

## Secrets to Motivating Your Sales Team

“How do I keep my sales people motivated?”

This is one of the most frequently asked questions in my management development workshops. Although there is no easy answer to this question there are several techniques that, when properly implemented, will help you develop a highly charged and motivated work team.

**Involve them in setting goals.** Most, if not all, organizations establish quotas for their sales teams but, surprisingly, few actually involve their sales people in the process. Excellent managers know that involving their team members will generate a higher level of buy-in. Effective sales managers give their team an overview of the big picture and what the company needs to achieve. Then, they work with each person to establish individual targets that will meet or exceed the corporate objectives. Powerful goals follow SMART guidelines:

**Specific.** Every goal must be specific. The more specific and detailed a target is, the more people can visualize its outcome.

**Motivating.** Is the goal important to the person who is responsible for achieving it? If not, they may lose interest, particularly if it is a longer term objective. Once again, this reinforces the concept of involving the employee in the goal setting process.

**Achievable.** Goals should have a 75% chance of accomplishment while still challenging the individual to push themselves beyond their existing comfort zone.

**Relevant.** Each goal must be relevant to the main objective of the corporation. Obviously, sales is relevant to the overall success of the company.

**Time Bound.** Set a time frame and deadline for each goal. Ensure the deadline is realistic but, at the same time, challenging.

SMART goals help people stretch themselves and achieve more. Work with your team members to help them determine the goals that would be most appropriate for their development and growth and help them develop the appropriate action steps to achieve these goals and you will see a noticeable improvement in their performance.

**Communicate.** Sales people are hungry for information and my experience has taught me that, in all but rare situations, can be trusted with corporate details. Unfortunately, too many organizations and their managers' feel that people should only be given information that is relevant to their specific job.

I once worked for an organization that established some aggressive sales and profitability targets and created a bonus program based on the percentage increase of profit from the previous year. The idea was excellent! After all, why not compensate everyone in the company for sales and profit other than just top level executives and sales people. This would allow EVERY employee to contribute to the profitability of the organization. Unfortunately, the company wouldn't divulge the previous year's profits which meant that the employees had no idea what they were striving to achieve. Many

employees saw this as a way for the company to avoid paying bonuses at the end of the year and, as a result, stopped working on their goals and objectives.

Tell your team what's going on. Keep them apprised of the progress you are making in achieving your targets. People are naturally curious and want to know how they are doing. I'm not suggesting you reveal confidential information but I do recommend you share information about the overall status of the company. If sales are down and you need people to focus on generating new accounts or business then tell them. If costs are climbing then advise your employees that they need to be aware of their expenses.

Regular update meetings, email correspondence, broadcast voice mails are just some of the ways you can communicate with your team. Another effective method is through casual discussions. At one point during my career I traveled as much as 35 weeks a year. On the occasion when I was in the office, I found the informal discussions around the lunch table invaluable because they helped me catch up on what was happening in the company.

Communication **MUST** be clear and concise. I once worked with a senior level manager who had a top performer that was looking to get promoted. The senior manager assigned this individual to a different location and instructed him to begin acting more like a District Sales Manager. When I asked the senior manager exactly what he meant, he replied that he wanted this individual to take more initiative. I questioned again him as to his exact expectations and he said he wanted his top performer to act like a Sale Manager. Again, I persisted and asked what he meant by this vague statement. He ended up repeating his previous comments and couldn't clearly articulate his thoughts. Because of this, there was no way his employee could perform to his manager's expectations.

Employees want to know where they stand and, all but a few, want to do a good job. They want to know how, you, as their manager, view their performance. That's why it is critical that you give them direction and feedback on a regular basis. Unfortunately, many managers are hesitant to provide feedback on negative performance because they are afraid of the potential conflict that may arise. Yet, most employees can accept constructive criticism, providing it is delivered in a professional manner.

**Recognize their effort.** In my workshops I often hear managers grumble when I suggest they praise and recognize the efforts of their team members. I hear comments such as, "Why should I praise them for doing their job?" or "They'll think I'm soft." My experience has taught me that people will work harder for someone who recognizes the effort they put into their work. Praising an employee is not a difficult process. Here are four steps to follow to provide effective positive reinforcement:

1. Be specific. Most people make the mistake of saying something like, "You did a good job today." Although this is better than no feedback, it doesn't recognize the specific behaviour you want reinforced. What exactly does it mean? How will the

employee interpret it? A more effective method is to say, “Sarah, you did a really good job satisfying that irate customer.”

2. Be sincere. Ensure that your body language and tone of voice is consistent with the message that you want to give. Carefully consider what you say and how you say it. Keep it brief and to the point, be clear and concise. Too many people don't determine beforehand what they are going to say and the result is a garbled, unfocused message. Ensure that you are sincere; if you don't mean it, don't say it.
3. Acknowledge the effort and/or energy. When you praise an employee's performance, acknowledge their effort and commitment. In other words, how hard they worked and/or how involved they were with it. For example, “*Karen, thanks for helping out John today. I appreciate the extra effort you made to ensure that everything was taken care of.*”
4. Ensure it is timely. Praise the employee's performance as soon as you become aware of it. If too much time elapses the individual may perceive the praise as an afterthought and it will very have little positive impact. Also, make sure the reinforcement is given in an appropriate place. The general rule of thumb is to praise in public and reprimand in private. However, not all employees want that recognition in front of their peers. Therefore, you must know your employees and be aware of the best place to provide positive feedback.

**Promote two-way communication.** Your sales people are a wealth of information and can often contribute valuable suggestions to improve the business. Many managers say they have an open door policy but, in reality, will only listen to an employee if his or her ideas are in sync with their own. If you truly want to create a team of highly motivated employees take the time to listen to their comments and ideas. Foster an environment that encourages the open sharing of information. Great leaders are always open to new ideas and methods of improving business and some of the best ideas come from the front-line staff.

**Lead by example.** This last point is the most important. If you want a highly motivated team YOU must set the example. You must demonstrate enthusiasm, energy, team cooperation, honesty, integrity and commitment. Treat people with respect and dignity. Give them the tools to excel, grow and develop. Encourage them to participate and get involved. Solicit feedback, listen to their comments, and act on suggestions that will help your business succeed. Set and communicate high standards, provide positive reinforcement when your team members perform and involve them. You will soon see a team that will do almost anything to help you succeed!

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