

## The 5 Bad Habits Every Sales Manager Must Break - Immediately!

Jun 23, 2014

Over the past two decades, I have been a sales leader and I have coached countless sales leaders. In my experience and the experience of all the leaders I have coached and interviewed, there are five bad habits that many sales leaders and managers unconsciously develop that prevent them from exceeding their revenue targets, developing themselves into great leaders *and* developing their people.



These habits are consistent across industries and seem to be pervasive regardless of tenure. It does seem that the longer a sales leader has been in a management position, the more ingrained these bad habits tend to be. These bad habits also plague the small to medium sized business owner as well as they tend to function as the chief sales officer in their company.

## **Bad Habit #1: They focus on the wrong things**

If you read the job description of just about any sales leadership function, usually 75-85% of the responsibilities revolve around coaching and developing others. When I interview clients both current and past on this subject, the average time spent on this category is less than 10%! Instinctively, we know in our hearts that the best way to drive results is through others yet we get sucked into the chaos of firefighting every day and before we know it, the vast majority of our time is spent trying to solve problems for our people rather than empowering them to solve those problems themselves. What would it look like if you literally spent four days a week doing nothing but improving your team's knowledge, skills and attitudes? If you're not able to do this, my guess is that it's due to two constraints. Number one, your organization's administrative processes are too burdensome and time consuming. Number two, you stink at time management. Both are devastating to your ability to do what you were hired to do...coach for results.

## **Bad Habit #2: They measure the wrong things**

The number one problem for 99% of all organizations is to improve top line sales revenue. With this in mind, let's follow the normal school of sales leadership thinking. To increase revenue, my people need to be in front of more customers, therefore, I will measure every sales person based on their percent to plan and the number of sales calls they can make. The reality is, every sales team performs on the traditional bell curve. Ironically, the top performing sales people rarely make the most calls. Yet, we still employ the flawed logic that more calls equals higher performance. Rarely is this the case. So if it's not the case, then what is really going on? A sales person's performance is ultimately measured by the revenue they produce but those sales totals are simply an outcome of sales behaviors. The great sales people consistently demonstrate great sales behaviors, not activity for activity's sake. What you should be measuring are the behaviors your sales people are demonstrating and to do that you must actually spend time with them observing their behavior in front of customers. As a sales leader, you cannot assume that your sales people have the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to be great. You have to define those sales competencies and expected behaviors and work backwards to measure their ability to demonstrate those behaviors in front of customers. What prevents sales leaders from doing this? See Bad Habit #1.

## **Bad Habit #3: They unwittingly reinforce poor sales behaviors**

Producing more revenue for the organization is always front of mind for every sales leader. That pressure to deliver results is what gives them insomnia and ulcers. It's that very pressure that manifests itself during the workday in the way *they push that pressure down to their teams*. That pressure produces fear of failure which gives rise to anxiety and stress. **That consistent daily dose of cortisol causes most sales leaders to unconsciously reinforce poor sales behaviors in their teams**. How does this happen, you ask? Let's say you get the month's latest sales results one Friday afternoon and for the third month in a row, you're behind plan. You fret and worry and

stress all weekend on how to turn the ship around. By Monday morning, you haven't necessarily come up with any innovative solutions so at the Monday morning sales meeting you simply do what comes natural, and that's to go transactional. You begin the meeting by saying enough is enough and we need to do better! We have to do a better job at convincing our customers to buy our solution. We need to make more calls and close more business. **By the end of your rant, you have the cortisol levels so high in your sale team that they bottle that stress, turn around and go data dump as many customers as they can that week.** It's that stress, coupled with measuring the wrong things that continually breeds poor sales behaviors in your sales people. You are unwittingly creating in your sales people the very habits **that cause your customers NOT to buy.** The next month roles around with underperformance and the cycle continues. Customers buy from people they trust and they trust sales people who have the skill at connection. Until you can get your sales team to improve their ability to establish personal and professional trust, the poor results will continue.

#### **Bad Habit #4: They assume training happens elsewhere**

Depending on your organization's philosophy and resources, you will have varying degrees of training and development resources. For those at large companies, they tend to abdicate training responsibility to the training department. For those at small to medium sized companies, **they assume they are hiring skilled sales people who can read a binder and "go get 'em".** In both scenarios, the sales person, even in the best case, gets transactionally trained on products and services but has no development whatsoever in actual sales behavior training. A typical sales leader picks up the ball once a sales person has completed their customary "on boarding" training and managing them to the number from that point forward. A couple of months go by and they can't understand why the sales person isn't producing more. "Didn't you go through training?" they ask or "I thought I hired you because of your experience?" Most sales leaders have implemented their unique "sales process" for their teams that usually reinforces the wrong behaviors (see bad habit #3) and don't equip their teams to have the skills necessary to truly drive effective sales behaviors. When underperformance happens, the finger pointing begins. Managers point the finger at training and training says they did their job so either you don't know how to manage or you stink at hiring. And the cycle continues...

#### **Bad Habit #5: They manage instead of lead**

**You can only manage process. You have to lead people.** We know this to be true at the gut level, we just can't seem to figure out how to implement the concept in our daily grind. **Unfortunately, we have embodied the term "manage." The term itself has the connotation of control. Managers spend there time fighting fires and creating administrative nightmares.** Leaders empower others, cast vision and allow the system to hold people accountable based on one's ability to demonstrate results through behaviors. **Managers say things like,** "Your sales are down. How many customers are you seeing per week?" Leaders say things like, "When you're in front of a customer, where do you feel you're losing ground? What skills do you need to improve to prevent

that from happening?" Managers focus on expense reports being turned in on time and every penny accounted for. Leaders focus on how well the sales person invested their resources to accomplish their sales objectives. Managers focus on activity. Leaders focus on behaviors. Managers point out critical flaws where leaders encourage and empower development. I could go on for pages on the difference between the two. **It's the pressure and constant stress that sales leaders feel that turn them back into managers.** Managers live in a constant state of worry, anxiety and critical judgment. Leaders live in a state of vision, hope and empowerment. Which one are you and which one would you prefer to work for?

As you might have guessed by reading through these bad habits, they tend to build on each other like an avalanche that starts small and innocent but by the time it reaches the valley, it's taken out everything in it's path.