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enLIGHTenment
MAGAZINE
OCTOBER 2019

SALES MANAGEMENT

Is a One-on-One Activity

A look at some of the skills and tools needed to help sales managers develop the talent in their showrooms and increase both the top and bottom revenue lines. BY MARK OKUN

Sales management is both a subject and a profession that are near and dear to me. In fact, I had to shorten this article because I have so much to report on this topic!

I have discovered in my career that the role and the position of “Sales Manager” can have a broad interpretation and often the reality of the job goes against the traditional definition. Wikipedia defines Sales Management as: “A business discipline which is focused on the practical application of sales techniques and the management of a firm’s sales operations. It is an important business function

as net sales through the sale of products and services and resulting profit drive most commercial business. These are also typically the goals and performance indicators of sales management. The definition includes this about the role, Sales Manager is the typical title of someone whose role is sales management. The role typically involves talent development.”

THE ONE THING

There are many ways to influence performance. Each skill is essential and will impact the overall production of a sales team. However, there is one

activity that will do more to bolster your sales performance than a hot new product or increasing awareness of your showroom. The one factor that can do more for the bottom line in a showroom or for a rep agency than anything else is time.

Time is required to perform exceptional sales management. The impact of a great sales manager can best be felt if there are four or five salespeople in the showroom or rep firm. As such, sales managers can create an average revenue increase of about 20 percent. That’s like adding another person to the team! This is a welcome result as we face a tightening labor market blended with the revenue increases we all want to see...and, of course, the need to survive.

Large showrooms may have a dedicated sales manager who exclusively works with the team, but the hurdle faced by smaller operations is that the sales managers are often the Jacks and Jills of all trades and this has ramifications felt on both the top and bottom lines.

TIME IS THE SALES MANAGER’S TOOL

For the most efficient use of time, sales managers must prepare and present daily/weekly meetings. They need time to evaluate all of the sales numbers versus the KPIs that have been established to determine actual performance levels. It’s time to observe the individual members of the team in action, make notes, and offer immediate feedback.

With all the activity that goes on in a showroom, time is a precious commodity. It makes sense that the most critical time investment that a sales manager can make is one-on-one skill coaching sessions focusing on the individual sales team members. The result is that both manager and salesperson are working together to improve the results.

Evaluate how your time as a sales manager is spent. If you’re like most, you spend 10-15 percent or less of your time on personnel development; the bulk of your work time is spent on other pressing activities. The percentage of time allocated to do the job will vary with the showroom’s sales staff size, but the rewards will be worth it.

CAM DRIVES THE SALES MANAGERS ENGINE

CAM is an acronym for Coaching, Accountability, and Motivation.

Coaching. Think of it this way: Does the coach of your favorite sports team watch the game from a luxury box or the field? They watch from the field,

of course, making notes and reviewing plays. Do you apply the same philosophy of being present when your team is in action on the sales floor? The time on the sales floor or with a face-to-face appointment with a client is the time to observe and make notes to talk about later.

Sometimes managers confuse coaching with immediate feedback. Constructive coaching is done on a consistently scheduled time weekly, based on KPI data and observations. Immediate feedback is done only when the salesperson is detected offering erroneous information, or they are about to miss a sale. Either situation is appropriate for the sales manager to get courteously involved in the presentation, either correcting the error presented or going in for the close.

In the coaching role, the sales manager puts his/her emphasis on the specific details and activities that will provide the most positive results for the individual and the showroom. One-on-one coaching is the time for completely candid conversations. This time between rep and manager is the only way to change habits and introduce new ideas and techniques. These are the actions that continue

“If you don’t manage sales, then sales manages you.”

fostering personal relationships with team members. Coaching is not the time to discipline or present negative opinions. Bring “just the facts” and let the results drive a pragmatic conversation.

Performance coaching by sales managers requires that there is a commitment to the coaching process from ownership, management, and also the team members. Ownership and management must embrace the priority, the time it takes to do, and the increased value that strategic team development offers. Team members must be equally committed to the priority given to a coaching program and to being a coachable person. Adopt the attitude of being open-minded to new ideas and strategies, broaden your comfort zone to act outside of your box, and be accountable for the results — good or bad.

Coaching is not a one-way street. Sales managers expand their knowledge base as they help team members to succeed and excel in areas that they lacked proficiency in. When coaching a team

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“You can’t manage
what you can’t
(or don’t) measure.”

— Peter Drucker

member in an unfamiliar skill or new habit, invest time to learn and understand the information in question before you can share it. Once you learn something new, it is yours forever, and the lesson becomes another tool in your personal development tool chest.



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ACCOUNTABILITY

This is the linchpin of successful coaching. Both the team member and the sales manager must be accountable to each other to ensure a positive outcome. The team member is responsible for taking action on the agreed-upon skills he/she needs to learn and the tasks to perform. Accountability for the sales manager means they must bring ideas, skills, motivation, and guidance to the session that will help propel the salesperson toward mastery of their profession.

An unwavering commitment to the process demonstrates accountability. No meetings missed, no half-baked plans presented, and no rushing. Each coaching encounter is based on results and supported by the KPI numbers that indicate performance. Sales managers must listen to team members with an intensity to discover the help that they need.

There often is a reluctance to hold salespeople accountable for their performance. The “Nice Guy” management style does not point out issues in a person’s work performance and they don’t identify changes or improvements to a person’s working style. They also don’t discuss the salesperson’s current percentage of their monthly goal achieved or where they rank as a member of the team. If this sounds like you or if this is a description of a manager who works for you, it is a sign of having trouble with being accountable...which leads to having trouble holding others accountable.

MOTIVATION

Motivation is the last segment of the CAM strategy. The reason Motivation is at the end is because the

success of Coaching and Accountability are dependent on the sales manager’s ability to motivate the collective team and the individual.

Motivating the team in a weekly meeting or daily huddle (my favorite) is mandatory for professional sales companies. This required and scheduled get-together is the supporting actor of the one-on-one sessions to be held. This is the time to remind the team of actions and goals each has individually and collectively. It’s time to excite them about trying new techniques, spend time helping each other, and sharing strategies.

Contests, games, and competitions are great ways to motivate a team. Hold creative contests on a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual basis. Of course, the go-to competition is one based on sales volume, and to tell the truth, this style of the challenge is a demotivator.

Since contests can be used to motivate changes in habits, behaviors, and actions, I suggest holding a contest for the most add-on items sold. This is not about dollars earned as much as it is about creating the habit of providing a client to buy more items. Think of impulse purchases and set up your team to win. Place the target item near where orders are taken to provide the prop needed for the team member to ask the client to buy the item. The habit you want to instill is asking the client to buy more once they have purchased something. With everything in place, the law of large numbers is in full effect — and all it requires is that the salesperson introduces the impulse item and ask the client to buy it. The person selling the most targeted items wins!

With contests come incentives to win. One way to acknowledge contest wins or achieved goals that will have a more profound impact and retention is when the reward is not tied exclusively to money. Yes, everyone wants more money, but save those monetary rewards for annual or bi-annual improvements. Some of the best prizes for motivating people for quick wins are: free lunch for a week, an extra day off with pay, theater or concert tickets, toys for the employee’s children, passes for the local amusement park, exclusive use of a preferred parking spot, a night out for two, etc. The only caveat is that the incentive should be equal to the challenge. I assure you that if you put any of these suggestions into practice, you will see a reward.

As always, happy selling! ❖

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