

SALES STAR


Don McNamara: Motivating the “Want” in Sales

[By Akbar Ali]

For every sales manager looking to transform his or her underachieving or merely satisfactory sales force into a superior selling machine, look no further than Don McNamara. As founder and president of Heritage Associates Inc., a full-service sales management consulting, training, and coaching company, McNamara is in the business of turning the conventional into the exceptional, motivating sales managers and their staffs of all sizes and industries to reorient their techniques to produce extraordinary results. Indeed, his company’s philosophy spells it out plainly enough: “Improved effectiveness leads to improved productivity. Improved productivity results in increased revenue.”

McNamara’s start in the industry came about during his college days, when he received what can only be called fortuitous advice from a college counselor he worked for part-time. Graduation was approaching, and like so many others heading out into the real world anticipating how to secure their professional footing, McNamara was told to sell for the Burroughs Corporation.

However, this was not the only factor which compelled McNamara to pursue a job in sales. Financial stability was also important, especially in light of his struggles growing up.

“I grew up in a family that was very poor, so I decided when I went to work I would earn the type of living that allowed me to have the lifestyle my family did not enjoy,” he says.

When the time came for him to pursue his college degree, he chose to attend a university where he would be nourished both academically and spiritually.

“I went to a Jesuit college which caused me to develop a philosophy of life, career, and personal behavior. Ethics, morality, and solid decision making were the cultural breeding that enabled me to enter the workforce and personal life with a solid grounding.”

Upon graduation he heeded his counselor’s advice and began working for the Burroughs Corporation, selling mechanical, electromechanical, and electronic accounting and bookkeeping equipment. McNamara soon found that Burroughs was an ideal place for launching his career, though he challenged the traditional methods of operation at the company, ultimately establishing himself as a prized company asset.

“I stayed with them for over eight years. In

fact, at the time Burroughs would not allow a sales representative to change divisions. I was in the business machines group and wanted to sell for the electronic systems division. My stance was ‘Either transfer me, or I will go where I can sell mainframe computers.’ They relented, and the results were six new system sales in the first year in IBM’s backyard—namely Upstate New York.”

McNamara intended to follow a traditional career path he had envisioned for himself, but the business landscape changed so dramatically over the course of his career that he was forced to rethink where he wanted to end up professionally.

“I expected to end my career as the senior vice president of sales for a large multinational company. However, all the MBOs, takeovers, etc., changed the landscape dramatically, such that well-compensated sales executives are a rare breed with the same company over a protracted period of time. Longevity and company loyalty are replaced by ‘Make your career mark and good money while you can because you may not be there next year.’ After 30 years in corporate America, I decided that the best way to make a difference in a company and leverage my experience was to become a sales management consultant.”

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. Golf, cook, vacation to new and interesting places in Europe.

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. Something with holiday (seasonal) music.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. *Harvard Business Review*.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. *Boston Legal*.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. Lee Iacocca.

Q. What makes you laugh?

A. My three- and five-year-old grandsons.

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Given his extensive experience in sales and training, McNamara has enjoyed a number of successes throughout the course of his career. Among his many accomplishments was his early successful effort to replace two IBM computers with one Burroughs computer, a switch which engendered large savings for users.

He also ran a corporate sales and first-level sales management training program for a then-major computer manufacturer, regarding which he observes, "I have seen every conceivable type of sales and sales management person."

"In my very first field sales management position, I took a group from number 15 out of 16 districts in the U.S. to number three the first year," he adds. "This represented a doubling of quota year to year from the prior year, and we still were 126% of assigned target."

"In the second year I took a new vertical line of business, and we were the only district to make our quota in the western U.S.

"I consistently turned underperforming teams into top producers in their respective companies for the 15 years I was in management, at any level — from district, regional, national, and VP levels."

The wide breadth of McNamara's experience has also allowed for some important and consistently relevant lessons to emerge, including one of his personal maxims: "Where the 'want to' is high enough, the 'how to' comes easy."

He's also learned that senior executives like their data crisp and well presented.

"Making it easy for them to understand the solutions and the recommendation you make saves them the time and, as a manager, is what they expect of their direct reports," he observes, adding that "[a]t the end of the day, anything that saves money or makes profits is what executives zero in on."

Two important things he has learned about the working attitudes of senior executives are that "[m]ost senior executives have not come through the sales ranks and think professional sales and sales management is a black art" and that they "do not appreciate that you can manage a sales organization just like any other group, just that you need to make sure you constantly hold them accountable for results."

McNamara also notes, "When companies promote from within, they are letting the staff know they value contribution and achievement which should lead to a promotion. The difficulty is that most

promoted don't have a clue what the next job requirements are [and neither does their management], so the promoted flounders for too long a period."

Certainly, McNamara is a keen observer of behavior and results, and he has extracted bits and pieces of others' work and advice from colleagues over the years that have shown him the best way to make it in a competitive industry.

"There were none that overly influenced me; rather, I took the best practices, techniques, and skills from a myriad of sources to hone my own sales and management skills. I also paid very close attention to what didn't work so as not to duplicate the failures of others."

As a professional dispenser of advice and guidance, McNamara's counsel to the aspiring sales professional or manager pertains to the all-important dual necessity of self-awareness and professional education.

"Recognize staying current in your profession is one half of the job and only says you are treading water. Continual and constant learning and recognizing the application and implications of information is the other half."

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