

NOT GETTING THE SALES YOU THOUGHT YOU SHOULD BE GETTING?

The gates are down, the lights are flashing, but the train is not coming. If that is the case I propose a few ideas to get back on track.

Leadership

There is a huge leap from managing people and leading them. Deloitte's prediction from 2014 are magnified today. Their report stated, "executives are struggling with leadership gaps at 60%+ and it represents their top business challenge." Harvard Business Review, likewise, stated "nearly 60% of companies face leadership talent shortages that impede performance." Your managers may be depriving the village somewhere of an idiot.

The remedy?

Enhance your selection process. Don't hire someone just because you like them. It's got very little to do with the track record, skill sets and a desire to improve – and excel. Often the worst hiring decision makers are the VP of Sales and fellow Salespeople as they are often easily sold. I've stopped many clients from making a bad decision when they're number one reason for potentially hiring the person was "I really like her." If your company doesn't have a great interview and selection process, get outside help. One question to ask is "What is the last sales book you read?" and "what new skills did you put into practice from the book?" I'm currently reading "Glue In Many Lands." And I'm stuck on it.

The VP of Sales must be a “driver.” That describe someone who is on his game and gets the group in the same mindset. In many instances, the VP is more of a nice person then one who asks questions of his team such as “who are you seeing next Wednesday? Why? What are you going to learn? And what personal value will you deliver?” And more, similar questions. This is what proactive leaders do. They got their group to think before acting.

When is the last time you invested into coaching your VP? How much money will you invest in his mentoring? And, plan on follow up to ensure he is implementing the new skills. The message: invest in the VP before you invest in the troops. So go the VP so go the rest of the group.

Training and Education

An overwhelming number of corporations invest superior time into money and product training then they do for skills training. You do want experts with product, industry, competitors and more knowledge, but without superior sales and leadership skills they won't get too far.

The best investment is with one – on – one mentoring. Targeted education has been proven to be more valuable than almost all sales training classes. After each session, certain newfound skills are to be

implemented and with deadline dates for such. And again, a follow-up program must be in place. Why?

Think of all the seminars your team has attended. Then ask yourself “what did they act on?”

The best formula is a combination of education, training and field training. As I previously mentioned, about 60% of corporations lack leaders. How do you have a great VP unless he has continuously had mentoring himself? Is he a nine or 10 in the three categories in this paragraph? Can he be a nine or 10? If it's a “yes”, then invest. If it's a “no”, maybe he can serve everyone better in another position. To be fair, I have seen managers grow from a 5-7 into a 9-10. It requires a great mentor and...a great student.

Whether it's training or education, about six new skills are to be agreed-upon after each session. I've had clients follow this rule for a long time – with success. Can you imagine a VP and sales group acting on approximately 25 new skills by year-end? Competitors, doing same-old, same-old don't stand a chance. Same people with the same skills this coming year will hurt you. A caveat. Everyone must act on the investment. Any hold out must be invited to join a mediocre competitor.

While interviewing a candidate, I asked the mundane question: why did you leave XYZ company? He replied, “they relocated and didn't tell me where.” Interview over. I think he got lost in thought as it was unfamiliar territory.

Social Skills

Harvard economist David Deming found that those who emphasize social skills grow by a whopping 24% while tasks requiring technical know-how and intelligence experience little growth. He also found that salaries/bonuses/commissions increase the most for those that place extra emphasis on social skills. Those that lacked them stick out like a pig among show horses.

This type of low – skills people include: interrupting others (clients hate it!), rambling on, putting their belongings on a client's desk, not completely accomplishing goals and objectives, don't ask (the right) questions and act like a know it all among other traits. These people kill relationships both internally and externally. You can catch them off – guard with comments like "if I agreed with you, we would both be wrong."

Why do the Chiefs often let people get away with these and other related issues? I found that most of them don't have the skills to encourage others by telling them the truths about deficiencies. I hear too often, "I hate confrontation." It's not. Rather, it's leadership. If you don't tell your group the truth, you are hurting them.

An example of social skills: On the first visit, a sales person sees about 20 golfing photos in the client's office. So, what do mundane sales people talk about? Oh, things like "I see you play golf." How many

times has a client heard that? Learn more about the person and his corporate goals versus chit-chat about golf. These sales people set low performance standards and consistently fail to achieve them.

Better: keep finding out the things no one else uncovers. You may hear “my daughter” or “our sales are suffering a bit.” Keep asking follow-up questions. If the client’s sales are stale, give him the last sales book you read. And sign it “Dear Mary, during our last visit, you mentioned that your revenue was being challenged. I like the ideas in this book and I hope you do too. Bob.” That’s an example of social skills including listening, providing value and thinking of and for others. It beats selling things at a price. Earn the business. When I provide field training, I bring one of my books for each client with a personalized note. When’s the last time your clients had a visit from an author? Naturally, I always want their toughest-to-sell clients. Hopefully, you do too because it means you’re up for the challenge and your social skills will land more new business than your competitors. Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad. Wisdom, to me, means, “I’m going to grow and bring more value to clients.”

Humor

A chief who lacks the fun factor makes work – H. A. R. D. Want to diminish recruiting, creativity and revenue? Be a member of the NFL. No Fun Leader.

AccounTemps talked to 1400 CFOs and found that nearly 8 of 10 said an employee's sense of humor was important for fitting into a company's corporate culture. Even CFOs now appreciate humor or fun! Let's say, it's a serious matter. The goals are to have the most fun place to work and to ensure your sales people deliver fun during client visits. It's the joy and value factor. The book delivered is value and humor is the joy. Unbeatable combination.

And easy exercise I do for fun is to utilize postcards I've collected from visits ranging from Hawaii to Europe. I simply write, "I look forward to meeting you. Sincerely, Bill." No last name. Often, when I call, an Assistant will answer and ask, "who is calling?" "Bill". The Assistant's voice elevates with "Who are you? It's been driving us crazy!" Easy appointment. Or if you have done prior homework, cut out an interesting or fun article right up her alley. Include it with a simple note "I thought you would appreciate this. Sincerely, Bill." It's proactive and sets up the image "I am different."

In both cases, the card stays on the client's desk until you call. Also, in this fast – paced world, personal cards versus just email set you apart. Applying for a new job? Take a postcard with you – postage affixed. Take it immediately to the post office after the interview. They will probably receive it the next day when they are reading your follow-up email. You will be the only one to do this. If you are a great candidate, your chances for being hired just went up. Icing on the cake: I have two postage stamps. One

with my photo and the other is a photo of one of my sales books. That's an example of social skills – being different.

It's hard to make a comeback when you haven't been anywhere. Just act on one or two items from this article and see where you can sell almost anywhere to almost anyone. Or, if you decide you're not up for doing new things, at least be creative about it. Like "I don't do new things on days that end with a 'Y'."

Inspiration and perspiration are related more than rhyme.

Bill Blades, CMC, CPSP, is a speaker and consultant specializing in sales and leadership. He can be contacted at bill@billblades.com or 480-556-1467. Also visit www.billblades.com.