

SALES & MARKETING

THE SALES PLAN TO
EFFORT WIN



by Jack Daly

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Each of us is ultimately responsible for the level of success we are surrounded with.

As Sales Leaders, we have the unique opportunity every day to coach and lead our associates to new heights.

Are we continually gaining peak performance from our teammates? Remember that any inadequacy in our teams is a reflection of our proactive coaching efforts. So ask yourself, are you committed to building a world class sales organization?

Depending on where you are now and the size of your sales force, this worthwhile goal may take three to five years to achieve.

If you are ready to lead, join your teammates in the ongoing challenge. "World class" is attainable if you have a passion to achieve it, if you have the budget and other resources to devote to this purpose, and the support of your CEO or owner.

First, how do you measure up?

Sales Leaders interested in greater team success have two choices today: Either we can wait for the market to improve - or we can become more effective sales leaders. Each of us has the tools to forge his or her own destiny.

Increasing the skills of salespeople is the most direct way to build a sales team.

Just as we train sales professionals to focus on building relationships rather than chasing deals, we encourage managers to strengthen their mentoring abilities, instead of pursuing numbers.

Recently Sales & Marketing Management magazine surveyed more than 200 sales managers, to discover what it takes to

be a great Sales Leader. Despite the different industries represented, there was strong agreement on what makes a sales manager stand out.

Here's your chance to bench mark yourself against what others say it takes to lead and manage successfully in today's business environment.

Rate your proficiency at the top eight management skills identified in the Sales & Marketing Management survey:

Excellent (E), Good (G) Average (A), Poor (P)

___ Listening

___ Communication

___ Leadership

___ Coaching

___ Empathy

___ Integrity

___ Ability to motivate

___ Goal Setting

Listening was cited as the most important of these skills, "You can't decide or lead without the knowledge," explains Bernie Steiner, Vice President of GPS transportation. Suggestions for listening and on improvement include:

Prepare and commit yourself to active listening

Look for your prospect to reveal his or her Highest Value Needs when listening.

Concentrate and try not to let your thoughts wander.

Plan to report the general essence of what you are hearing to someone else later.

Take notes - but adapt your note taking to be appropriate with the speaker and the situation.

In the Lamalle Report on top executives of the 1990's, the top five factors cited in achieving success by those earning over \$250,000 annually were: 1. Communication (cited by 71%) 2. Intelligence (64%) 3. Integrity (54%) 4.

Experience (50%) 5. Enthusiasm and positive attitude (46%)

Our associates look to us to be active communicators and inspirational leaders. But remember: People will listen to what you say, but their behavior will be shaped by what you do.

As leaders, we must lead the charge to take advantage of today's changes. Fast-emerging technologies, combined with a reconfiguration of many businesses and industries, are working both within and around our companies.

Peter Drucker recently noted, "Every organization has to prepare for the abandonment of everything it does." We're seeing this every day as business consultants.

NEW CULTURE You'll have trouble creating a new culture if you insist on working in ways that are consistent with old paradigms. Organizations can't stop the world from changing - the best they can do is adapt.

Smart teams change before they have to; lucky ones manage to scramble and adjust. And the rest?

During the 1980's, a total of 230 companies - or 46 percent - disappeared from the "Fortune 500." Size does not guarantee continued success when leadership is lacking.

Proactive field coaching of our sales teams is a must. Sales professionals need our skills and guidance to help them work with their prospects and clients.

Jim Koch, CEO of the Boston Beer Company, said it well: "If more CEO's had to go out and sell their products, day in and day out, they'd pay a lot more attention to what they were making. When you're out there selling, there's no place to hide. It's the acid test."

Not surprisingly, Koch spends two days per week in the field with customers and salespeople. We believe coaching is necessary today for all sales leaders - regardless of their title.

Here are seven questions worth considering in between calls, when working with our sales professionals in the field.

1. What is the purpose of this call?

2. What is the value of this account to you?

3. Who is the decision-maker?

4. What is her or his highest value need?
5. What is our customer's market share?
6. Who is our principal competitor? Why?
7. Are we positioned to take over this account? How?

We are all aware that there are more salespeople in our markets than the volume of activity requires. Encouragement to stay focused is called for - the sales leader must step up here.

Integrity is a must for the Sales Manager, just as it is essential for sales professionals. Personal integrity is necessary for a transfer of trust to take place between yourself and your team. (See sidebar for motivation incentives.)

PLAN TO WIN To find true success, we must know where we are going. We must have a plan. Denis Waitley framed it this way: "Most people spend more time planning Christmas and holidays than they do planning their life!" It's our responsibility to help our sales reps focus on their targets, and get their goals in writing.

Minimal standards of performance should be communicated and enforced. Efforts to reach those acceptable levels should be positive and ongoing.

How often should you hold incentive contest? According to the Sales & Marketing Management survey:

Annually - 32%

Monthly - 21%

When appropriate or necessary - 13%

Quarterly - 10%

Semi-annually - 9%

Never - 8%

Weekly - 7%

As a minimum we recommend the posting and distribution of sales performance rankings on a monthly basis. Our job as Sales Leaders is to grow our people. Effective sales managers let sales reps know where they stand and how they rank in comparison to others, determine their goals and aspirations, and develop plans to help them improve.

To reach your goals, you must start by successfully hiring and training. Here is a checklist of a dozen essential attributes of a stellar salesperson. Use it to evaluate your current salespeople, as well as in hiring:

Self-motivation	Sales experience	Intelligence
Positive attitude	Work ethic	Communication skills
Integrity	Track record	Competitiveness
Interpersonal skills	Personality	Listening skills

Refine the above list to develop a written profile of the sales professionals you want to find. You need to be constantly networking to locate those key producers.

Too often sales leaders make the mistake of saying their office is "fully staffed." Instead, we need to recruit on a regular and ongoing basis in order to keep upgrading our sales force. Sales Managers should have a written list of sales rep candidates, as well as a written plan for winning them over.

PRIME THE PUMP

Regularly scheduled sales meetings often are convened out of habit, monopolized by the sales manager, and conducted without a defined purpose. The result? No one expects anything useful to be accomplished.

Here are some suggestions for making the sales meeting one that people look forward to - and leave with renewed vigor and skills to employ in the market:

1. Sales managers should limit their talking to no more than 25 percent of the time.
2. Rotate the chairmanship among all sales professionals. Make it "their" meeting.

3. Begin every meeting with recognition - tying it into specific success stories.
4. Spend a minimum of 20 minutes in each meeting on sales skill development. Exercises such as role practicing, reviewing case studies, building presentation skills, and the development and refinement of a personal "success guide" and good candidates for this section.
5. Invite guest speakers. Don't overlook the possibility of inviting a top-performing sales rep from a competitor. You'll be surprised how many readily accept an invitation to "strut their stuff."

GETTING AHEAD

Which one of us wouldn't benefit from a course in computer technology? Who among our salespeople couldn't benefit as well? Active leadership is the way to get them there. By "walking the talk," you'll take the initiative.

Similarly, an ongoing reading program can help retool the initial basics obtained in a school format. Respondents to the Sales & Marketing Management survey read an average of eight business books per year.

Are you keeping up? The following books were identified as "must-reads" for every sales leader:

1. The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People - Stephen R. Covey
2. One-Minute Manager - Kenneth Blanchard, Ph. D., and Spencer Johnson, M.D.
3. How to Win Friends and Influence People - Dale Carnegie
4. Swim With the Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive - Harvey Mackay
5. In Search of Excellence - Tom Peters
6. The Art of War - Sun Tzu
7. Think and Grow Rich - Napoleon Hill
8. The Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun - Wess Roberts, Ph. D.

To this list we would add:

The Art of Leadership - Max Depree

How to Make a Buck and Still Be a decent Human Being - Rick Rose explains how he holds a two-hour sales meeting each morning, four days per week - which none of his team wants to miss.

INFLUENCE CIRCLES As contact management guru Harvey Mackay would say. You're only as good as your contacts. Take a cue from survey respondents, who had 2.5 files of business cards on their desks (or in their computers).

Not only should we as sales leaders be maintaining a thriving, growing database - but our sales team also should be. If we are not leading them in this direction, we are falling short on our responsibilities. Our sales reps should have a database filled with information on past consumers - and then maintain contact with them.

An ongoing list of prospects also should be kept, and regularly worked. To continue growing a loyal clientele, this list should contain no fewer than 30 names, addresses, and phone numbers.

Each prospect must be prioritized by potential value to the salesperson, and the database should include information such as the anticipated date of working together, time of last call, and results of that contact. Once again, Sales Leaders demonstrate the way through their "Rolodex management," or complete contact management program.

Finally, sales managers were asked, "What's the best part of your job?" Almost half agreed that helping others succeed is the most important aspect of selling. In fact, nothing else came close.

Dealing with personnel problems, terminating non-performers, and paperwork were cited as the least-enjoyable aspects of sales management.

Martin Pazzani, Vice President of Marketing at Heublin, Inc. summarizes our Sales Leader well: "The old command-and-control style of leadership will not work in a complex environment that changes rapidly, communicates instantly, and relies on a diverse work force for results. Future leadership will need to set high goals, define the standards, create the culture and let the organization do the rest."

HOW DO YOU MEASURE UP? REMEMBER, YOU ARE THE MESSAGE!