the extended benefits of being a side-by-side sales manager happens when the day’s wins and losses are retold as stories at the huddle. There is a strong emotional bond built between people working together to reach a common goal. When people have a passionate commitment, they are more motivated to be in line with the mission of the company.

Motivation is also inspired from trust, which is displayed in many forms in a showroom. For some, it may mean being trusted with more responsibility; for others, it may be that you value their subject matter input. And for some, it is the trust that comes from working autonomously. Whatever motivates one person may not motivate another. It is the leader’s job to define what drives both the team and each individual.

Selling and supporting sales is a tough job, and motivating our team is where the power lies. This article touches on some of the ways to do that. One principle of motivation that cannot be ignored is consistency. Without it, every action we take to motivate our teams appears only as a façade of reality.

The consistency of meeting times and the consistency of the message that supports the company’s vision and mission will lead to forming desired habits and increasing skill levels.

While motivation is a topic that can be spoken of generally, its implementation will vary from company to company as well as person to person.

As always, Happy Selling! ❖

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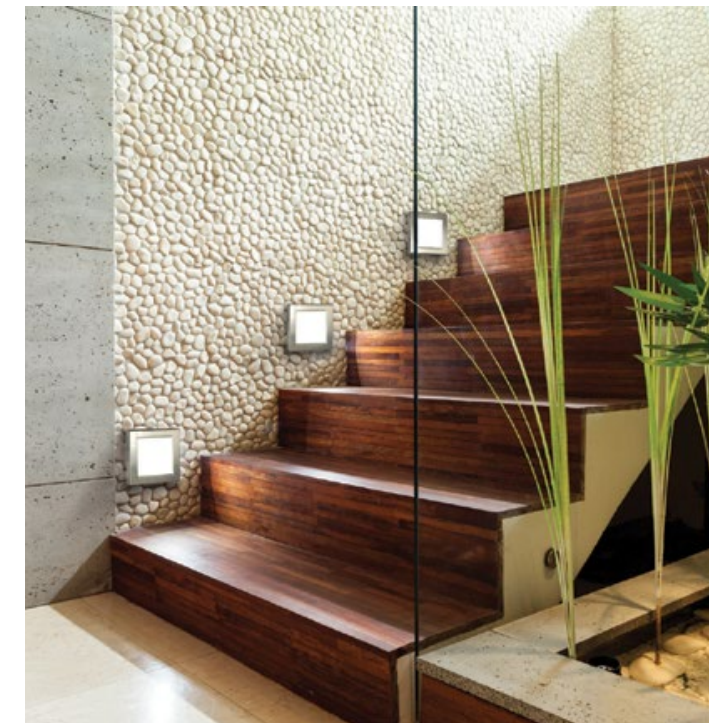
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