

Building a Sales Culture

Sales Managers

In any business selling operation, the key to long-term, consistent success is the quality of sales management. The first challenge is selecting the right individuals for this crucial role. They must not only have good sales skills/experience themselves (in order to 'lead from the front' when necessary), but must also have a talent for managing what is often a very diverse and temperamental group of personalities. Their ability and willingness to 'individualise' their management style is particularly important in the sales arena, where so many factors can affect the success of their team members - the talent/skills/knowledge/personality of the sales person, pre-existing level of market penetration, existing customer/introducer base, local competition, geographical factors etc. Sales management skills and knowledge can be taught (see below), but talent cannot; and if the management 'talent' is not there, then no amount of sales management training will work. It is possible to design specific recruitment/interview processes to identify the necessary talent - many of them are revealed by individuals unconsciously in their language patterns during interviews. Selecting and recruiting the right quality sales managers for the business is the single, most important step in building a sales operation.

Management Framework

Once the right management individuals have been selected, the next stage is to agree a common sales management framework for the operation. We would recommend that you adopt a sales management by objectives framework, which has at its core the belief that sales results are the outcome of properly planned sales activity and that individuals will only carry out the necessary activity if they feel capable and confident to do so. The Q.D.Q. (Quantity, Direction, Quality) model is one of the most effective to focus both sales people and their managers on the right sales activities - this model, together with a Salesflow pipeline tool can form the basis for effective Personal Sales Planning. Sales managers must be capable of communicating and winning hearts and minds at the front line in relation to the importance of personal sales planning; and using this as the platform for all of their performance management. Sales managers will need help to develop the necessary management tools and be trained in their use (and how to 'sell' them to the front line).

Coaching and Performance Management

Managers must be capable of not only providing effective sales coaching in the field, but must also create a culture in which the 'ownership' of coaching is where it belongs - with the individual salesperson. In our experience in large organisations too often the responsibility for coaching is placed with the manager and is therefore seen as something which the organisation 'imposes' on the individual - this badly damages the effectiveness of any coaching delivered. Each sales person must be encouraged to take individual responsibility for their own coaching (and only those who do so should be recruited in the first place) - this is what all great sportsmen and women do, and it is in that arena that coaching is most visibly effective. Managers must also be helped to make effective decisions regarding who they choose to spend their time with. Most sales managers spend most of their time

with their worst performers (indeed organisations often encourage them to do just that), not a very good use of their limited time - consistent underperformance in any field is usually a talent issue, which results from errors in recruitment (see below). Whatever previous coaching training they may have had, it is important that they continue to refine and develop their coaching skills further using the latest techniques (for example, those within NLP - Neuro Linguistic Programming). Ongoing, consistent field coaching will be crucial if they are to really embed any sales skills training given to their teams.

Front-Line Sales & Process

As above the first challenge for sales managers is recruiting front-line individuals to the team who have the necessary *sales talent*. Again, these talents are identifiable using a structured sales assessment process. As with the management team, recruiting individuals without the necessary talent has a devastating effect on overall performance - apart from the 'human' aspects of the pain all round as the individual struggles to perform and his/her manager struggles to help him/her, there is the cost in terms of salary until the individual leaves/is encouraged to leave, the lost management time (which could have been used so much more effectively on talented team members), the potentially enormous cost of lost deals, wasted leads and the possible damage to introductory sources and the company's reputation. Sales knowledge and skills can be taught and coached, but only to those who already have the innate *talent*.

Often, the recruited salespeople will have come from a diverse range of backgrounds and so it is important to establish a common agreed framework for selling the company solution. All consistently successful human behaviour in any field of endeavour has a *structure* to it. Not everyone sells in exactly the same way (nor should they) and often we find that salespeople are not consciously aware of the structures they are using (or whether those structures are working for them or against them) – the approach with sales training should therefore be to help each individual to *find the structures that work well for them*. It is important to use an overall consultative selling process at the core of any training, which can enable everyone to analyse and practice different structural elements within a common framework. It is obviously very important that the sales managers go through this process first of all, so that their future coaching follows the same pattern.

We would also recommend that any training incorporates practical application sessions to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to 'bed-in' their own structure. In addition, it is very useful to use certain language patterns and other NLP techniques with each individual to embed those structures at both the conscious and unconscious level so that they find it easy and automatic to adopt the new behaviours.

During the work with the front-line sales team it will be important to agree with them the company *Sales Propositions* ie. What you've got, what's good about it, what's different about it, and how you flex it according to whomever you may be up against in the market. The team should develop a suite of sales tools built around the company's Sales Propositions which can be used by all front line sales people during their sales meetings.

Finally, in the longer term, it will be important to establish a pattern of continuous personal development across the team so that the sales operation (a) 'sharpens the saw' and is able to achieve continually increasing targets and (b) becomes self learning.