

Managing salespeople

Nikki Heald, Managing Director of Corptraining tells us how

1. Do you think there is a clear difference in the management of sales people to non-sales staff?

Not necessarily. I believe that an effective manager, with sound leadership and people skills, is able to apply these qualities in any business arena. Most professional environments have targets to achieve, whether it be sales or otherwise and a successful manager identifies organisational goals and then motivates team performance to accomplish them. Basically, it comes down to successful people management and developing a style that builds business profitability and sales. An understanding of sales processes and strategies can be developed through training and on the job learning.

2. Is it beneficial to have sales/similar experience or background to the people you are hiring or not? Could such experience prejudice any management style?

It may assist to have a sales/similar background in the area in which you are hiring, however, I do not believe that it is absolutely imperative. For instance, when hiring a salesperson, it is important to recruit for "talent" not "experience" and I firmly believe that this is the case also when recruiting a sales manager. Attitude, willingness to learn and emotional intelligence are fundamental to sales success. Whilst past experience may bring with it knowledge, it may also bring a resistance to change and pre-conceived ideas or processes. Such pre-conceptions may negatively influence the team or prejudice management styles. Often, fresh eyes bring fresh ideas.

3. Often strong sales people in recruitment are promoted to management roles, which often leads to disillusionment for the individual, along with lack of direction or focus; is there a way to overcome this?

Promotion is considered the next step for high performers, however, a great sales professional does not necessarily make a great manager! Prior to promotion, consideration should be given to ensure that the right "fit" is made and that the individual's talents will be fully utilised in the new role. Aligning and matching professional skills to job requirements is critical to maintaining motivation, interest and direction. Obviously, if there is misalignment in the match, it is likely that sales and motivation levels will drop.

4. What are the key behaviours managers need to adopt to successfully manage a

sales team? Since management involves an exercise of influence and motivation, the quality of leadership is a critical component of team success. An effective sales manager inspires the team to achieve by:

- i *Clear communication* – the team understands business goals and direction.
- ii *Active listening* – not surface listening but intently with deep attention.
- iii *Support and empathy* – they treat their staff as people and take a genuine interest in them.
- iv *Encouragement* – praise and positive recognition for team contribution and effort.
- v *Personal development* – training to ensure fine-tuning and enhancement of management skills.
- vi *Motivation and positivity* – enthuses and inspires team members to succeed.
- vii *Leads by example* – works harder than everyone else and won't ask their team to do something that they themselves would not.

5. How can manager's motivate poor performers?

Sales teams are traditionally made up of varying degrees of experience and enthusiasm so, whilst you may manage a number of excellent sales professionals, some will be not so good. Fundamental to team success, is the ability to identify individual performance motivators and then use these to build on poor performance. Motivating an individual comes from reinforcing and promoting the positives. In other words, a powerful way to change negative performance is to focus on and emphasize desired performance. This can be done by immediately praising the desired action and encouraging more of the same. Many organisations offer incentives such as movie or theatre tickets for high performance, however, sometimes these rewards can become expected and lose impact.

6. With many recruitment consultants rewarded on individual results, internal competition can be damaging if it's not managed well. What ideas do you suggest to ensure competition stays healthy?

When the focus in a sales environment is target based, there must be fair systems in place to provide adequate and equal opportunities for all team members to achieve great results. Otherwise, strong internal competition can work against desired outcomes. Distribution of any leads, on a qualitative and quantitative basis ensures that each sales professional has the opportunity to

succeed. Whilst individual recognition is vital, be sure team members understand that each person is vital and brings strengths which contribute to the overall dynamics. No team member is any more important than another – everyone has a role to play in the performance cycle.

7. How can targets and activity be monitored effectively without enforcing too much control on people that often find working to rules frustrating?

Successful sales managers are those who recognise that employees do not perform productively when they are being controlled. The challenge is to manage in a way that fosters reasonable balance between freedom to perform and expected processes. Targets should be clearly defined by the manager and then the team left to modify performance and creative talent to meet these outcomes. Meetings provide a forum to discuss and set strategies, whilst also providing an opportunity for results to be regularly reported and assessed. Ultimately, as a manager, you only need to look at the running total to determine whether to congratulate or motivate. ■



Nikki Heald is the Managing Director of Corptraining which was established to provide dynamic and modern training solutions appropriate to the business

needs of today. Her programs focus on maximising professional and personal visibility via consistency in presentation, protocol and communication techniques.

Nikki has been described as a dynamic trainer and entertaining speaker whose interactive approach motivates participants to implement valuable changes to their professional image and mindset.

Clients include professional service industries, finance companies, leading insurers, hospitality, government departments, schools and a diverse range of small businesses. Sessions are customised to meet specific objectives.

In conjunction with her formal training qualifications, Nikki's expertise has come from a background in corporate and professional service environments.