

Professional Service Providers



Ball of String Sales Management Supervision

By Don McNamara CMC

Mr./Ms. CEO, here is a question for you.

How many times have you hired a new sales manager and because he or she was experienced and successful somewhere else, they understand how to be successful in your organization? Moreover, did you take for granted that the new manager understood what was expected of them on the very first day they began with you? And unfortunately sometime later discovered they do not have your company's sales process, policies, procedures and prices well understood?

In many ways you vest authority to your sales manager to make instantaneous decisions with your sales staff, as well as when in the customer and prospect presence. Unless your sales manager is fully knowledgeable (and that means tested in some fashion) about how it is done in your company, predictably a few things will come unraveled.

Try this the next time you bring a new sales manager aboard; that is try the "ball of string" approach.

As you verify assigned minor goals and objectives are being completed, you can let a little string off the ball to see how the increased authority and responsibility is handled. Then, as more difficult objectives are completed you let a little more string out, giving a little more opportunity to demonstrate their grasp of your company. After successive measurement periods you will have an understanding of exactly what the new managers' capabilities are so far. Now you are in a position to identify what skill set, additional product or company knowledge is required for enhanced performance - or if corrective action needs to be taken.

Why do this? Coaching your sales manager to improved performance involves understanding any present competencies, as well as those areas that need shoring up and improvement. When you turn your new sales manager "loose" if you will, you will discover further along that what you had assumed at the start was most likely premature. They are not ready to be considered full-fledged sales manager – at least not yet in your organization. Assuming they are up to speed too soon probably will require you to intervene, or worse yet perform triage in rectifying scenarios created from lack of company and product knowledge, or inappropriate supervision of your sales team. Also expect to receive phone calls from your prospects and customers asking you 'what is going on with your company anyway?'

Try the "ball of string" technique the next time you select and hire any new manager. Letting a little string out as you go and as objectives are met ensures you know where the manager

is in their understanding of your organization. You'll find you understand how well the basics are understood, as well as what you need to address with them so they continue to improve. Through continuous observation and coaching, you will always be able to judge what remains open for improvement; letting a little more string off the ball as you go.

And oh yes, lest we fail to mention, something for your own piece of mind.

Doing it this way will avoid being awake nights wondering when you personally must get involved in sweeping up the broken glass created by incorrect information about your company's sales process, policies, procedures and prices with your customers and internal support organization. Moreover, the last thing you want to deal with is an upset sales organization that is barraging you with complaints about the new sales managers' leadership style.

© 2002 - 2007 Don McNamara CMC