The Real Role of Sales Managers

BY RICK CONLOW | RICK CONLOW INTERNATIONAL

"Selling cycles are longer!"

"Margins are lower!"

"We need to cut prices to sell!"

From Vancouver to Montreal, San Diego to Newark, businesses are doing just about anything to stay one step ahead of new, smarter and more aggressive competitors. But many aren't doing the right thing: training and coaching their salespeople.

Most salespeople today are not equipped to create sales in the current market, because their sales managers have neglected what should have been their primary responsibilities – training and coaching. Several years ago, corporate staff, salespeople and sales managers themselves began to see the sales manager as a marketer, number cruncher and contractor.

As managers assumed tasks associated with these roles, these new responsibilities encroached on their education and training time. Now, organizations are paying the price.

With fewer customers and formidable competition, it is imperative that you have a knowledgeable, professional and – here's the key – highly trained sales force. You can't afford to wait on this. If you haven't made this investment, you need to make it now.

Kick it into high gear and get moving on the things you should have been doing in the past.

You can't expect your salespeople to improve their performance if rigorous training and coaching don't support them. It's simply unthinkable.

Badgering, screaming at or threatening your salespeople to do new and better things is not training. That type of behavior reduces salespeople's level of productivity and injures their attitude. Meanwhile, the service people and support people observe what's going on and they become anxious or depressed. The fallout hangs over the office like a dark cloud. What a wonderful atmosphere that creates for customers!

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Many of you may be thinking, "We do train. We coach. We have weekly sales meetings. We have orientation training for new people. Our on-line library is full of materials. The salespeople all read the product guides and fact books. We send them to sales conferences." That's wonderful, but these activities aren't training. Education? Yes. Motivation? Maybe. Training? No. Coaching? No.

Education is important. People must have the facts and knowledge to do their job (and companies need to get much better in this area, too). But training – real training – is role-playing one on one and in groups with the sales manager. It is a hands-on application of skills and knowledge over and over and over.

Real coaching is working with prospects in actual selling situations, with the sales manager playing an active role. It is a process of teaching salespeople how to develop their skills and results. It demands a dedicated commitment of time from the manager to get in the field and see customers with reps, and it requires office time as well. The company we worked with in Montreal improved their results from 80% of forecast to 147% of forecast by making this happen.

The top 100 companies in the U.S., according to Fortune magazine, provide 40 to 60 hours of training per employee per year, and the salespeople get even more. But it's worth it! Studies show real training and coaching can have a dramatic impact on sales performance – 50% to 88% improvement depending on the industry.

You can't learn to play scratch golf simply by reading Phil Mickelson's book, viewing his DVDs or taking an elearning course. You can learn a lot about technique and skills. However, to play to par, you must take Phil's knowledge and apply it with lessons from a qualified teaching pro and then practice it on a course and make corrections continually. Even then you might not play scratch golf, but the odds are more in your favor than if you just read a book and watched DVDs.

The most successful managers realize the value of real training and coaching. They train, train some more, and coach to reinforce. They see training and coaching as an ongoing and never-ending process. They place the responsibility, authority, and accountability where it belongs—squarely on their shoulders.

But, they have to be trained and coached first.

You can hire the people you need to market and crunch numbers. Get your sales managers out of their offices and in front of customers. Take them to the training room and teach them how to train and coach others. Then, require them to train and coach high-performance selling skills relentlessly.

This is what real coaching and training are all about. Make your sales managers your "teaching pros." Regardless of your current sales performance, you'll experience the difference. And in the current marketplace, it's the difference between growth and stagnation!

About Rick Conlow

I've been in your shoes; I was a manager just like you may be now. I wanted to succeed just like everyone. Eventually, I co-founded WCW Partners, Inc. and Rick Conlow International. Our people involved elevating people first through Servant Leadership. Collaborating with over 200 fine companies and thousands of managers we achieved:

+48 quality service awards including JD Power, Ford's President Award, and Canada's Consumers Choice Award.
+Record-breaking sales year after year: 30%, 48%, 52%, 75%, 122% and 212% gains.
+15-20-point gains on CX surveys, 50-95% NPS ratings.
+12-19-point gains on EX surveys, 50-84% eNPS ratings.
+Authored 22 books, including the best sellers, The Superstar Leadership Model and The 5 Dynamics of Servant Leadership.

Exceed your leadership potential today, Partner with us!

POSITIVELY,

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