



THE GOOD PEANUT

“TODAY’S SALES MANAGER – A SUPER COACH OR A SUPERVISOR?”

Whilst business leaders increasingly grasp how vital it is that their sales managers focus on coaching their salespeople, the problem is that very few of them are actually doing it.

A research paper on professional selling by Julian Griffith

Effective sales management is pivotal to building revenue, maintaining margins and hiring the right people.

Today’s world calls for the sales manager to be a professional coach and mentor. Being an effective supervisor and administrator, or even a great salesperson, no longer cuts it.

Businesses that understand and focus on this will outperform their competition, retain their top performers and attract the best talent.

So why do so few companies implement this strategy?

What are our sales managers doing on a daily basis? I’ll come on to that later, in the meantime one thing is for sure, they are not spending anywhere near enough time coaching and developing their people.

Too many business leaders are allowing their management team to carry on doing what they’ve always done and then venting their frustrations when targets are missed.

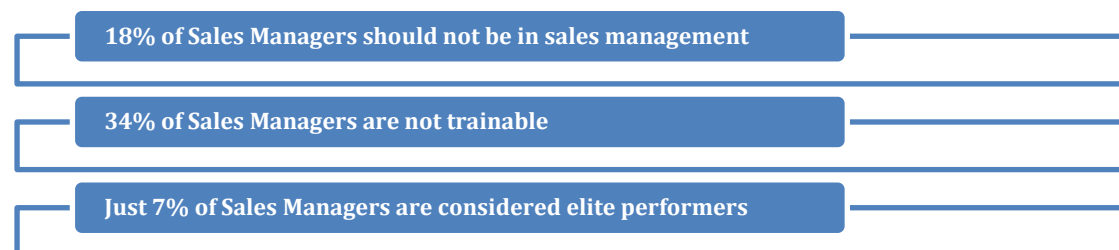
At this point let me stress two key things.....

Firstly the purpose of this paper is not to point the finger at sales management. Instead let’s take on board that most have been put into the position ill equipped, without ever being trained in what to do and are crying out for development in people management skills that are alien to them.

Secondly, if you have a great sales manager on board, it will enable you to grow your business. But if your manager is weak and not doing the daily things that he or she should be then you will always face an uphill battle.

The key message is “Focus on getting your sales management right”.

Having worked with numerous CEO’s and their sales organisations over the last few years, the one ever present problem that needs fixing is the lack of effective sales management. This experience is supported by findings referred to in my paper titled “Taking the lid off your sales organisation” where I explain that data obtained from Objective Management Group (OMG)¹ through evaluating nearly 50,000 sales managers in about 250 industries over a period of twenty years shows that



So let’s start to unravel the reasons behind the problems and then how we can fix them.

Issue #1 – What do they spend their time doing?

First up is the time they spend managing one crisis after another. The same way that many managers step in to save a piece of business rather than allowing their salesperson to handle it themselves and sometimes fail, they’re constantly on hand to fire fight daily problems, many of which they should be delegating or simply not be getting involved with in the first place.

Then there’s the branch manager who has a dual role. Yes she has to manage her sales team but is also responsible for the day to day running of the branch. Often these managers have a background in operations and may have little or no sales experience of their own, let alone have the skills needed to manage a team of salespeople. The truth is that this is an almost impossible ask and what happens is the person invariably does what she does best and is most comfortable with. In fact anything but manage her sales team well.

At the other extreme we have the sales manager who really is still driven by being a salesperson. Yes he has a new title but has few of the attributes needed to manage others. His mindset may still be “it’s all about me” and he might struggle to truly be a team player. As a result he will dedicate far too much time to personal selling.

Finally there are the myriad of things they can busy themselves with including too much time spent on compensation, organisation matters and strategy.

Solution to issue #1

Allow and enable your managers to spend their time properly. There are four key areas that they need to focus on.

¹ Objective Management Group www.objectivemanagement.com

1. Coaching
2. Motivating
3. Accountability
4. Recruiting

80% of the sales manager's daily routine needs to be spent doing these core activities instead of the 30 to 40% typically reported.

Seriously consider giving them specific training in these vital skills.

Issue #2 - Are they aligned to the company's strategy?

On the subject of strategy, we need to also highlight that managers are usually misaligned with the CEO's business strategy.

To drill down further here I have compiled data from a random selection of sales organisations I have worked with. Between them a total of 43 sales managers took part, with the answers they gave compared with those of their respective CEO's.

The strategy questionnaire covers key topics including the type of customer targeted, whether the business goal is to build market share through volume or focus on profitability, the role of the sales manager, strategies around attracting and hiring new people, training, remuneration of salespeople, marketing, new business and pricing.

Now I think you would agree that it's vital that the managers are singing off the same song sheet as their bosses. However, once averaged out, the group analysed showed it was just **54%** in line with the strategies of their respective organisations.

From wider experience this finding is representative of sales organisations throughout the country across all industry types.

But our managers are our messengers. We rely on them to ensure that the sales team are "on message", that they are doing and saying the right stuff day in day out to our clients and future prospects.

Organisations realise the importance of building their brand as a great way to differentiate themselves from their competitors. This should be applauded but at the same time it is evident that immediate action needs to be taken to ensure that the sales force embrace the brand and the values the company stand for so they can sell in accordance with it.

Solution to issue #2

Make it a priority to map out the sales strategy of the company then workshop it maybe with your complete management team, not just your sales managers, so that all understand what they should be doing.

I am conscious this may appear obvious and over simple, but experience clearly shows that most organisations are failing to get their sales leaders to understand and carry out their sales strategy, so this is a great first step.

Issue #3 – Do their beliefs support them and their team?

Data shows there is a remarkable correlation between how the manager thinks and behaves in selling situations being mirrored in his or her sales team.

If the overall belief system is positive from a sales perspective it supports the manager and his team. Likewise if there are weaknesses present they spread very rapidly to those who look to them for guidance and motivation.

Key examples include.....

- Is the manager taking ownership of and responsibility for results or do excuses prevail?
- Does he have a need for approval from his team? If so can he do the tough things sometimes needed?
- Can he hold his people accountable?
- What if she is a comparison or price shopper? If the manager needs to think about it, will that impact the ability to close sales?
- Is he comfortable discussing money? What does he consider a lot of money to be?

Solution to issue #3

Whilst an individual's strengths are apparent, we very often are unaware of our weaknesses and how they sabotage us.

Before we can fix any problem areas that the sales manager may have they need to be understood and accepted. Consider using a sales management assessment tool to give the answers before deciding what action should be taken.

Issue #4 – Have you got the right person for the job?

Many businesses keep their best salespeople by promoting them to managers and then wonder why it's not working out. If that's not an option they may approach someone who is working for their competition or within the industry. Often they come with great expectations which prove unfounded as the months roll by.

The reality is that getting the right person onboard entails a lot more work, but when done properly the rewards are considerable. Having the right sales manager in place is central to growing the business.

Solution to issue #4

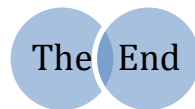
Put in place a robust recruiting process. Firstly create the criteria for what is needed and objectively evaluate all candidates against it, whether internal or external.

Don't be wooed by their impressive resume, instead question claims and look for inconsistencies.

Conduct interviews following a strict routine and when satisfied speak with previous employers, usually not the referees put on the resume. In addition consider further testing in areas such as Emotional Intelligence.

Summary – 4 things you can do now

1. Make sure your managers are spending their time doing the right things and if they need to improve their skills look to give them the necessary training.
2. Discover whether or not your managers truly understand and are following the strategies of the business. If not make it a priority to rectify this problem.
3. Be clear about their beliefs and behaviours and how these either support or undermine their ability to carry out their job. Be open to looking into specific coaching for them to overcome any weaknesses.
4. Take the decision to put a robust recruitment process together and follow it. It will pay you back handsomely.



About

The

Author



Julian Griffith is the most sought after private advisor to CEOs specialising in sales force performance for three specific reasons. 1) He tells it like it is 2) He doesn't play politics and 3) He has an uncanny gift to uncover sales blockages that most CEOs don't always recognise on their own. Having held senior sales leadership positions both in the UK and Australia, Julian has seen the good, the bad and the ugly among sales leaders and why they innocently miss hidden performance blockages within their own sales teams.

Julian is the Managing Director and Founder of The Good Peanut. As a CEO Insider himself, he has witnessed firsthand the key ingredients needed to transform an underperforming sales team into a world-class sales organisation and he and his team work with CEOs intent on building high performance sales teams to drive growth for their companies.

In his book "The CEO Solution", Julian discusses the leverage that you need to optimise your sales organisation's ability to perform at a world-class level, he unmask the truth about what is really going on in your sales force and covers specifics such as how you can prevent your sales team from eroding margins in your business in order to "close the deal", together with the beliefs we hold and whether they support or hinder sales performance.

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