

Building a sales force that pays for itself

By Willard Michlin

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The elements involved in building a sales force, especially one that pays for itself and also adds value to any business, are many and varied. The whole purpose and direction of a sales manager needs to be directed to creating a sales force that causes the employing company to expand through increasing sales. This is done by the following general steps: Training sales staff to be able to sell the company product in large volume; correcting how sales presentations are made; handling any customer flaps his sales people make; and then testing and hiring more sales people, to create an ever increasing sales force. This is a continual process that a sales manager must be doing to justify his existence. If he doesn't, the company cannot expand.

Training to make a good sales person

“Training them to be able to sell the company product in large volume.” A very wise American philosopher once stated that all a salesman had to do was to continue to try to interest the customer and the customer would eventually buy, if the sales man continued to try to interest the customer! Like all great truths, they are ‘obvious’ once stated.

So, what does it take for a sales person to continue to try to interest a customer, no matter what objection the customer raises and despite the sales person's own impulse to ‘give up’ after a while? Lets look at the elements:

The sales patter: The first of these would be a successful sales patter. Here we are talking about getting a hold of someone or several people who are successful, at selling to customers, in the target industry, or a similar industry. Once such person(s) are found, you need to interview them to find out what they DO that made them a success. We are looking for the actions they take and the things they do, not what they think.

The best person to interview for this information is usually the most successful sales person, right there in the company, if one exists. Notes should be carefully made of the actions they take to get a sale and these notes should be very exactly written up and turned into a patter that can later be drilled on new and old members of the sales force.

Advertising and preparation: Next, a series of sale recruitment advertisements need to be created for the local newspaper. The receptionist of the company needs to be briefed on what to do when calls come in. The adverts need to be big enough to attract attention and have enough mystery in them so that people actually call in to find out what its all about.

The receptionist should understand that all she is doing with calls from the advertisements is routing

them to the person doing this project. She does not answer questions about what the company is and what is being offered. She simply arranges for them to come in for an interview at a scheduled time or collects their phone numbers so that they can be called back and scheduled to come in, by someone else.

The interview: When applicants for the sales position come in, their interview is very specific and to the point. There are certain very specific criteria that are being looked for in a good sales person. The two main one are, (a) can they persist along a given course? (b) Are they are interested in people?

That is an easy statement to make, to be sure. However, to find such people requires very exact interview procedures. The first step is testing. We use a series of 3 tests. One of these provide a detailed look into the 10 most important job related traits such as Stability, Goal attainment, Composure, Certainty, Activity level, Aggressiveness, Responsibility level, Correct estimation, Appreciativeness and Communication level.

The other 2 tests measure an applicant's ability to solve problems and how well they are able to following instructions – a vital test for anyone operating machinery where understanding and following instructions are very important!

With the results of the 3 tests, one only needs to ask the applicant questions regarding his past job failures, past job successes and when they first decided that they wanted to be in sales. These answers, compared to the results of the 3 tests tell the whole story and can really make it very easy to select applicants most likely to succeed as sales people.

How the compensation is done: For this project to be successful and actually pay for itself, the sales applicant needs to be hired under very specific financial conditions. They need to be hired on a draw + commission. This means that they get a low amount of money weekly for a certain period of time and if they do well, they should be producing enough sales to repay their draw and start making money quickly, for themselves as well as the company. How this is worked out is key to the success of the project. If this is not worked out correctly, sales people will either not start, not produce and stay too long and drain the company or quit before their training is effectively completed.

The mastery of the conversation: A successful sales person requires one skill above all others. This is the ability to guide and control a conversation. If he or she can guide and control a conversation, it is then possible to continue to try to interest the customer and be successful at it.

For a salesperson to do this one action well, an in-depth 3-day training on the basics of conversation and how to guide and control a conversation, is vital. Communication between people (conversation) have very certain and definite laws, which if followed, puts a sales person in total control of a conversation without making the other person feel like they are being controlled!

Drilling the sales patter: After the sales applicants have successfully mastered the art of controlling a conversation, they now need to be drilled on the successful sales patter. If a full day is devoted to drilling them on this and they are drilled to a point where they easily and smoothly deliver their patter, without referring to notes or becoming tongue-tied or embarrassed, then and only then, will they be ready for the next step.

Get them out selling: After the above steps are completed and your sales people are ready to 'hit the streets', they should be divided up into groups of 3 to 5 people with one of them being the sales manager of the group. They are then sent out to find customers and deliver their pitches (sales patter).

This should be done in such a way that there is not great pressure on the sales people for the first few days. Tell them to go out and practice on any customer they find. The objective is to get them comfortable delivering their patter.

They are given realistic targets to achieve and when they flub and do not get results, they are corrected and sent back out by the person that is overall in charge of this project.

Failures: Not all will make it through this line-up. Correct them as much as possible and if they cannot make it, turn them loose and concentrate on the others that are making it. As the sales manager you also need to work on starting new groups through the process. Continue these steps until you have all the sales people you need to really boost the company sales.

Personnel: The number of sales force trainers required to train the company sales manager on this procedure and help him build his sales force is only 2 people. They will need to work in the company for 30 days. One of these would be the person overall in charge of the project. He or she creates the sales advertisements, get the people in, does the tests on them, interviews them and decide which ones to hire. This person also does the corrections. The assistant does the conversation-control training; the successful sales patter drilling and help the lead trainer with the corrections of the sales teams.

Summary: An effective sale teams can be built that pays its own way, enhances the company sales and increases the value of any business. The key to it all is having a hiring method and training program for the sales people that follows the exact laws involved in guiding and controlling a conversation.

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