

> SMART MANAGEMENT

THE CORNER OFFICE

> OFFICE VS. THE FIELD

One manager and one salesperson square off on issues facing sales organizations today

AT ISSUE: What one task is the poorest use of a salesperson's time?

MANAGER: My first thought was paperwork, such as last-minute requests from upper management for lists of people that should receive a particular invitation for an event, or reports on the top accounts and how much they will bring in this week/month. But in the Internet space, the poorest use of a salesperson's time is tracking down information from internal sources. Facts/figures, programs, sponsorships, pricing and new opportunities all change daily, so it's nearly impossible to keep up. Internal sales sites are a great start, but they can't be kept up to the minute with the latest and greatest. So taking the time to track down the right people to get the right answers in a very tight time period is challenging to say the least. There really is no fix for this due to the nature of the Internet. But the downside to this is the sales force is internally focused instead of being externally focused. And as we all know, being externally focused is how any company makes its revenue goals.

—Sharon Kelley is regional sales director for a national Internet company.

SALESPERSON: Many daily activities like the Internet, cell phones, paperwork, paper-shuffling and reviewing reports keep us away from building client relationships. Busy-work ties us down. With constant interruptions, who in the world has time for relationship-building? This is where the best rise above the average. The best salespeople minimize their time spent on the mother of all busy-work, customer service. This is not to say that customer service isn't critically important; how we handle adversity that manifests as a customer service issue is an opportunity to build the relationship. It should not be handled by the professional, but rather by a "go-to" support team. The professional communicates the issue to the team, emphasizing the importance of client satisfaction, and then he/she gets out of the way. Customer service issues will always consume our time if we let them. We need to embrace them and turn them over.

—John Fitzgerald is a financial advisor with Multi-Financial Securities Corporation.

[THE PULSE]

10%

The average increase in profitability shown by companies managed by women, as opposed to those with male CEOs.

SOURCE: 2007 STUDY, FINNISH BUSINESS AND POLICY FORUM EVA

Jumpstart Your Team's Performance

Your first 30 days with a new sales force

BY MARY DONATO



Let's set the stage: You've been given the opportunity to become the leader of a sales team that has had proven success in the past, but has recently been in a slump. You have been asked to return it to the glory days. So where do you start? Here are immediate actions you can take to jumpstart your team's performance and get it back on the right track.

Set expectations. Let everyone know what you expect from them and what they can expect from you. As a leader, you must raise the bar and set the pace.

Identify the key activities that drive results. Driving your revenue number is important, but develop a goal for weekly activities, too. For example, if you sell sales-process improvement solutions, an important activity may be meeting with senior sales executives. Let's say you find out that on average, only one or two calls to this level of decision-maker are being made. Establish a target of four to five per week.

Teach reps how to achieve activity goals. Don't assume your team knows how to achieve the activity targets. If they haven't been doing them in the past, something has prevented it from happening. Has it been a lack of personal motivation? Perhaps no one inspecting activities? Some other issue?

Once you establish the right metrics, track activities weekly and monthly. Find out who on the team is able to achieve the goal and how they are doing it. Ensure others learn from those best practices. Once you've personally had a chance to observe and discuss activ-

ities with your reps, identify those who can't make the journey and address their situations right away.

Identify the team's strengths and weaknesses. Develop a learning plan to help reps improve their skills. Weekly team meetings should be used as learning opportunities, a time to open people to new ideas. Have a customer talk about the reasons they chose your company versus a competitor. Have a rep on your team or a top sales rep from another company discuss creative techniques they are using to set appointments or close business.

Inspect what you ask for. Don't ask for paperwork, reports, Excel spreadsheets or summaries if you're not going to use it or inspect them. It becomes a waste of time for everyone. I personally love weekly updates and read each one in detail. It tells me a lot about the person's approach and how they run their territory. It also gives me an indication if something is getting in their way.

Provide ongoing feedback during one-to-ones, as well as quarterly and yearly reviews. The latter two should be in writing. Ask people how they think they are doing against established criteria and let them know how you feel. Focus on their strengths as well as areas for improvement. Be sure to gain feedback on how you're doing as a manager to support them.

If you have suggestions on what has worked for you in the first 30 days of leading a new team, go to www.smm-soundoff.com and share your ideas.

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