



Thriving in a Hostile Environment

Beachgrass Consulting

Sales Team Management

Even in our Web era, in which most B2B sales could be conducted electronically without sales people, it can be observed that the vast majority of businesses do still have large sales forces. There are three reasons for this:

- When dealing with their accounts, sales persons are able to **detect new business opportunities** that often the accounts are not even aware of themselves.
- When companies buy, even though they want to have the lowest possible prices, very often they need more than just a purchasing price: they also **look for supply chain arrangements**, or for specific expertise in fields that the seller knows.
- When companies sell, they want to **influence the purchasing decisions** of companies who buy

The prime concern of any company should be to satisfy its customers. In most B2B cases, sales people are the first human contact that customers or prospects have with a company. It is important that this experience with your sales people be excellent. Word-of-mouth being a powerful marketing tool, it is essential that all your customers have the same experience quality with all your sales people. As a consequence, your sales persons should be selected, coached, trained and rewarded, first to ensure that they deliver the best possible experience to your customers, and second to be as much as possible interchangeable so that they can replace each other without affecting the customer's experience.

The second concern of any company should be to meet its revenue objectives. Too often, this concern becomes the main one. This is regrettable: focusing on revenue generation is necessary, but defocusing on customer satisfaction leads to future poor performance. So managing a sales force requires striking a balance between short-term needs (revenues) and long-term ones (customer satisfaction).

Additionally, to be successful a sales manager has to work at the individual and team levels. In our previous bulletin, we touched on what should be done at the

individual level: selection, coaching, training and rewards. But what should be done for a team?

Not all groups are teams. **What is a team?** It is a group of people who share the same goal and leadership, they trust and respect each other and they discuss, make decisions and work together. Why is this important in sales? Teams ensure that there is emulation, that each sales person is supported by the team members, that most on-the-job coaching is performed by the sales people themselves (the experienced sales person helps the new hire). A team ensures that each sales person can benefit from the team's technical knowledge and network.

Because of ICT available today, sales people can spend more time outside the office visiting customers. This is desirable but creates a challenge in terms of team building. **How do you foster trust among people who are operating at a distance, in virtual teams?** In the past, sales people were spending a large amount of time in the office, writing proposal, reports, and discussing projects. They could thus create the contacts and links to develop and maintain trust among each other. Today most of their contacts happen via the Web and the phone. So new techniques and tools have to be used to build and develop trust in virtual team.

Finally a sales team is not just a group of people. A true sales team is a group made of a sales person, usually an account manager, and some technical specialists who assist him in designing the proposal and discussing it technically with the customer staff. The **sales person acts as a group leader**. So the sales manager has not only to manage the sales person but also how this person manages his/her team.

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