



IT'S GREAT TO BE A

salesperson,

BUT NOT A

sales manager

A promotion from sales rep to manager comes with heightened responsibilities, but typically no training resources that will help these new leaders thrive.

BY JASON JORDAN AND MICHELLE VAZZANA

From the very first day salespeople are hired, all attention is turned to making them successful. We clearly define their role so they know what is expected of them. We give them a sales process to follow so they know what to do. We give these new employees the tools to support that process so they are effective and efficient.

We train and retrain them to develop their skills. We demand that their managers spend time with them, coaching and developing them to higher levels of capability. We shower them with rewards and recognition when they ultimately succeed. And if they become really, really good, in time we promote them to be a sales manager.

And then what do we do to help all of these new sales managers succeed in their role? Do we clearly define their role as a sales manager? Not really. Do we give them a sales management process to follow? No. Do we give them the tools they need to become better managers and coaches? Other than customer relationship management, not so much. Do we train and re-train them on how to do their job? Nope. Does senior management coach and develop them to higher levels of capability? No. Do we shower them with rewards and recognition for a job well done? Not that we've seen.

And we wonder why sales managers don't succeed? Shame on us.

Where sales managers need help

If sales managers are to succeed, they deserve the same intense focus and support that they were given when they were salespeople. Most organizations have long abandoned the notion of hiring a horde of salespeople and just seeing what happens. Instead, companies do everything possible to help all sales reps succeed. But they do not give the same attention to sales managers. For some reason we assume that these new sales managers will figure it out on their own.

Determining what can be done to help sales managers succeed depends on how success for that role is defined. In other words, what is it that sales managers are expected to do? We discovered that salesforces have

specific expectations of their sales managers—expectations that inform what can be done to help them.

In the research that went into our book, *Cracking the Sales Management Code*, we tried to determine the most important activities in any salesforce. We did so by investigating what sales leaders measure and examine in their management reports. Our reasoning was that if a company is going out of its way to measure and report something, then it must be important to that company.

We found that the salesforces were pretty consistent about what they expect of their sales managers. Specifically, companies were measuring how good sales managers were at these five tasks:

- recruiting and hiring
- sales coaching
- pipeline management
- performance management
- forecasting.

These results make sense: Sales managers are expected to hire good people, coach them to be even better, help them pursue and win deals, make sure they're on track to meet their goals, and make sure the sales forecasts are accurate and on time.

Now that the five primary tasks sales managers must do well have been identified, how do organizations enable managers to succeed at doing them? The answer is simpler than you might think: Do it in the same way they were enabled to succeed when they were sales reps.

Just do it

The process of enabling sales managers is really no different than enabling sales reps, but there are some barriers to overcome. Foremost, sales managers have not traditionally been an area of focus, so it's often necessary to reallocate budgets and resources. Also, doing this well requires committed involvement by senior sales leadership, which also can be a cultural change.

But those barriers aside, the process to follow is quite familiar. Consider the following development activities that we've found to be the most high impact with our clients.

Coaching for Performance

Sales managers should serve as coaches to their employees. As a coach, you are only as successful as your team, so it's important to set up your salesforce for success. The following questions can help ensure that you have done just that.

Has proper training been provided to each member on the team? As part of training, it's great for team members to learn from other team members, but it's also important that they learn from you, their manager. It demonstrates the importance you place on sales training. It also demonstrates the value you place on them since you're investing your time in them.

Have clear expectations been set? Somehow we always think we are clear in our communication and yet we're often misunderstood. Have you set clear expectations for your team? Do they have clear sales goals? Are there standards they should be following? Are there deadlines that must be met? If you haven't told them what the expectations are, you can't expect them to know the answers to these questions.

Has enough time for mastery been provided? As you coach your sales team, it's important to remember not everyone learns at the same speed, just as everyone does not reach top-level performance at the same speed. We cannot afford to have someone not prepared and performing quickly. At the same time, we cannot afford to be too hasty in getting them up to speed, or we may find they never mastered the skills needed to be successful in their position.

Source: *The Art of Modern Sales Management: Driving Performance in a Connected World* (ASTD Press)

JUST LIKE SELLERS, MANAGERS NEED A FORMAL PROCESS TO FOLLOW TO MAKE SURE THE IMPORTANT WORK GETS DONE, AND DONE WELL.

ToDo —

PENDING

Develop a management process. One of the most obvious and overlooked resources that sales managers need is a management methodology or process. You can probably instantly name the sales rep process you have in your salesforce, but what about your sales management process? Managers need one too.

We find that in the absence of dedicated time that is set aside to do the important tasks, managers fall into a reactive stance where they only respond to unforeseen events. So just like sellers, managers need a formal process to follow to make sure the important work gets done, and done well.

Train, train, train. The sales manager training agendas at most companies are anemic at best. In fact, according to ASTD's *The State of Sales Training, 2012*, more than half of sales manager training falls into only one of the five areas mentioned earlier: sales coaching. And while coaching is an unquestionably critical activity, what about training for all the other responsibilities managers have? How many sales managers are trained to forecast accurately or to manage a sales pipeline? Or to hire and motivate high-performing reps? Too few, in our experience.

Provide tools. Salespeople have all sorts of tools to help them do their jobs—tools to help them plan their activities, research prospects, and generally enable better selling. Sales managers also need tools—tools to help them hire, coach, forecast, and generally enable better management.

Customer relationship management is a start, but it certainly shouldn't be the end. Coaching guides, forecasting templates, meeting agendas, and similar tools can make sales managers better at what they do.

Coach the coach. Yes, sales managers need coaching too. Sales leadership should work with frontline managers to develop their skills, knowledge, and capabilities, just as the managers are expected to do with their reps.

Few newly minted sales managers are inherently great forecasters, coaches, or pipeline managers, but they can improve over time if shown how. If we agree that development shouldn't end at the sales rep level, then vice

presidents of sales must commit to coaching their frontline sales managers.

Celebrate. Everyone knows who the top salespeople are in every company, but who are the top sales managers? Do they get recognized at the annual sales meetings? Do they get highly visible prizes and perks? Not usually. If the sales manager's job is really important to improved salesforce performance, then recognize it as such. If you have a great sales manager, shout it from the hills.

We reap what we sow, so start sowing

When you consider what superstar salespeople are given once they're promoted—little guidance, anemic training, few tools, no coaching, and faint recognition—it isn't surprising that so many of them fail as sales managers. But we know how to solve this problem: Apply the same level of focus and investment to frontline sales managers that is currently applied to sellers. In fact, sales managers probably need a little more investment than salespeople receive because the investment in better sales managers has proved to yield better salespeople.

So if you're in the legion of salesforces that need to start sowing the seeds of sales management success, where do you start? With the basics. Start by clearly defining the role of your sales managers. What are the important tasks that you expect them to do? Then find good training resources to develop the skills needed to execute those important tasks.

Just taking those two steps will leapfrog you ahead of most salesforces in the world. You need not try to boil the ocean to make a huge impact with your sales managers. You just need to step off of the repeat-as-needed treadmill and give them the attention they're due.

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