

Getting the Most Out of Your Sales Team **7 Must Haves to Ensure Success**

Have you ever wondered what happens between the interview process and thirty days into the position that changes a dynamo sales professional into an underperforming drag to the team?

Hiring, motivating and retaining really good sales professionals are hard. In a world filled with technology feeding constant data to us, leaders spend less and less time focused on the human capital of the sales office. So often when a sales person fails it is not because *they* did not deliver but because the *employer* did not deliver.

In one of my first major roles as a sales leader for a large team, every time I would go to my supervisor to complain about a team member's lack of production, the first thing my supervisor would ask me is, "Have you done everything you can do to make sure this person succeeds?" Though I found this a very frustrating response at the time, I learned a great deal from the experience.

Before you start to write a *Personal Improvement Plan* that will most likely lead to termination and turnover in the team. Ask yourself these very important questions.

1. Does the work environment provide a place for productivity to flourish?
2. Have you provided adequate orientation and training?
3. Is there an open line of communication that works both ways?
4. Does the sales manager understand their personal goals and how their goals are important to the team's goals?
5. Do they have a plan and does that plan align with the overall business plan?
6. Are you measuring them and holding them accountable?
7. Are you rewarding them appropriately for their success?

Does the work environment provide a place for productivity to flourish?

It is very likely that as the leader of the team you have your own private office. Not every sales organization has the luxury of space to provide every member of the team with a private office. In many cases bullpens of cubicles are designed or people are doubled or even tripled in an office. Yet sales managers are dialing for dollars, cold calling, and scheduling appointments and for this, privacy is a must and background noise can be distracting.

Is the office technology up to date? It can be very frustrating for someone who is trying hard to achieve good time management and multiple times a day they are experiencing system crashes or growing old waiting for a slow system.

Have you provided adequate orientation and training?

This is typically where most leaders fail. Since most sales positions are open for 45 -60 days before being filled, there is an urgent desire to have the new manager to hit the ground running. That is certainly a plan that will lead to disaster. At a minimum a 2-3 week orientation and training should be completed before turning a new sales person loose to sell. The orientation needs to introduce them to the overall company's mission and not be limited to only the sales department but also have them spend time in the other departments that will eventually support them and the customers they bring in. Next you need to make sure they really understand the product they are selling. Confidence is one of the most important attributes of a good sales manager and if they are not fully knowledgeable to the product they will appear inadequate to their targeted customer. Have the new manager shadow one of the more senior managers on sales calls and presentations. Make sure they are adequately trained on systems, technology and SOP's.

The training cannot stop with new hire orientation and the first 30 days of employment. People appreciate when you, as an employer invest in them with ongoing training. Make sure you have addressed an ongoing training plan that ensures all members of your team can grow personally. As a result, you will find they become quiet loyal to you as a leader.

Is there an open line of communication that works both ways?

When I was leading sales organizations, in my first meeting with new team members, I would promise them they would never have to go home at night and wonder what I thought of their work or performance. I promised them I would always be very candid and direct with them. I warned them that sometimes they might even find my approach abrasive. However, the good news for them was I expected and would encourage them to be equally direct with me about their challenges, needs and even my leadership style. Communication has to work both ways and each person has to have equality in the conversation. An open door policy is important but sometimes it is just as important to close the door, shut the emails and text and have a one on one conversation with your team member. Trust me you will learn more about being a leader in those sessions than any other resource can provide, especially if the manager trusts you enough to be open and honest with you.

Does the sales manager understand their personal goals and how their goals are important to the team goals?

In my career working with thousands of sales professionals, I was always surprised at how often sales managers were moving aimlessly through their day because they had no idea what their goals were and how their goals supported the team. It is very important that sales managers understand the expectations of what they need to produce. Not only does this plan need to be presented in writing and reviewed with the manager, it is important to make sure they are given an opportunity to ask questions and agree to the goal. If a sales manager feels they have goals that are not attainable, you have lost them from the start. It doesn't mean that you will give your team members easy goals, you can motivate them and stretch their sales ability but they need to know that you can qualify the goal and work with them to understand the equation that produced the goal. Once they buy in, they will work hard to achieve and even exceed their goals.

It is equally important the manager understands how by achieving their goals they help the team succeed and if they drop the ball they may cause the whole team to miss the mark. A little healthy competition in a sales office is not a bad thing and if managed appropriately you will create a synergy within the team where by they motivate and help each other succeed.

Do they have a plan and does that plan align with the overall business plan?

Hopefully as part of the training and orientation you have adequately reviewed the existing business plan of the company. I am always amazed at how much time goes into an annual business plan only to place it on a shelf and not refer to it or use it as a guide to execute the plan. So often it doesn't come off the shelf until it is time to complete the next annual plan. An annual business plan should be your roadmap to success. Make sure that a new team member has fully reviewed the business plan and understands the tasks from that plan that will become their personal responsibility. These action plans are available for them to use and to build from as they develop their own personal action plans.

I am about to quote an old cliché but one that is proven to get results, “plan your work and work your plan”. Work with managers to ensure they are following this golden rule of sales.

Are you measuring them and holding them accountable?

Any good sales professional understands and expects accountability is part of the job description. Ensure that as part of the one on one communication you are having with the manager, you are discussing goals and action plans and discussing how well they are executing on the action plans and meeting financial expectations. If they are exceeding goals, discuss what you see and they believe are the reasons for the success. So often we focus on the challenges and try to analyze for solutions but miss the opportunity to duplicate our successes. When there are challenges become part of the solution and ensure you are removing any obstacles that is keeping them from making their goals and executing on their plan.

Are you rewarding them appropriately for successes?

All the mentoring and motivating in the world is not going to help if you are not providing reward and recognition appropriately. I highly recommend the incentive compensation plan be approached with the “keep it simple” approach. Do your homework. Make sure you are competitive with the market and the reward equals the effort. Most important the manager needs to understand it. Too often incentive compensation plans read as if the stars, moon and planets must align at the exact time the manager is facing due north. They have to see it to believe it. If they can understand the process, they will work towards achieving the highest level of the plan. An individual that has chosen sales as an occupation is likely a person that likes to control their own financial destiny and they embrace the concept of their effort equals the amount of reward.

In conclusion, before you start to turn over a position, ask yourself if YOU have achieved your responsibilities as a leader to make sure you have done everything you should to ensure this individual was given every opportunity to succeed. Yes, sometimes you can't change the people and in that case you have to change the people but in almost every failed relationship it was not the fault of only one of the participants.