

Sales Management during Turbulent Times - By Dr. Rick Johnson

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Was your sales manager formerly your top rated sales person? Did you promote them based on sales performance? Did your sales manager ever receive any formal sales management training? Do you think your sales force needs to be more aggressive? Are you following best practice principles?

These can be telling questions. Often the power of solution is in the question more than the answer because if you ask the right questions, the solutions seem to become much easier to create. Managing a sales force in any industry is no easy task. It becomes especially difficult when there is a downturn in the economy. Effective sales management requires a substantial amount of personal leadership built on the concepts of coaching and mentoring the sales force.

Sales during a downturn could hit a brick wall and become stagnant. If that happens you run the risk that your sales team may lose their passion.

Rekindle the Passion even if Times are Tough

Sounds easy but exactly how do you rekindle passion? Is there really such a thing as rekindling passion? The answer to that question is yes. Passion is a result of doing something you love to do. It means becoming really good at it. If you love doing it, you become committed to being successful at it.

You might scoff and say, 'Rick, we had that passion in our sales force but the economy sucks. We seem to have lost it.'

Not surprisingly, that does happen, which brings us to the first question, how do you rekindle passion? I certainly can't downplay this. It is difficult. But, it starts with having the right sales leadership in place, a leader that has excellent people skills. Not sales skills but people skills, leadership skills that make people want to follow them. They make people want to release discretionary energy and give that extra effort. That may mean an extra call everyday or working till 5pm on Fridays or doing whatever it takes to provide solutions to customers problems.

It means toughing it out and having the following attitude.

'As long as there are cars in the customer's parking lot that means they are buying something and it is my job to get the biggest share of that something that I can possibly get.'

A Tough Question that Requires an Answer

Do you have the right person in the job of sales manager? Are they a leader or were they simply your best sales person. Do they have real leadership skills? Sometimes rejuvenating your sales force requires a change in leadership. It may even require a change in the sales force, the development of a documented sales strategy or even just a simple territorial restructuring.

However, before you get radical, ask yourself the following questions,

Have you supplied leadership training for your sales manager

Have you provided any coaching or mentoring to support the sales managers efforts

Do you get involved in supporting the sales strategy

Does your human resource department support a formalized program for new sales recruits

Do you show participative support in quarterly or semiannual sales meetings

Is the sales force held accountable - do they have scorecards

Is the sales manager held accountable beyond what I call the statistical disappointment review via e-mail

Is your sales force trained in value selling

Do they really understand what it means to be a total solution provider

Nowadays, salespeople must be problem solvers able to generate solutions for customers in their time of need. Therefore, they must possess a great deal of knowledge about your customers' business. They must actually define what those needs are because the customer may not know, nor take the time to explain if they do know. Customers want you to have the knowledge and intelligence to comprehend and analyze their problems before showing up at the door. Customers will listen and buy from the salesperson that finds the "pain" and takes it away.'

Revisit the Basics

Sometimes going back to the basics is part of the answer to rekindling the passion. That means revisiting best practice in all areas including targeting, goal setting, customer profiling and action planning. Some of your sales people may have forgotten and some of them may have never known the principles. Your old school experienced sales people may resist the structure, the formality and even the coaching and mentoring. Don't allow it. Don't let the inmates run the asylum. Tough times require tough love, best practice discipline and accountability.

Managing a group of professionals with the type of personalities required to succeed in sales is no easy task. However, sales management holds the key to meeting company objectives. Effective sales management must build the platform for success. Sales people are not the easiest group in the company to manage. If they were they would not be sales people. Selling is not easy. It takes a special talent, self motivation, self discipline, a passion to succeed and the ability to accept rejection. The reality of the situation is simple. The majority of sales people are not managed well.

Sales is a profession that requires professional sales people and professional leadership.

Every company needs aggressive, creative and resourceful salespeople to have their products specified, accepted and used by customers. Without informed and capable field salespeople, no company could hope to compete in the marketplace today. But they have to have a passion for success and a leader they look up to that shares that passion for success.

Do You Have the RIGHT Sales Manager?

Make sure your sales management understands best practice principles and teach them the basic formula for success and your sales force will excel even in a down economy.

Basic Formula for Success:

The Right People

A resume tells you what person has done. It does not tell you who they are! Interviews are predominantly subjective. The interviewee is generally prepared. Create some objective job related quizzes. Establish a recruitment process that creates a pipeline to exceptional sales people. Utilize the Winslow Assessment System to profile your candidates.

The Right Structure

Structure is more essential to sales than any other function!

- Territories & Accounts
- Compensation & SPIFFs
- Communication Channel

The Right Process

A platform for Sales Effectiveness that defines sales best practices.

- T.O.A.D. (Territory Opportunity Action-planning Discussion)
- Coaching & Mentoring
- Effective Sales Meetings
- Performance Score Cards
- Training

The Right Strategy

Built Around Best Practice

- Targeting
- Goal Setting
- Action Planning
- Alignment with Corporate Initiatives
- Accountability

The Right Development

- Clarity in Job Descriptions
- Standards & Benchmarks

--- Required Training Programs

--- Leadership Development Programs

Make sure your sales manager has the right skill sets. Make sure they have received sales management training. Coach them, mentor them and teach them this formula for success and they can rekindle the passion in your sales force. The formula is not difficult and most importantly, it really works.

Check out Rick's new CD and Workbook -- Real World Leadership Kit --- 'Learning to Lead So Others Will Follow'

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