

12 Sales Management Tips for 2012



1. **Don't become a "rainbird coach."** I had a neighbor who would wait until his lawn had turned brown, and only then turn on his rainbird water sprinkler. I see a lot of sales managers who act the same way: they wait until there's a meltdown before coaching their people. Far better for a lawn—and a salesperson—to receive regular "sprinkling."

2. **Set and focus on priorities.** Sales managers can easily become buried in "stuff" and reactive fire-fighting. They're working harder than ever but are unable to catch up, and have no time for what should be their #1 priority: to coach salespeople. The only person who can solve this problem is *you*. Set priorities for you and your sales team and then focus on them. Don't allow distractions to take your eye off the ball.

3. **Focus on developing both "skill" and "will" in your sales team.** Effective sales managers know they can't just monitor results. They need to pay attention to both the skill and will of each salesperson, so they target the underlying problems that create low win rates.

4. **Triage your coaching time.** Your peak performers will likely do well without much help from you. Your bottom 20% won't achieve much even if you coach them to a 10% improvement. Spend most of your precious one-on-one sales coaching time with your "emerging contributors" – those salespeople who have the best chance to develop into peak performers.



5. **Turn prima donnas into bell cows.** Having a high-performing sales person is great for your bottom line, but if you allow them to you're overlooking a great opportunity. Engage the prima donna in helping you define standards of high performance, then use them as a bell cow that others on the team can look up to and learn

from. Do not allow them to continue with behaviors detrimental to your team.

6. **Develop and focus on a sales team development plan.** Identify what steps of selling different teams members are weakest in and understand how to help them improve. Determine what obstacles are standing in the way of achieving your team's sales goals.
7. **Follow-up.** Managers who fail to follow-up on suggestions or instructions they give to their team members create a team culture that's lacking in accountability. Don't assume your team members will have the same discipline around follow-through that you had as a salesperson.



8. **Teach your salespeople about how customers buy.** One of the biggest problems in selling is that salespeople have no idea how customers buy. So naturally they focus more on their sales process than on the customer's buying process. They too easily get out of sync with the customer and lose a lot of opportunities. You can have a huge impact on sales effectiveness if you teach your sales people how to link the steps of their sales process to the steps of the customer buying process.
9. **Challenge your customer focus.** A lot of sales managers tell me their companies want to be more "customer focused." But the customer's perspective isn't represented at all in how they train, coach, and review their salespeople! Challenge yourself to come up with ways to embed the customer into your sales management processes. For example, track *where customers are in their buying process* rather than where your salespeople are in their selling process.



10. **Be an "early coach" instead of a "white knight."** One of the most common complaints I hear from salespeople is about a sales manager or executive "riding in on a white horse" to save the day and close a deal. The end result of this white-horse ride is often three-fold: white knuckles for the salesperson, a bigger discount for the customer, and lower profit for the company! Your best chance at influencing the opportunity occurs *early* in the customer's buying process, when the customer is defining their needs and shaping their vision of a solution.

11. **Use positive confrontation.** No sales manager can afford to ignore poor sales performance or behavior. Discipline yourself to deal directly with the salesperson in a coaching mode. Observe them in action and give feedback to help do a better job the next time.



12. **Don't adopt any new monkeys.** Sales managers like to be problem solvers. But they end up with a lot of monkeys on their backs. Next time a salesperson tries to hand off their problem to you, politely hand the monkey back by asking two questions: What have you done about it so far? What do you think *you* ought to do now?



Kevin Davis, president of TopLine Leadership, is the author of ***Slow Down, Sell Faster! Understand Your Customer's Buying Process and Maximize Your Sales***, available wherever books are sold. His company provides custom workshops based on the "Slow Down, Sell Faster!" sales model, as well as a Sales Management Leadership workshop for sales managers. Contact Kevin through his website at www.toplineleadership.com