

7 Ways to Build Highly Successful Sales Teams

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Introduction:

One of the most exciting and challenging roles in any company is sales. Success in sales requires you to be the best you can be emotionally, physically, socially and technically. For those managers who put the time and energy into developing a strong sales team they will be well rewarded in many ways.

Through the various people I have managed I have found that most sales people fall into one of three different groups...

- **Firstly**, there are those who are below the line. These are the people who constantly struggle to reach their targets and who usually take up most of your time.
- **Secondly**, there are those who are on the line. These people consistently reach their target, but struggle to achieve outstanding results. This group can be relied upon to bring in a level of sales you can certainly live with.
- **Lastly** are those who consistently achieve above the line. This group isn't happy just to reach target, targets for them are a starting point not a finishing point. This group require little maintenance, they prefer to get on with the job and occasionally like their egos stroked when they do well.

All managers would love to have a team who operate above the line. However, how do you develop a team to achieve this? What practical steps can busy managers do to unleash the potential of their sales force? Sales success is more than just being good at one thing. It takes several things working collectively together to build the great team you desire. In this all important article we look at 7 critical things you can do to help your team achieve the results you know are possible...

1. Hire the Right Players:

You may think this is overstating the obvious. However, with the lack of good salespeople in the market, you may be tempted to take someone less than ideal to fill a gap. Let me give you 3 words of advise – Don't, Don't, Don't. A sales person is such a crucial part of any business and a wrong decision will cost you \$1000's and/or could damage the reputation you have with some clients. When you are in the selection stage of recruitment your options are broad, however when you select

someone you've made your choice and you must live with it, so choose carefully!

To start building a team that achieves at a high level firstly requires you to have the right people in the right place. It is estimated that 50% of a team's success is determined by the type of members it has. As you well know the composition of your team effects the results you achieve...

- Having the wrong people on your team produces bad results.
- Having a mixture of great, good and the wrong people on your team produces inconsistent and overall unsatisfactory results.
- Having good people on your team produces good results.
- Having great people on your team produces great results.

I'm sure your company has a good recruitment process. However, here are tips that might help...

- What's your first impression of the candidate when they arrive for the interview? Do they warm you? Do they have an attractive personality? If you had a choice, would you spend 30min in a social setting with them? The way you instinctively perceive them is exactly the same way your clients will also.
- Do they share the same values that you, your team and company have?
- Do they positively sell themselves? If they can't at least sell themselves to you, how on earth will they sell your products/services?
- Interview them with another colleague, they may pick up things you don't.
- Interview all finalists twice. It's amazing how they can come across the second time.

50% of a team's success is determined by who is on the team.

- Don't believe all they say. Some sales people have a distorted perception of how good they really are.
- Phone their last two places of work to do reference checks. Put little weight on the word of a friend if they offer them as a reference.
- Assessment tools can help you see the candidate more objectively.

- Ask them how much money they want to earn. This question shows you two things. Firstly, it shows how hungry they are to succeed and secondly it shows the personal worth they place on themselves. Hunger and self worth are two fundamental qualities of being able to achieve above the line.

The right people in the right place, produces the right result.

Now, you may be thinking, that's all very well, but I already have a team, so what do I do? You will find the rest of the article very helpful in that regard. However, in general terms you are obviously happy with those that are currently achieving on and above the line. But, what about those who week by week struggle to get anywhere near the line? Basically you have four options, you can...

- **Tolerate them:** You accept their poor performance with little intervention.
- **Train them:** You coach them to higher levels of knowledge and skill.
- **Transfer them:** You find another place for them within your company where they can excel.
- **Terminate them:** You graciously and legally work through the process of removing them from the company.

Someone once said that the tasks of great sales managers are summarised in three words - Hire, Inspire and Fire. You will notice which comes first. The right people in the right place, produces the right results.

2. Develop an Empowering Culture:

We all have our own understanding of what culture is. Regardless of what your definition is however, we would all agree that when there's a good working environment there's a greater chance great success will follow. In the book *Leading with Values* the authors outline a study that estimates the impact of culture within a business being 8 times more powerful than strategy in influencing people.

One of the easiest ways to illustrate the impact of culture within a sales team is one of a person biking along a street. Image the impact of two different winds blowing on her. If she had to bike against a head wind that would make it harder to go in the direction she wanted. Although she will probably get where she wanted to go, it will require more physical energy, more mental determination and require a longer rest when she got to where she was going. Imagine then a tail wind, less effort would be required, the journey would be more pleasant and she would arrive there quicker than anticipated.

This illustration very simply shows you the influence culture can have on your team. Which wind is blowing within your team?

As the manager is the 'keeper of the culture', let's look at practical things you can do to develop an empowering sales culture...

- **Be passionate:** You teach what you know, but reproduce who you are.
- **Believe in your team:** This shows you value them and gives greater confidence for them to excel at a high level.
- **Celebrate Success:** The job is made easier when you are recognised for the results you produce.
- **Address shortfalls:** Poor performance destroys individual and team morale.
- **Try new things:** Be adventurous, be open to new methods and ideas.
- **Continually train:** Train your team during weekly meetings and specific sales events.
- **Have fun:** Do things they don't expect, surprise them, laugh.
- **Be supportive:** This is especially true when times are tough or when they have had set backs.
- **Provide right tools:** Ensure your team has the right resources to do their job efficiently and effectively.
- **Shield you team:** As much as possible keep your team from in-house politics and bickering.
- **Develop Teamwork:** Encourage open communication, co-operation, sharing best practices, getting leads for each other.

3. Set Goals that Inspire the Heart:

We have all heard about the power of planning and the importance of goal setting. But, how do you get people to set goals so that they are more than just ink on paper. The most effective goals are those that energise and help propel you forward through the good and tough times.

People have goals for many reasons. Some set goals for the feeling of accomplishment they will receive when they achieve them. Other set goals to receive public/peer recognition or a company reward. Some have financial or more personal needs they want to fulfil. Whatever reasons your team sets goals for it is important to understand that reaching the companies goals, (budgets, units sold, profit etc) is only one part of effective goal setting.

You are the keeper of the culture.

It has been my experience with many sales people that effective goal setting occurs when the heart is set on fire. For most people however, just trying to reach company targets may not be the catalyst to

inject the needed inspiration to go the extra mile and dig deep to overcome challenges. Although company targets may form part of their motivation, most sales people have more personal needs they want to fulfil. A good manager is able to identify each of their team's primary personal motivators and blend them with the company's objectives to form a set of goals that will inspire the heart and produce a win-win. When your team has goals that inspire the heart...

- Your team are driven to give more of themselves as they know it will personally benefit them.
- Your team see company targets as a means to an end, not an end in itself.
- You don't need to spend as much time trying to motivate them.
- Your team will be more proactive in learning further skills.
- Your team will tend to set 'stretch' goals which they are confident of achieving
- Your team will start to develop a powerful momentum of success.

4. Be a Leader, Manager and Coach:

Being responsible for a group of sales people is a privileged and dynamic role. I say privileged because in most cases you get to work with some very talented people. I say dynamic because everyday is different and yesterday's victory doesn't guarantee tomorrow's success. A sales manager's role is very multi-tasked and requires you to wear many 'hats' during the course of a day. Some of these hats include...

- Motivator
- Leader
- Boss
- Friend
- Father
- Mother
- Manager
- Disciplinarian
- Counsellor
- Coach

Three key roles: Leader, Manager & Coach

In terms of being a person who can develop a great team, I strongly believe that three of the above stand out. They are leader, manager and coach. Although sometimes, you may interchange the use of each term, they have a distinctly different role to play in developing a great sales team.

- **Leader:**
 - Those who look after sales people are usually called sales managers; however their first role is one of being a sales

leader. A leader is one who helps set the overall vision and purpose for the team and helps to build the culture that fosters the right results. Leaders also set an example for their team on how to sell successfully.

- One word which best describes a leader is 'see'. A leader is one who sees the potential of the market they compete in and the potential of those in their team. They work hard to inspire their team to reach the goals they know they are capable of achieving. Leaders help develop new products and find new opportunities for current services that have not yet been seized. They tend to be big thinkers and yet are able to take others with them and thus enrich everyone in the process.

A leader sees what others sometimes can't.

- **Manager:**
 - The sales manager is one who attends to more menial tasks including, paper work, writing reports, monitoring progress, running meetings, doing budgets, stock control, complaint handling and general admin. Most of these roles are fairly non-exciting, but are an essential part of the backbone of their team's success. What a sales manager also does is provide their team with the necessary market, client and company information to do their job more effectively. Without a manager team effectiveness would be less and the effects of what they do would be quickly noticed.
- **Coach:**
 - We are all very aware of the critical role and influence a coach plays in a sports team. With a sales team a coach's role is just as important and necessary. A coach's function within a sales team is more one on one. It isn't telling people how to do their job or what they have done wrong, moreover its working with each person to help them reach their goals. A coach helps identify areas people are already good at and ways to make them even better. They also seek to identify areas that are hindering success, (attitudes and skills), and look to overcome these with practical training suited to the individual.
 - From time to time a coach will go out on calls with each team member to observe them in a selling situation. They will provide them with positive and timely feedback which will give each person the

- necessary steps needed to grow in skill and achieve their goals.
- An effective coach won't allow a member of their team to become lazy in the pursuit of their goals, but will continually motivate them towards high performance.

5. Positively Overcome All Negatives:

One thing we love about good sales people is their high level of emotional energy and drive. When this drive is functioning well, you can expect to see great results. However, if something upsets these people you can equally observe them becoming very upset, (sometimes at you) and disrupting those around them. Just like a coin has two sides if you want the drive and enthusiasm you sometimes have to be prepared to manage the emotional volatility as well.

It is unreal to expect people who are dealing all day with prospects, clients, objections and rejections to be on top of their game all day, everyday. There are times when something pushes them over the edge and they let you and others know about it, (big time!). The key to overcoming these 'outbursts' is to work positively to overcome them in the shortest amount of time. If the situation is not addressed quickly it can fester for days or weeks and eventually blow up, well out of proportion. An undealt issue can also rob your team of valuable energy and time, which could be better spent selling!

Here are some helpful keys to positively overcoming all negatives...

- Only get involved when necessary. Try to train your team to resolve their differences.
- Get onto it quickly; issues seldom disappear, if left they usually get bigger.
- Have firm boundaries on what is acceptable and what isn't.
- Don't be emotionally blackmailed. Sometimes you will have to say 'No' and others will have to live with it.
- Realise that the problem isn't always the problem; it can be a lot deeper.
- Help people to see it from others perceptive, as they usually have a one sided view of the matter.

Unaddressed issues don't go away.

- Letting people talk can be all that's needed to resolve an issue.
- Chinese whispers can play havoc in offices, so people may be upset over something that's not true.
- Ask: What's the problem? What caused the problem? How can it be solved?

- Don't always take on the burden of being the problem solver, as people will learn little for next time.

6. Reward and Recognise Top Performance:

In life people love to hear the words, "well done." When you work hard at something and achieve a goal it gives you a great sense of satisfaction. Your success can become even sweeter though when others notice and acknowledge the effort you put into achieving that goal. A sales environment is no different. When your team work hard and achieve the desired goals it is good to be able to recognise and reward people accordingly.

Everyone loves to hear the words, "Well done."

All managers I meet understand the principle behind, 'what gets rewarded gets repeated.' However due to work demands and pressures they sometimes fail to do what they know they should. One month can quickly slip by with several opportunities to reward their team and yet they fail to give appropriate recognition. Here are some other reasons why managers don't establish an effective reward system...

- They feel that because they don't need to be 'patted on the back' others don't need it either.
- They tend to focus on what their team isn't doing right and fail to see the good they are doing.
- They lack the imagination or time to seek out meaningful rewards.
- They feel that they must spend lots of money
- They have had a bad experience where it backfired on them.

I have seen many different types of reward schemes ranging from simple words of thanks right through to company paid overseas family holidays! Most companies however, fall somewhere in the middle of these two. Here are some things to consider when choosing to reward and recognise your team...

- It should be for effort and results above what they are paid and required to do.
- It should be open to everyone, not just a few pet team members.
- It should be meaningful to the recipient and not a blanket, one type fits all.
- It should be done as soon as possible after the achievement of the goal.
- It should become a regular part of what you do with your team and not go in fits-and-starts.

- It should be for both skill development and task related achievements.
- It should be varied in its form so it isn't seen as an entitlement.
- It should be such that it creates a desire to achieve more.

There is much attention today being put on treating the customer as number one and adding value to the relationship we share. However, what about having the same intent with your team? What about treating them like you would like them to treat your customers? When your team feel you value them, they will in return value your customers. Now that's something to think about next time you go to say thanks to a team member.

7. Effective Training in Key Areas:

Within a team there are critical times when training is a must. The first of these times is when the team is being formed or when new members come on board. Another time is when the team's performance and motivation is low and sales are lacking. Another time is a specific period of the year, which usually forms part of your going training programme and lastly, before a special campaign or new product launch.

Training accelerates learning.

The nature of training then can be summarised into different groupings...

- **Initial:** As part of induction.
- **Self:** Skills learnt through books, tapes, outside seminars, friends.
- **Specific** (To develop specific sales skills)
- **On the Job:** Learning from your success and mistakes, learning from each other and from one on one coaching.
- **Formal:** Through outside training institutes as well as skilled sales trainers/motivators.

So why is training so important and vital to success? Although your team will naturally grow and develop as a part of their role they will not be able to do it as quickly as they can through specific and focused training. What specific training does is accelerate the natural learning process so that your team can reach certain skill levels quicker than they could alone. Effective training is like putting fertiliser in the ground, you know it will quicken the growth of those it mixes with. When you regularly include all of the above training elements into your team you will start to see a big shift in peoples thinking and behaviour.

Although some may take longer to put ideas into practise, when they do they will see an increase in their results.

When I think of the sales teams I've managed and helped there seems to be key areas that people require ongoing help with...

- **Staying on Top:** How to stay motivated despite rejection and disappointment.
- **Prospecting Skills:** How to find new business opportunities.
- **Needs Analysis:** How to find a client's hot button so you can sell what they need and want.
- **Presentation Skills:** How to present your products/services successfully.
- **Overcoming Objections:** How to overcome low price shoppers and those wanting discount.
- **Pipeline Constipation:** How to close the sales in your pipeline.
- **Closing Skills:** How to close a sale with confidence.
- **Ongoing Business:** How to keep a client buying from you again, and again.

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