

What Happens When You Don't Train Your Sales Managers

Situation: a company's top sales rep is promoted to sales manager, but does not receive training on how to perform a sales manager's duties and responsibilities. Here's what happens then.....

Untrained sales managers:

Don't know how to be an effective sales manager, so they continue to do what comes naturally – they continue to sell. But this leads them to spend more time with their top salespeople, who are working on the biggest deals, which leaves the rest of the sales team out in the cold, without a leader/coach.

Allow the inmates to take control of the asylum. Untrained sales managers don't define standards of performance and they don't coach to standards. When unsuccessful sales behaviors occur the manager fails to confront the situation, and what you don't confront you condone. Without sales discipline there can be no team excellence.

Hang on to low producing salespeople far too long. Because sales managers aren't coaching reps on a consistent basis, the manager doesn't know why the rep continues to turn in a poor performance. The manager then reacts to a rep's poor production by "buying" the rep's excuses, erroneously assuming the rep will turn it around. But by this time the problem is too old to fix, the sales manager's opportunity to correct this problem sales rep occurred months ago, and the coaching opportunity was missed. Intuitively the sales manager knows this. She blames herself for the rep's continued failure to perform and, out of guilt, gives the rep even more time on the job to fail some more. The manager's acceptance of one salesperson's mediocrity brings the entire team down.

Become high paid, administrative assistants to the salespeople. Untrained sales managers think that if they solve the problems that salespeople bring to them then reps will automatically sell more. Not true. Managers need to expect salespeople to solve their own problems instead of doing their thinking for them. When a salesperson comes to the manager with "a monkey on his back" it is the manager's duty to a) ask the rep how the problem should be solved and b) see that the rep leaves with the monkey!

Fail to follow-up – untrained sales managers make suggestions to salespeople on how to improve and then assume salespeople will implement their suggestions. After all, when the manager was a salesperson, he/she implemented the boss' suggestions. Managers who fail to follow-up create a team culture that's lacking in accountability. Without accountability there can be no team excellence.

Don't manage time effectively, or set priorities. There are actually 29 specific timewasters that sales managers suffer from. Sales managers become buried in “stuff” work, reactive fire-fighting, feeling overwhelmed. They're working harder than ever, but unable to catch up, and no time for what should be their #1 priority - to coach. The result? The individual on the team with the most highly developed sales skills - the sales manager - has no time to coach. No time to teach his or her talents, skills and energies to those individuals on the team who need and want it the most.

When sales managers somehow do find the time to coach, they jump in and take over the customer meeting, which prevents the salesperson from learning, and implies to the customer that the salesperson is unskilled. This is the syndrome I refer to as, “Move over Rover, let the great one take over.”

Unsure how to diagnose a sales performance problem, so problems in sales *competence* and *willingness* persist. Managers harp on the bad results, but don't address the unsuccessful behaviors and activities that created those poor results.

React to the issues of the day with no strategic plan for developing the team. Questions that sales managers should consider in their strategic/team development plan include: Which salesperson is ready to step up and assume the role of the “bell cow” on this team? If I were to set a team goal to increase sales by 30% over the next 12 months, what obstacles would stand in our way? Is there anyone I need to de-hire? What step of the sales process are we weakest in, and what specifically can I do to correct this?

Think primarily of job tasks, spend little or no time thinking about non-task issues such as team morale, individual rep motivators, career planning for sales reps, etc.

Effective sales management is a skill set that is altogether different from selling. I don't understand why many companies seem to believe that, without any training, a great salesperson will automatically become a great sales manager. One thing I do understand, however, is that the companies that do train their sales managers will see faster ramp-up time for new-hires, increased sales productivity and morale, and more satisfied and loyal customers.

In short, the entire sales team will improve results if a company will make a training investment in their sales managers.



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