

## How to Run an Effective Sales Meeting

Sales meetings are a fact of life and business and they are important for a variety of reasons. They allow larger companies to address the entire sales team as a group. They offer opportunities to provide additional training (product, skills, and technical). They help keep your team up-to-date. And, they present a tremendous opportunity for your team to connect and develop stronger relationships with each other. Unfortunately, many sales meetings are unproductive and not nearly as effective as they could be. Here are a few of the most common mistakes people make when scheduling and running sales meetings.

**They try to pack too much information into the meeting.** This often with larger organizations when the entire sales team only gets together once or twice a year. The meeting planner (Owner, President, Vice President, Sales Manager, etc.) believes that the more information that is reviewed, the better their return on investment. I recall one of my managers once stating, "Since we have them here for three days let's make sure we cover everything." He then scheduled each day of meetings to start at 8:30 A.M. and finish at 6:30 P.M. Meetings must be more than information-dumps. People can only absorb so much information in a given period. When this capacity is reached, attendees begin to tune out and the effectiveness of the meeting starts to diminish because of the amount information the company wants to cram into a single day.

**Solution:** Recognize that marathon sessions are seldom effective. If you have a team that is spread out geographically, consider scheduling tele-conference meetings or use Internet technology to communicate regular changes to your team. A sales manager I know has a weekly meeting with his team to keep them abreast of sales results, new products, and updates. However, he only reviews a few topics and keeps these meetings relatively short (one hour or less) to ensure people stay focused.

**Too many meetings.** In smaller companies, it is easy to fall into the trap of holding meetings too frequently. I have worked for companies and been required to attend meetings every week. While some of these meetings were valuable, many of them were not a good use of time because they focused on issues that only pertained to a few employees.

**Solution:** Watch for signs of frustration or impatience during your meetings. If your team expresses their concern about meeting every week, consider the content that is being delivered. While it is important to keep people up-to-date on changes, you can often communicate these changes or updates via email, your company's Intranet or bulletin board, or even voice mail blasts.

**The boss dominates the meeting.** I have attended countless meetings where the boss dominates the air-time and lectures to his/her team. This is one the fastest ways to lose your team's attention and their respect. Another approach that is just as ineffective is to reject new ideas without first listening to them.

**Solution:** Make sure various people have the opportunity to present ideas, changes, updates, etc. This gets your team involved and makes them feel like they are a bigger part of the team. And never, ever, reprimand people in a public meeting. Contrary to popular belief, public humiliation is NOT a good motivator.

**They get off-track.** Countless meetings veer off-track on conversations or discussions about topics not on the agenda. These side conversations distract people and often relate to a handful of people. This often causes the meeting to run beyond its scheduled end time which frustrates and annoys people.

**Solution:** Make sure that every meeting has an agenda and that it is distributed BEFORE the meeting. Then follow the agenda and keep to the scheduled times. If you get off-track, advise attendees that you will discuss that topic in a side conversation AFTER the meeting.

If your meeting is an all-day event, allow plenty of time for breaks. The general rule of thumb is to break every 90 minutes for at least 15-20 minutes. This gives people time to briefly recharge and it allows them to check voice mail and respond to customer requests, questions, or concerns.

**Attendees do not have input into the meeting content.** Because most meetings are organized by an executive of the company, the agenda follows his or her concerns and issues. Rarely do sales people have input into the content or agenda. However, this one action can make a significant difference.

Solution: Involve your team when setting the agenda. One manager I worked for always had at least one sales person deliver a presentation, and at the very least, he sought input for meeting topics. Getting your team involved in the meeting increases their level of interest, improves their buy-in, and demonstrates that you take their ideas and input seriously. It may take a while to get people on-board when you first implement this approach but after a few meetings, the process gets easier.

Lastly, one of the most important questions to answer is WII-FM. Every sales person wants to know “What’s In It For Me?” When your meetings address this concern, attendance and active participation will increase, as will the buy-in for any necessary changes.

Sales meetings are important business tool and when you avoid these mistakes you can increase the effectiveness of your meetings.

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