



ADVICE FOR MANAGERS



Managing Perception: Make Sure Everyone Knows How Great Your Sales Team Really Is

[By Heather Bennett]

The role of sales manager is a complicated one. While all managers are tasked with getting the best performances from their teams, sales managers have additional concerns. The most obvious difference requires that sales managers reach revenue goals, both long term and short, that have direct impacts on their own compensations, as well on those of their teams.

While the subject of compensation makes the role of sales management complex, it is often not the most challenging issue facing sales management in many companies. Often, sales professionals must deal with company cultures that harbor some level of hostility towards the sales organizations.

This is not a new phenomenon. History has never been kind to the archetype of “salesman.” From the wily “snake-oil” vendor of American lore to Arthur Miller’s pathetic Willy Loman to the evil greediness depicted in cult-classic films like *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *Boiler Room*, the profession of salesperson has taken a quite a beating.

Within organizations, sales teams are often lightning rods for ill will. When a company’s revenue is down, the sales team is often blamed for being non-productive. When sales are up, salespeople are often seen as overpaid. Making matters worse in the last decade, improved technology has led to dispersed sales teams, often working far from company headquarters, being managed remotely. Sales activity is often called into question by those who don’t see the “calls” being made.

While it has been the tradition for sales teams to ignore such acrimonious feelings, such an environment can be potentially devastating to the sales effort. Unchecked hostility can cause breakdowns in getting the support a sales team needs to function. For

instance, sales teams often rely on customer service, product management, sales support, or implementation teams to get deals made. Low morale in these teams can cause a bottleneck that can directly impact sales growth.

Perhaps even more devastating to a sales effort is an upper management’s lack of confidence in a sales organization. When the executive team has a negative perception of a sales team, a breakdown is soon to follow. Top-producing salespeople know that organizational strife will inevitably inhibit their abilities to pull in numbers and will often start to pursue better opportunities. Sales managers will often react by instituting plans of ultra micromanagement that typically cause more problems than they fix.

So what is a sales manager to do?

All sales management, no matter what the environment is at his or her company, should consider managing the perception of the sales team a primary responsibility. In addition to training, coaching, recruiting, strategizing, and removing obstacles to the sales effort, a sales manager must create a plan that keeps the sales team in good favor with the rest of the company.

If you’re a sales manager, here are 10 things you can do to improve the perception others in your organization have of your team:

1. **Hire and maintain a quality team.** The perception of a sales team is often shaped by its weakest member. Don’t let non-producers or problem people hang on for too long.
2. **Insist on a strict code of behavior as your team interacts with others in the organization.** If a salesperson is having trouble getting something that he or she needs, don’t leave him or her to fight the battle solo. Get involved before disagreements become heated.
3. **Keep your eye out for manipulators.** Salespeople are masters of manipulation. They often need to be in order to get deals made. But don’t let your team con others in the organization into doing their work. Clearly define roles and responsibilities and make sure they are observed.
4. **Publish sales activity.** Almost all sales organizations publish revenue numbers. Consider also publishing sales-activity statistics for the rest of the company. How many cold calls were made? How many meetings were conducted? How many proposals were presented? This keeps everyone informed of what it actually takes to close a deal.



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5. **Give credit where credit is due.** Reward teams and individuals who go above and beyond to support the sales effort. Send out a thank you email. Take a team to lunch. A little recognition goes a long way.
6. **Recruit from within.** Look for budding sales talent within your organization. This dispels that notion that a sales position (and the income potential that comes with it) is unobtainable to those on the inside.
7. **Insist on rigorous training.** Make sure your sales team is well versed in your product or service. If they have to rely on others in the organization to provide basic information to the prospect, their value to the sales process becomes diminished.
8. **Consider complaints.** If someone complains about a salesperson on your team, take immediate action. Look into that matter and communicate what you found, whether the complaint was substantiated or not. This will let everyone know that you won't ignore problems.
9. **Brief the executive team and invite feedback.** Regularly share your plans with the executive team and ask for opinions and perceptions. Don't let bad feelings fester. Even though it may be difficult to hear that someone lacks confidence in your team, knowing the perception is much better than managing reservations that are not communicated.
10. **Be successful.** It's more difficult to manage the perception of a team that is not performing well. Work hard and demand that your team do the same. Inevitably, results will ensue.

About the Author

Heather Bennett of Heather Bennett Resources is a management consultant and sales trainer who helps companies that are too busy selling to fix the way they sell. Believing that sales processes need to be as unique as the companies that employ them, Bennett helps her clients through project management and training with the goal of creating a space for companies to work through their toughest sales challenges. She works with companies of all sizes and has had particular success with growing sales teams of 10 or more. Her innovative approach has supported clients in many industries, including technology, insurance, manufacturing, retail distribution, agriculture, and healthcare. She can be reached at www.heatherbennettresources.com or at (201) 659-9109.

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