

# Managers should apply their natural selling skills

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“If you are leading and no one is following, you are not leading. You are out for a walk.”

This quote by John Maxwell pretty much sums it up. Sales leadership never has been more important because of the recession, corporate scandals and the impact of the Internet on business.

Many sales managers get promoted because of their ability to source, sell and close business. The skills in leading a sales team are very different; however, there are some real similarities between selling and leading. The effective sales manager recognizes how to take old selling skills and transfer them to new sales-management skills. Here are five points to consider:

- **Prospecting skills** — Really good salespeople always prospect for new business and to grow existing accounts. Sales managers can prospect for sourcing and uncovering top sales talent.

A top salesperson also makes time for business development, because they know that prevents empty sales pipelines.

Effective sales managers also block out time to interview potential salespeople, even if they don't have an immediate opening. They know that prevents empty-people pipelines and empty territories.

- **Qualifying skills** — Good sales are about qualifying or disqualifying opportunities to ensure the wise investment of time and energy.

Top salespeople learn consultative selling skills to uncover the need or want of the prospect. When a prospect shares a need, the savvy salesperson doesn't immediately buy the buying signal. They ask more questions, looking for proof of commitment to solve the problem.

Sales managers also need good qualifying skills regarding potential job candidates. Instead of uncovering a need, they must figure out if the candidate possesses what they need.

For example, a potential candidate says they're a team player and hard working. Like a good salesperson, the sales manager doesn't buy the buying signal. They learn and apply behavior-based interviewing skills to look for proof of what the candidate said.

There's a big difference between what a candidate would do versus what they did do. One answer is a fiction novel; the other is a biography.

- **Building relationships** — Top salespeople know how to build relationships with prospects and clients. They take time to understand what motivates each client in order to provide excellent service.

A salesperson never acts like they don't have time for a good client. They don't check email or voicemail when meeting with a customer, because they want the client to feel valued. Great sales managers use the same relationship-building skills, except the client is the sales team. Instead of trying to mass-manage the team, effective sales managers learn about each salesperson's strengths, weaknesses, motivators and desires.

They are fully present and focused when meeting with the team. They aren't checking voicemail, email or any other electronic gadget. Great sales managers treat their sales team like they treat their best customer.

- **Core values** — A salesperson knows they do their best work with customers who are aligned with their core values and the company's. Good salespeople know that a customer who's not in a win-win mode is a losing proposition.

Sales managers work best with sales representatives that share their core values. How many of you have heard the following response from a sales manager when asked about tracking their team's sales activity: "Oh we don't do it; salespeople just lie or turn fake numbers in."

Now, think about that statement. Why in the world would a sales manager keep someone on the sales team who is lying to them? Accepting that type of behavior says as much about the sales manager's values as it does about the fibbing salesperson's.

The effective sales manager is clear about his core values, and all his team members are aligned with them.

- **Great doctors** — Really good salespeople are like good doctors. They listen to the patient (prospect), gather information and prescribe only when they feel they have the right solution or medicine. If they can't solve the problem, they refer to another specialist.

Good sales managers also are doctors. They listen carefully to figure out the root cause of a performance issue. Is it because the salesperson doesn't know what they don't know? Is it a buy-in or belief issue? Is it a knowledge problem or an application problem?

There isn't one solution for all customers. There isn't one solution to improving performance on your sales team.

Evaluate the skills you learned as a salesperson, and transfer those to your new role as a sales manager. Don't throw away skills you've honed for years. Learn how to use them in a new way.

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