

Retain Top Sales Talent



by Don McNamara

ONE CONCERN of sales management is the turnover rate of salespeople. Sales managers want to stabilize the sales team, improve their performance, and retain top performers. Salespeople seldom leave for money! They leave when other factors come into play, making the job of achieving their goals difficult to reach.

To retain top sales performers, sales managers must institute several sound sales practices:

1. Develop realistic goals and objectives with team members. Goals should be mutually discussed and agreed upon collaboratively. Both managers and team members must buy in to what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, and what resources will be required to deliver the results. Monitor progress using a management-by-exception system.

2. Be proactive in developing common goals and objectives with sales reps. Performance will soon rise. With a plan, sales management is proactive rather than reactive or inactive. Setting goals and objectives, coaching their completion, and monitoring success are functions of sound sales management. Winging it leaves far too much to chance. At the end of the day, "What gets measured gets done."

3. Spend time with your sales reps. Your salespeople are your customers. Use the resources of the entire organization to present a more professional image and increase the probability of a sale. Sales managers who spend time with their reps in the field always have better performing teams. Joint calls permit sales managers to coach their salespeople. Managers can observe skill set improvement, determine loss in skill capability, and test the current attitudes. Sales managers who spend time with their people are taking care of their customers—the sales force.

Sales Rep Aggravations

Here are four common practices that aggravate salespeople:

1. Sales managers who take over. Skilled sales managers are involved listeners

in sales calls. They do not take over. When the manager takes over calls, customers may see him/her in a sales role, and not as a manager. How can the sales manager and the sales rep know what they did not do well in the call? Solid salespeople enjoy demonstrating their ability in front of the boss, who should use this as a time to compliment them for work well done, or assist them in improving their skills. Wait until the call is over and do the "post mortem" in a constructive manner.

2. Sales managers who don't listen or want information. Sales managers who pay attention and listen to what their reps are saying to them without fear of retribution, establish and maintain trust. If management acts in an arrogant fashion and ignores the issues that sales identifies, defections will soon occur. To gain the respect of a sales team, sincerely listen to their sales-related issues.



Attend to what they are saying, then make the improvements as necessary.

3. Managers who lose their cool. Consistency marks mature and confident sales managers. Does the sales manager maintain composure in times of stress, or does the sales force receive temper tantrums and tirades when sales miscues occur?

4. Managers who play favorites. Is there evenness in supervising the sales staff, or are there glaring examples of favoritism? Imagine the mentality of an over achiever who observes blatant examples of someone else being played favorite. Salespeople have developed radars and antennas when it comes to such management behavior. Aspire towards fairness. Make sure you let

your sales representatives know they are being measured for sales results, and leave politics to government. You will be amazed at how well the sales team responds and how the general morale of the group improves.

How's Your Sales Culture?

In many companies, the conventional wisdom is: If we build it or have it, they will buy it. If that were the case, you would not need salespeople. Great companies tend to attract, engage, and retain the best and the brightest. The best product, service, or system will be only marginally successful unless it is properly presented. This takes salespeople. Look at the consequences of having an ineffective sales culture. Identify those elements needed to build a positive one.

Companies that have the most efficient internal operations expect and get more sales results. Inspect your policies, internal processes, procedures, practices, and programs. Do these impede the sales force or get in the way of salesperson effectiveness? Do they encourage salespeople to take a sales orientation? Does the sales compensation plan reward the behavior and sales achievements you desire? When your internal systems are efficient and effective, your salespeople will spend more time selling, rather than telling or saving prior sales.

It may not be that the sales team needs to be motivated as much as the company needs to understand why they are being demotivated. Salespeople will be re-energized when they see barriers and limitations to their effectiveness being addressed and lifted. If the company is working towards the same objectives, salespeople feel they have some control over their destiny. Eliminate the factors causing loss of sales force confidence in the company.

Expect results and performance, and expect your sales team to respond. Take a proactive position with sales management. Ensure you and they have the same goals in mind. Insist they supervise the activities of the sales staff to attain previously determined objectives. Completion of objectives leads to goal attainment, for both the sales team and the sales management. Amazing results transpire. Top performers will know that they are valued members of your company. Sales reps will stay in place when they see that their goals can be accomplished within the organization. **SME**

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ACTION: Create a sales culture of expected results and performance.