

Motivate Your Sales Force

by Ty Bello, RCC

The time you put into coaching sales reps will reflect on the bottom line, but you must be organized and consistent.

It's time you learned how to coach and motivate engaged and disengaged team members. Time is valuable, and your time is an investment in the future success of sales. You must set aside time to coach your sales team members, and not discriminate between new and old team members.

I speak with owners and sales managers, and ask them how much time they spend with sales team members. The typical response is "not enough," and this is always a red flag.

Coaching a sales team is different than "managing" a sales team. We like to say "coach sales and manage the numbers." Your role as an owner or sales manager is to train, inspire, and motivate your sales team members to perform. The 80/20 sales coaching formula is 80% developing strategies and marketing, and 20% coaching.

If you are not growing your sales team, your business will not be growing. If we work 40 hours per week and take 20% of that time and apply it directly to coaching, we will need to set aside 8 hours. The majority of owners and sales managers lack the understanding of what coaching the sales team actually means. The sales team member is the physical representation of your organization to the referral community.

With that in mind, coaching your sales team can be broken down into several areas: one on one; group sales meetings; customer service; billing; and service. During your one-on-one time, the coach can review the numbers and account or referral source activity, marketing strategies, monthly themes, and educational opportunities for the referral community. The coach must always use this time with the sales team effectively, and plan in advance. Nothing will turn a prime motivational time into an absolute nightmare more than an unplanned meeting. Likewise, each department that the sales team will meet with must be prepared and have a weekly agenda.

Tools and Tactics

- Use the 80/20 sales coaching formula.
- Learn how to coach and motivate team members.
- Balance incentives, bonuses, and commissions to get the results you desire.
- Keep a healthy balance among sales team members, and do not promote poverty or retirement.
- Develop accountability and feedback loops within your team.

When you use your 8 hours of coaching wisely and effectively, you will see significant return on your investment in less than 60 days. However, you must stay consistent and make these educational times a priority.

The main variable of coaching a sales team always comes down to the individual. You must coach people in a way that reaches them. No two people are alike, and thus you cannot coach them the same. Your strategies, marketing plan, themes, and other applications can be taught and/or delivered the same way, but coaching the individual on the "how to" will take an individual approach.

In every organization, there are those who are 100% on board. And there are those who are disengaged and becoming less and less invested in the organization. Engaged employees are like a good racehorse. They are winners, and they love to do their jobs. How do you motivate the winners? Money is a great motivator, and bonuses can be powerful. But remember, these people already like their job, so how do you take it to the "next level?" Is there a chance for promotion for them? What role can you play in getting them there? Can you give them more freedom? Are there areas of interest you can foster for them, such as training or becoming a "knowledge expert" in an area?

Employee appraisals are a great way to formally discuss where employees are and where they want to be. Use self-assessment tools and career self-management to uncover goals and aspirations. Find out what you can do to help them get there. It is also a great time to discuss what "keeps them going"—you may find it isn't always money. Special recognition, praise via feedback, taking them and their spouse out to dinner to celebrate milestones, allowing them the chance to take classes at the local university are all possibilities. Most of all, remember to thank them often.

These are the people you need to keep engaged and challenged, or they will begin to become disengaged. Disengagement is not a one-time event. It takes months or even years for the apathy to build toward complete disengagement.

A disengagement may look like this: New sales reps start with enthusiasm, then situations arise and they begin to wonder if they are making a difference. They want more autonomy and start to distrust their leaders. Then they question if they should have even taken the job. Soon, they may think seriously about quitting.

This goes on for a while as they try to change things. They may make suggestions and/or talk to coworkers to get an idea of the current "drift." If the "drift" is negative, it can lead to a sense of hopelessness. When they feel there is no hope, they resolve to quit and passively look for another job. When the situation still doesn't get better, they actively seek another job—usually without your knowledge. They accept the new job offer and subsequently quit, or even quit without a job and stay unproductive.

Sometimes the engaged sales team member is the hardest to deal with, because we lack ideas on how to inspire and coach them. If that happens, you may want to simply ask them. This is not an area you want to guess at. If you are wrong, it may cost you a team member, and ultimately business and market share.

For those of you who have a new salesperson (within the first 6 months to 1 year of employment), this conversation should be relatively easy. For those who have sales team members who have been with you for more than a year, this may be a bit more awkward. With more longevity may come more skepticism. "I have been here for over a year and we are now having this conversation, what's up with that?" Regardless, this conversation must be had, and you must understand the "carrot" for each sales team member to keep them engaged, or bring them back into engagement.

VENDING MACHINE SALESPeOPLE Sales teams are becoming more like vending machines. You need to put a coin in the slot to get results. Bonuses and incentives are important to motivate any sales team, but they should not be the only part. We must create bonuses and incentives that provide a fair and equitable return for both the business and sales team members. We must be students of our numbers and understand the referral process and community, profitability, and behaviors that will drive our sales.

The following are the first five steps to building an incentive, bonus, and behavior-based program:

1. What is a fair base salary?
2. Define incentives, bonuses, and commissions.
3. When will these be paid?
4. What products are most profitable and will generate a higher yield for incentives, bonuses, and commissions?
5. Model your plan. What will be paid in incentives, bonuses, and commissions?

In approaching a fair and equitable position for both the business and sales team members, keep a healthy balance and do not promote poverty or retirement. Poverty is when there is an imbalance in the plan and the sales team member is not fairly compensated for their sales efforts with incentives, bonuses, and commissions. Retirement is when the sales team member is overly compensated for sales efforts with the combination of base salary and incentives, bonuses, and commissions. When a sales team member is retired, they don't really need to hunt; they can just farm and be fine.

The words that are the most descriptive in defining the posture of your sales team member are: engaged, disengaged, retired, hunter, or farmer. Knowing these words and their impact upon your business as it relates to sales and the sales team member will provide you with tremendous insight on how to coach and motivate your sales team.

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