

Motivating Your Sales Team

Ghostwritten for Tory Parks, Director of Sales & Marketing, Del Lago Resort

During the boom times, everyone wants to be in sales. Top salespeople earn big salaries, drive the expensive cars, take great vacations and have all the trappings of success. When the economy starts to sputter, everything begins to tailspin.

Even though the economic recovery signs look good, companies are still closely scrutinizing every dime they spend. Investment spending has given way to “what can we do without?”

In an ideal world, the entire sales team would be motivated by a real love for their jobs. External incentives such as bonuses, contests, and trips to Australia would simply be icing on the cake. Unfortunately, the companies we sell to are not the only ones who are keeping a close eye on the bottom line. It is more vital than ever that we find ways to motivate our sales teams independent of the perks.

The companies that are still thriving have figured out how to retain their top salespeople and keep them motivated as well. They understand that there is no secret formula to creating a successful sales team. The same principles that will sustain you in the boom times will keep you afloat during the bust. By employing these fundamental sales management strategies, you can turn your sales team into energetic, motivated superstars, with or without sending the top salesperson to Australia.

Get into the trenches

It is impossible to motivate your sales team until you know what it's like in the trenches. Understand their challenges and help them search out and create opportunities. As a manager, you can't effectively manage something you're not in touch with; and trying to do so will destroy your credibility.

Savvy salespeople know whether their managers really understand the problems they face daily. Don't be afraid to admit a lack of understanding of the challenges and stresses of generating sales revenue. Admit a knowledge gap and ask how to most effectively help them. Honesty encourages people to be drawn into the process. This empowers your sales organization and keeps your hand on the pulse of the clientele.

Respond quickly

Treat your sales team as if they were your biggest and most important client. You require the sales team to stay responsive and move decisively when it comes to addressing a client requests, so react the same way when your sales team needs your assistance in closing a deal.

Keep the batteries charged

It may sound trite, but it is essential to keep both you and your team energized. Implement brainstorming sessions with the team to solicit new approaches and ideas. Help them hone their critical thinking skills. Promote interaction and encourage laughter. People who have fun while at work are more productive and “burnout” becomes less of a threat.

Don't make the mistake of asking for feedback and then shelving it. Follow through and implement the best ideas from the brainstorming sessions. Show your sales team that their ideas make a difference and that you are actively listening to them.

Don't manage, mentor

During trying times, your sales staff needs to know that they are cared about in relation to their ability to be successful. Understand what motivates each person on the team. Each will have their own unique style and approach as well as skill sets. Making someone else successful requires different things for different people.

People process information and are motivated differently based on whether they require internal or external motivators. Internal motivators include personal pride, love of the work itself, a strong work ethic or a particular value system. Training sessions or challenging work assignments can motivate people who fall in this category. External motivators include raises in pay, promotions, bonuses, vacation time or the corner office. It should be stated that motivational results of external incentives often are short-lived.

Additionally, most of these needs, expectations and aspirations are unexpressed. It is up to management to develop a good system of company communications, employee relations, training and development that will lead to an environment of openness, cooperation, teamwork, and empowerment that will benefit all the parties involved. Understand what motivates each team member by spending individual time with each person and letting it be known that supervisors are available for advice and counsel. Ask open-ended questions and watch their body language.

Hit the road

You've paid your dues as a salesperson. You have your share of 'on the road' horror stories and successes. Now that you have moved into sales management, you thought that your traveling days were over, but they aren't. Go with your sales staff on a call if it will help them close the deal. Knowing that you went the extra mile for them will pay off in loyalty in the long run. There's no substitute for being in the field with your sales organization when the going gets tough.

Shout it from the rooftops

Openly praise and give credit where credit is due. At group meetings, share result-oriented ideas and strategies and ask individuals to elaborate for the team. Most salespeople face the same challenges. Thus, when one person has an idea or strategy that works, it could be implemented to assist other salespeople in conquering business. Positive recognition empowers each salesperson to think out of the box.

It's nothing personal

Instill in your sales team the ability to not take rejections personally. Strong salespeople know how to handle rejection, which in sluggish economy, comes in larger doses. Remind your sales team that rejections are increasing due to outside or economic factors beyond their control and each "no" or "maybe" just gets them one step closer to a "yes." Keep them moving forward. Sitting around and worrying will not get you any closer to closing that important deal.

Keep an open mind

Present your sales team with opportunities to succeed vs. telling them what to do. There's more than one road to the finish line and your way may not always be the best. Encourage creativity in the approach your salespeople initiate. Help them find ways to differentiate themselves from the competition. If this means finding a way that is a bit out of the ordinary, then so be it. Listen to your people. You hired them for their intelligence.

Be a consultant

Teach your sales team to change their approach from being exclusively sales focused to that of being a salesperson and a consultant. In a booming economy a salesperson may survive, even thrive, by only pointing out features and benefits of a product. When a prospect is definitely going to buy from someone, your salesperson may win a sale by merely having a better sounding pitch than the competitor. In a soft purchasing climate, the prospect needs to see a return on investment. By illustrating the bottom-line benefits to the prospect the salesperson will gain an edge over the competition. Coach your sales organization to understand that people don't stop buying when economies go through down cycles. They look harder for value.

Prospects don't want to be sold. They want someone to help guide them through a critical business decision. Make sure your team serves as the guide in this process, even if it means that you will turn some business away because the fit was just not there. The prospect will appreciate and remember your honesty and candor.

Take the road less traveled

If possible, shift your sales strategy to focus your sales team's efforts on industries that are thriving; or help them search out untapped customers to reenergize their selling techniques. If your target market has been Fortune 500 companies, try approaching mid-sized businesses in a similar market. Make it policy to ask for referrals from your raving fans.

Live by example

Nothing is more important than consistency and passion. Walk the walk and talk the talk – and be passionate about it. Love what you do. To be a leader you have to inspire not control. True leaders find followers whether they are looking for them or not. Leaders constantly "coach" and fuel the sales process.

It is a challenging time to be in sales. No matter what industry, salespeople have found that closing the deal is harder than ever. Sales is first and foremost a numbers game. By keeping your sales team motivated and sticking to the basics, you can weather the storm and be strongly positioned to take the lead when the economy starts to rebound.

Tory Parks inspires her own sales team for as the director of sales & marketing at Del Lago Resort. Ms. Parks maintains a tenured, enthusiastic and successful team of sales professionals who have been with her for an average of six years. Del Lago is set among 300 acres along the shores of Lake Conroe, 40 miles north of Houston, TX. For additional information call 1-800-Del-Lago or www.dellago.com.