

The CEO Refresher

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Sales Citizenship

by Don McNamara

Executive Overview

Experienced sales managers are always on the lookout for new sales representatives who, among other attributes, possess good people skills and are pleasant to be around. There are two fundamental reasons they should select incoming sales representatives who have sound social skills.

Making You at Ease

Sales managers know those who can communicate effectively and put others at ease are prone to be liked by their customers and prospects. Generally this translates into more orders that are usually more profitable. Customers like doing business with friendly, cordial, respectful professional people. Additionally, there are significant other reasons for picking ones who are just plain "nice."

Realities

No company is immune to occasional mishaps such as incorrect billing, late and inaccurate shipments or less than desirable quality. Whenever miscues happen the customer's first call typically gets placed to their sales representative for problem resolution. Customers expect the situation to be researched and rectified with feedback on what is being done and what will happen thereafter to fix the situation. They expect timely information from the sales representative. There is not a customer who would refuse to give the salesperson the chance to correct the situation. And you can bet they will have more confidence in the individual who treats them with respect and empathy, is forthright and honest from the very first contact - whether on the phone or face to face.

How Your Company Views a Professional

Now the bonus. Sales people who tend to be pleasant with their customers also tend to be pleasant with their own internal resources. Sales person involvement with their own support personnel, whether billing, shipping, production, engineering, operations, or any other internal group is as much a function of their role as is making sales. And those reps who are cordial and avoid laying the blame at the feet of company resources find their support personnel more apt to assist them than those who irritate those same resources. Your internal resources always spend more time and take greater effort resolving issues for those sales people who are easy to work with and are not into the blame game. In short, they appreciate being treated with respect just like the company's customer.

The fact is sales people who act in this fashion are considered team players and get respected themselves by both the customer and their support organization. Mentally, they operate with a spirit of cooperation; they take a "let's get it resolved together" attitude. They understand the importance of customer service and how valuable this activity is in total customer satisfaction.

The Bottom Line

The next time you recruit and interview a potential star performer look for the "manifested" skill of how they deal with mishaps that occur as a function of their everyday role. Without hesitation ask them how they guide the process of fixing a miscue. Identify their relative "pleasantness index". You will find you attract and retain those who take a proactive approach to problem resolution as well. You see it's in their nature to get things right - it is part of their "aptitudes and abilities."

Being pleasant, proactive and performing with resolve are "manifested" skills; you can identify them with appropriate questions while interviewing. Experienced sales managers know that these "manifested" skills are desired and required for overall sales effectiveness. They strive to identify sales candidates who have them already established. These are clear indicators of how well they will perform for the customer and for your organization since a predicator of the future is how they handle themselves in the present.

Sales Citizenship

When you find that person, you have found not only a future star, you have identified one who understands the essence of Sales Citizenship. This sales person will get more accomplished with less effort and sales management involvement. Not surprisingly, this same sales candidate is one who will sell more and have the fewest problem orders and accounts, because this person takes responsibility for external customer satisfaction and internal resource cooperativeness. They are grounded in the realities of business. And may we hasten to add, you will hear complimentary comments about that new hire, which of course is an accolade for your own ability to find and hire a winner. Moreover, having a team of solid company sales citizens is an attribute of a highly competent sales manager.

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