

How to Retain Top Sales Talent

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Of constant concern in senior management ranks is the turnover rate of their sales members. If your goal is to stabilize the sales team, improve their performance and retain your top performers, then you will want to read on.

Understanding why sales people leave is critical. It is not money! In fact studies validate that money is the last reason sales people leave. Sales people leave when a whole set of other factors come into play and make the job of achieving their goals difficult to reach. Therefore to retain the staff of sales performers that make the difference, management must institute fundamentally sound sales management practice, as we will see.

The Starting Point

To begin with, sales managers must develop realistic goals and objectives with their team members. These should be mutually discussed and agreed upon collaboratively. Why? Necessity dictates both have bought in to *what* needs to be done, *when* it needs to be done and *what* resources will be required to deliver the results. After that, monitoring progress attainment can be accomplished using a management by exception system.

When sales management takes a hands off attitude toward developing common goals and objectives with sales reps you can bet it will not be long before performance issues arise. Furthermore, with a plan, sales management is proactive rather than reactive, or worst of all, inactive. Setting goals and objectives, observing their completion and monitoring success are functions of sound sales management. Winging it, if you will, leaves far too much to chance and luck.

At the end of the day, **“What can be measured gets accomplished.”**

Sales People are the Manager’s Customers

The best performers as a general rule know that to use the resources of the entire organization helps them present a more professional image and increases the probability of a sale. Sales managers who spend time with their representatives in the field always have better performing teams. Joint calls permit the sales manager to coach and do on the job training with the sales people. The manager is able to observe skill set improvement, determine loss in skill capability and test the current sales person attitude. Sales managers who spend time with their people have a

customer care attitude. In this case, they are taking care of their customers- the sales force.

Look at Sales Rep Aggravations

1. Sales managers who take over

Skilled sales managers are involved listeners in the sales calls. They do not take them over. When the manager takes over the calls, the customer unfortunately may see him/her now in a sales role, and not as a manager. How can the sales manager and the sales rep know what they did or did not do well in the call? Solid sales people enjoy the opportunity to demonstrate their ability especially in front of the boss. Use this as a perfect opportunity to compliment them for work well done, or assist them in improving their sales skills. Wait until the call is over and do the “post Mortem” afterwards in the car, or over lunch in a constructive and non-threatening manner.

2. Sales managers who don't listen or want info

Sales managers who pay attention and listen to what their representatives are saying to them without fear of retribution establish and maintain solid trust. If management acts in an arrogant fashion and ignores the issues that sales identifies, it will not be long before defections occur. There is no better way to gain the respect of a sales team than by sincerely listening to their sales related issues. Pay attention to what they are saying, then do your part to make the adjustments and improvements as necessary.

3. Managers who lose their cool

Consistency is the hallmark of emotionally mature and self-confident sales managers. For example, does the sales manager maintain composure in times of stress, or does the sales force receive temper tantrums and unprofessional behavior when sales miscues occur.

4. Managers who play favorites

Is there evenness in supervising the sales staff, or are there glaring examples of out and out favoritism. Talk about discouragement! Try and imagine the mentality of an over achiever who observes blatant examples of someone else being played favorite. Sales people have pretty developed radar and antennas when it comes to such management behavior. Aspire towards fairness and evenhandedness. Make sure you let your sales representatives know they are being measured for sales results, and leave politics to government! You will be amazed at how well the sales team responds and how the general morale of the group improves.

How's your Sales Culture?

In far too many companies the conventional wisdom is if we build it or have it, they will buy it. If that were the case, you would not need sales people!

The very finest companies tend to attract, engage and retain the best and the brightest. Recent studies confirm the best product; service or system will be marginally successful unless it is properly presented into the marketplace. This takes

sales people. Look at the consequences of having an ineffective sales culture and determine those elements needed to build a positive one.

Tend to Your Knitting

Why is it that the companies that have the most efficient internal operations expect and get more sales results from the external operations, namely the sales department?

Inspect your policies, internal processes, procedures and practices and programs. Do these actually impede the sales force or get in the way of sales person effectiveness? Do they actually encourage sales people to take a sales orientation? Does the sales compensation plan reward the type of behavior and sales achievements you desire? When a company's internal systems are efficient and effective, you will see a greater amount of sales time being spent selling, rather than saving prior orders and customers. What you desire is the sales team selling, rather than telling.

It may not be that the sales team needs to be motivated as much as the company needs to understand why they are being demotivated.

Sales people will get re-energized when they see barriers and limitations to their effectiveness being addressed and eventually lifted. If the entire company is working towards the same objectives, sales people feel they have some control over their personal destiny. Eliminate the factors causing loss of sales force confidence in the company.

In conclusion, expect results and performance and expect your sales team to respond. Take a proactive position with sales management. Ensure you and they have the same goals in mind for the sales organization. Insist they supervise the activities of the sales staff toward attainment of previously determined objectives. Completion of successful objectives leads to goal attainment, for both the sales team and the sales management. Amazing results transpire. Top performers will know that they are valued members of your company and their contributions are vital to the organization. Then, sales representatives will stay in place when they see their personal and professional goals have a way to be accomplished within your organization.