

Inspiring Your Sales Force

Without a Chief Sales Officer, you're not optimizing your business.

By Frank Schipani

We're all dealing with a high degree of uncertainty and change in the "new norm" of business today. And good or bad, seniority means nothing. Just because you've been in business a long time doesn't mean you'll survive. Nor does being number one today guarantee anything tomorrow. You can own a luxury car, a vintage watch, or a beautiful home, but you cannot own success; you only rent it. And the rent money comes from one place—SALES.

What are we doing about the lost art of selling? Let's be honest here: most sellers are servicers at best. To service a customer is to give him what he came for. A professional seller gives him more than he came for, while creating a memorable experience and thus loyalty on the part of the client.

I recently worked as a sales trainer for a major retail organization and, in the course of our preliminary discussion, they asked about follow-up. "We know you'll make an impact while you're here, but people generally don't remember much after the presentation," the GMM remarked. So I went on to explain what's needed for sustainable selling skills.

First and foremost: hire a professional to deliver content and inspiration. At this first workshop, include senior management, managers and all sales associates.

Second: host another interactive workshop for managers and sellers on all products from hats to shoes. (e.g. Merino is a lamb, not the former Dolphins quarterback. Canvas is a suit interlining, not the mat in a boxing ring.)

Third, and key to sustainability: assign a

designated individual to be the ongoing selling skills facilitator. He or she goes through leadership by example training and ultimately conducts weekly or bi-monthly sales workshops. This should be a full-time component of this person's job, and at the same time, a full-time responsibility of someone in senior management to supervise. Upon completion of this training, he or she is given a new title: Chief Sales Officer!

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The point of weekly or bi-monthly repetitive selling exercises and mentoring (What's working? What's not? How are you doing it Charlie?) is to reinforce the importance of selling, to improve individual skills, to have more fun, to make more money and ultimately to live up to the role of a true sales professional.

Accountability can be attained only by team training that is developmental and NOT

evaluative, as too many companies do today. All the monitoring, conversion metrics, and sales reports might serve to apply pressure to the sellers, but in reality, these fail to help them with actual on-floor techniques. In essence, they're giving a report card and asking the sellers to raise the bar without showing them HOW to raise the bar!

Tom Peters, the branding guru, noted several years ago in *Success Magazine* that American companies hardly train their salespeople, and when they do, it's not in selling skills, it's merely servicing. He went on to say that training the sales force presents a vast opportunity for any company willing to make the investment of time and money.

On that note, kudos to Macy's CEO Terry Lundgren for an initiative he took this past summer: retraining Macy's sales associates to sharpen their selling techniques and improve methods of approaching and engaging customers. And this, mind you, is a company with 810 doors! But while the goal is lofty, it's the follow-through that will determine whether or not Macy's can truly create a culture of 'selling' rather than 'servicing.' (And if they can do it with 130,000 associates, imagine

what you can do in your company!)

A final thought: If you think sales training is expensive...try ignorance. ■

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