

## **Leading a Great Sales Team**

I have elected to call this article “Leading a Great Sales Team”, as opposed to “Leading a Sales Team” because it is my intention to convey not only the skills for being a great team leader, but also to define what makes a sales team great. Certainly one measure of a sales team is the volume of sales it generates, yet certainly there are excellent teams that generate less than inferior teams due to the cost of the products they are selling or the marketing they operate within. For example, a BMW dealership could demonstrate higher sales figures even though they are selling far fewer units than the Kia dealerships.

### **Your Role as Team Leader**

As Tudog sees it, a good team leader undertakes 13 primary responsibilities. These tasks serve to insure the quality of the team, promote results, and maintain a positive work environment. They are:

1. Recruiting Salespeople – As leader you get to choose the members of your team. Instinct might tell you that you want people who see the world as you do. What you really want are people who are determined to succeed, know how to sell, and are willing to live within the guidelines and standards you will be setting up. You don't want “yes men”, but rather people who strive for excellence and will push you to excellence when the need arises. This may mean disagreeing with you. This is a good thing.
2. Training – I will soon devote more time to training as a key element to what makes sales teams great. As team leader you will either be conducting the training or selecting the outside firms that come in and provide training. Either way, as leader you determine what values your team will embrace and what culture will prevail. Tudog prefers a supportive sales environment, as opposed to a competitive one. We think everyone needs to be doing well in order for the team to excel. A good team has a star or two. A great is made up of stars.
3. Coaching – Your role as leader means you are not only team manager, but also head coach. A coach not only serves to instruct (a crucial role), but also provides support and encouragement. Your job is to be head cheerleader and motivate your team by showing them how much faith you have in their abilities.
4. Leads Distribution – You're the boss, so you get to hand out the leads that come, as well as some existing accounts. Last thing you want is for some of your team members to view you as unfair. This is why you need to set up a rotation that everyone is aware of and hand out leads in the set order. That having been said, if a huge opportunity comes in and you feel the next person on the list (the one due to receive the assignment in accordance with the rotation) is not the appropriate person for the task, you must make the decision to give the assignment to the person best suited for the job. If you do this, make sure you communicate openly with the individual you are bumping, explaining your decision and finding a way for the person to both save face, and remain next on the list for incoming assignments.
5. Monitoring Performance – If you are to be an effective leader you must have an accurate and up-to-date understanding of how each of your team members is performing. You need to do this not only so you can know who has what strengths, but also who has which weaknesses – so you can work to improve them and strengthen the overall performance of your team.

6. Results Analysis – It doesn't matter if your team is the only sales force for your company or if there are additional teams, you need to be constantly analyzing the results of your team's performance. You need to be seeking answers to where the weaknesses are, where new opportunities lie, how efficient you are, how strategies are performing, and how you can increase sales. Great teams are never satisfied with their performance as they are always looking to do better. By analyzing results regularly you can give your team the information they need to continue to excel.
7. Distributing Reward – You have the task of not only providing incentive to succeed, but also the ability to reward extraordinary achievements. Certainly one way to reward success is through additional monetary gain such as bonuses. While this is an effective way of providing incentive, your ability to do so on a regular basis will most likely be limited by the top brass of the company that would like to see some of the money stay in the company (and hate to see sales people earn almost as much as they do). Therefore rewards can be things other than money, from time off, to theater tickets, to public acknowledgement of achievement and your sincere gratitude.
8. Confronting Failure – There is no intent here, in using the term confronting failure, to imply that the manner in which failure is to be handled is through confrontation. The term is used because failure is an unpleasant reality of business and it is sometimes easier, emotionally and politically, to simply ignore it. As a leader of a great sales team, you cannot ignore failure. You must address it. In this way you are confronting it, but you must do so with the aim of resolution, not retribution. Seek to mend whatever caused the failure, and if you need to release a team member make sure you do so in such a way that does not seem unfair or disloyal by the rest of your team.
9. Retaining Staff – Losing valuable team players disrupts operations, eats away at morale, and cuts into your bottom line. Your job as team leader is to actively engage each of your team members, keeping an eye out for dissatisfaction and acting swiftly to, within reason, address the grievance.
10. Playing Peacemaker – There is no way to avoid conflict. The culture you create and support should serve to reduce tensions and competition, but certainly there will be times when you will be called upon to mediate a dispute. In these circumstances you must seek to be fair. You can pursue a compromise, but under no circumstances should you shy away from instituting justice. Your team members will view your retreat from being just as a failure of leadership. Not doing the right thing, in this case, is, for your team, coming down on the side of the wrong thing. And that's a bad thing. Another peacemaker role may be that of inter-team or even inter-department. In all these scenarios, the same rules apply.
11. Inter- Departmental Liaison – A bit more about your relationship with marketing will follow below, but in addition to marketing, you will have to liaison with an array of departments within your company (like customer service, tech support, finance, product development and others). As team leader you want to make sure that these divisions are acting to support your efforts in the field, and you need to set up routine scheduled communications with them so that you have the mechanisms for dialogue as the need arises.
12. Set Tactics – Sales can be approached through a variety of tactics – telephone, mail, person-to-person, a combination of all three. You need to set the procedures for each tactic, determine the mix, and monitor performance. You may have a product that requires a demonstration, so you would focus on getting those meetings and the strength of the presentation. On the other hand, you may

have a line of brand items that do not need to be seen, and your strategy is price based, so you can achieve an awful lot over the phone or through the mail. Whatever tactics are to be pursued, you, as leader, are the person to set them down.

13. Set Standards – As leader of a great team you have high standards and you have the procedures in place to make sure that those standards are maintained. To achieve these standards you provide great training (discussed below), hands on support, and public recognition for those who, adhering to the standards, achieve great things.

### **Training – The Key to a Great Team**

There are lots of training methods you can use – outside experts, role playing, on-site and others. The use of one method over another should come from your assessment of which will best prepare your team to be the best they can be. Your parameters need to be the content of the training, meaning the level of knowledge your team will have. Knowledge is divided into four categories:

1. Knowledge of sales techniques and when to apply which technique
2. Knowledge of the sales cycle and which tactic to employ at which phase
3. Knowledge of your products or services, both in terms of the technology (if it's technology based) and in terms of its benefits and ROI
4. Knowledge about the market, your competitors and why your product or service is superior

Other parameters for your training need to include the standard of presentations and how to deliver a good presentation, negotiation tactics and guidelines, and procedures for closing a deal.

If your team is well trained, and that training is maintained and updated on a regularly scheduled basis, you will have a highly qualified team. What we might call, a great team.

### **More Great Team Characteristics**

In addition to training there are other characteristics that make a sales team great. They area:

- Adherence to a supportive, positive culture
- Teamwork
- Good relations with other departments in the company
- Reliance on good marketing. This includes not only resisting trying to do the marketing department's job, but relying on them to draw attention, create interest and inspire prospective customers to action.
- A focus on fundamentals
- A love of the sale

The great sales team in action is a thing of beauty. Insofar as we love beautiful things, we hope this article will inspire you to go forth and be beautiful.