

## SO GO YOUR SALES MANAGERS, SO GO YOUR SALESPEOPLE

In a past survey, the Association for Talent Development revealed that a whopping 87% of managers become such without prior management training and education. This sets them up for seagull management – they fly in, crap on people and fly back out. By crap, I don't mean that they necessarily treat people badly. What I do mean is that they aren't delivering much value to their people. That is, doing things for them – not to them.

I started consulting in January, 1988 and I have never encountered a sales manager who had received prior mentoring. They don't know what they didn't know – yet. That means that my #1 responsibility is to deliver the truths about their specific weaknesses. Or to phrase it in a more positive light – we will create the opportunity to blow past sales management and focus them on sales leadership. Big difference. Let me explain some duties that are "musts" for sales leadership.

**CULTURE:** The first area to investigate is the current Mission Statement to find out if it is a real one or just words. It must be a living and breathing document stating what we stand for regarding our people and our clients. While this article is about sales leaders, every manager company-wide must receive mentoring about their role in absolute dedication to the Mission Statement. If not, our people and clients will believe we're a joke. In some cases, rightfully so.

The statement can be a powerful sales education tool. It will surely state that we will deliver "value" to our clients. That means the sales leader must be bringing value to both the salespeople and clients. As he does so, he has then deserved the right to ask each salesperson, "What personal value have you delivered to all of our Target Accounts? And what value do you

bring that no one else does?" Be prepared for a look of bewilderment as they have never been taught to think this way. But the ball is rolling.

As we develop a culture of greatness and the salespeople view it as something everyone believes in, they will begin sharing with clients and industry associates "how much fun we're having." It won't take long before the company's prestige starts to rise and the amount of high-quality sales applicants approaching us (I use "we" and "us" as I think of myself as part of the team) will start to multiply. Proof: I was V.P. of Sales and Marketing for a \$60 million firm. The V.P. of Sales for the largest firm in the industry at \$1 billion applied for a regional sales manager position with us. I asked, "Why?" to which he responded, "You're the talk of the industry and everyone talks about your value proposition, your creativity, and the fun everyone is having." Per Korn Ferry, 72% of global respondents stated they feel culture is, "extremely important", but only 32% state their culture aligns with their strategy. This is job one.

**RECRUITING:** Firstly, the best time to recruit is when you don't need anyone. While developing a great sales team, you will still lose some people due to their choice – or yours. So, it's imperative that you have a bullpen. Recruiting when you absolutely need someone quickly increases your chances of failure. One example from my corporate days was a salesperson (with the \$1 billion firm again) who really wanted to join us. Over the course of several meetings, I told him, "Don't go anywhere – it's just a matter of timing." Included in our meetings was a dinner with the applicant and his wife, a lunch, and even a dinner at a ski resort. Over this time, it became much clearer what I was getting and I learned some of his shortcomings. I addressed his shortcomings

and advised him how to improve. Why the ski resort? I stayed there and since he lived nearby, I wanted an atmosphere where his guard went down while his openness became more elevated. I wanted him to talk – not listen to me. I suggest you listen to take notes during the interview. Why do I carry 2 pens to interviews? A broken pen is pointless.

**SELECTION:** One of the most, or the most, crucial decisions a leader has is selecting the right candidates. A big blunder I hear often is “I really like him.” Bad idea. Faulty selection decisions can lead to stagnation, turn-over and starting all over again. Likeability is good, but I’ll choose a hard-driving person almost every time.

When I’m retained by a client, I bring sharpened interviewing and selecting skills. I reverse the talk/listen ratio. By that, I mean that the interviewer only speaks 10% of the time and the other 90% is dedicated to listening intently to what the candidate is saying. When the interviewer does speak, it usually is in the format of open-ended questions such as “how”, “what”, and “why”. When appropriate, ask the follow-up question, “How do you mean?”

The candidates should be given a skills assessment. I utilize a 25+ page “personality profile by profession” printed out enabling me to ask more refined questions. And having a great mentor involved in the interviewing and selecting process is one of the best investments that will be made on behalf of the sales leader. The right mentor usually observes and hears different messages than the sales leader. Again, the chances of making a great decision, after the

interview and the mentor and sales leader have had discussions, are greatly elevated. Very simply, an average interviewer alone, will deliver average results. And costly ones.

**TRAINING AND EDUCATION:** The majority of B2B entities invest significant resources on product training, but slim to no resources are allotted for sales and management training and education. For more success, I suggest that formula be reversed.

The first person I mentor is the key Sales Manager. Once they begin to understand how to lead, it's off to the races. I go so far as to provide field education with this person as most have never received it themselves. She has to learn about her own deficiencies before "telling" others how to improve. I need to get her to work harder on herself than on her people. Does she read books on her profession? She must. I'm now writing a new book on reverse psychology. Please don't buy it.

Sales training and education often fail due to one primary reason: lack of monitoring the implementation of newly learned skills. That results in training being called what it is – a cost. Each time after I have learners in the classroom, we collectively select the 6-10 new skills that are to be acted on. And we follow-up to learn of successes and failures (temporary).

The one aspect that gets more return on investment is 1-on-1 education. Every sales leader and salesperson is different and has different needs. That's why 1-on-1 sessions work so well. Each session is just for "Bud" or "Mary". At the conclusion of the  $\frac{1}{2}$  day session, we list a minimum of

9 specific skills, habits and traits to focus on. I might add that these sessions are when the truths are laid out because most haven't been told the truths. Why? 1) The Sales Manager hasn't learned how to effectively mentor and 2) many managers view it as confrontational. It's not. Telling the truths is what a sales leader must do. Conversely, not telling them the truths hurts them. I plainly label that posture as cowardice.

One last thought regarding field coaching. No favoritism. It's a plague. I've witnessed numerous Sales Managers spend more time with their favorite(s) than where they should be investing their time coaching and nurturing Target Accounts and Target Salespeople in each territory. Major time on major things, and minor time on minor things. Reduce C projects whenever possible to free-up time for the emergencies that pop up like funerals. What? Yes, follow Yogi Berra's plan to have time for funerals. "You should always go to other people's funerals, otherwise they won't come to yours."

Another big reason to work on the Sales Manager's development first is because most good people leave their employer because of managers – not the company. This alone should prompt CEOs to insure the sales leader is growing.

**CREATIVITY:** This is definitely an area for leaders to get better at because studies show that only 1% of the U.S. population is naturally creative. And the small percentage of salespeople who develop their creative side of the brain dominate logic-driven salespeople's results almost every time.

Once the Sales Manager embraces creativity, she is “fairly” capable of teaching it to others.

Usually, my clients leave most of creativity implementation up to me because getting a logic-driven manager to unlearn straight logic thinking into a blend of creativity and logic is a long-haul education segment that starts slowly. As more people begin to embrace creativity, it then becomes a vital part of your culture. And I'll take creativity and culture over strategy almost every day. A small example of same-old, same-old is that applications, medical forms etc ask who is to be called in the event of an emergency. I write, “An ambulance.”

**COMMUNICATION:** AMA's survey of the top 5 most important skills training for an individual are:

- |                             |     |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| 1. Communication            | 65% |
| 2. Skills specific to roles | 60% |
| 3. Leadership Development   | 53% |
| 4. Project Management       | 49% |
| 5. Interpersonal skills     | 48% |

Yet, all 5 areas concern communication to a great degree, but #'s 1 and 5 are proof that education is desperately needed. Typically, communication is the #1 reason for an individual's ineffectiveness and it's also the #1 reason for a declining culture.

While you want to be clear, your style, or how you say it, is more important than what you actually say. To the mix, add humor (if appropriate), creativity and high energy. Just be anything

but boring. Prior to Pope Francis visiting Cuba and the U.S., he answered a question about his immense popularity. He said, “Jesus also, for a certain time, was very popular, and look at how that turned out.” True and humorous. Maybe we should ask for training in Pope skills?

**WRAP UP:** Hogan Assessments reported that “only 18% of HR professionals said their company had enough talent to meet its future leadership needs.” But, I believe that percentage to be even lower among Sales managers due to the limited number of colleges offering a degree in sales and you’d have to extensively search for a college offering sales leadership courses. And have you provided your Sales Manager with a Mentor? I consider that a must-have. As a V.P. of Sales, I had one.

One of the best ways for a Sales Manager to get her prima-donnas to bring value is by the Sales Manager bringing value herself. If she’s not the best Sales Manager in her market, she can be (if you have chosen a progressive top-flight manager.)

Invest in her.

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