

Building Tenure

These methodologies can help ensure success

by: Larry Coco, Coco Training & Consulting Inc.

Creating a tenured sales group may very well be the biggest key to growing your business in a consistent, vibrant fashion. Let us begin by asking a tough question: Have you ever lost a salesperson who was extremely talented and had tremendous untapped potential — one who you believe in your heart of hearts should have stayed with your company? I find myself nodding in agreement just as you may be doing right now. Yes, we have been there and done that. So why did the salesperson look for a new job opportunity in the first place?

Perhaps we need to be blunt and admit that there are times where we find ourselves, as managers, so wrapped up in day-to-day business processes that we do not spend enough quality time addressing the motivational needs and aspirations of our people. In other words, what truly inspires our salespeople to reach that next level by committing to something greater than themselves — to the team and to your company? What do they need from you and your business environment?

Years ago, I recall embracing the curriculum developed by Applied Concepts (now Sales Optimizer) and believing it had a very solid perspective on building tenure. I still teach these methodologies today. Some of the core aspects are as follows:

■ **Ignite Each Person's Motivation to Stay** — The point here is that as good as we think we are as managers, we cannot motivate our people for any reasonable length of time. They motivate themselves and we can help by creating the proper team environment that inspires others to grow. The bottom line is that building this high-performance team environment must be at the top of our priority list. I am sure you can think back to the not-so-distant past and pinpoint specific sales reps who were there physically every day, but mentally, not so much.

■ **Clarify Your Mind Set** — Adjust your mind set to a place where your people feel like they are getting something more than money out of a job. Always remember that your team's motivation is directly influenced by your management style. This can be accomplished by creating payoffs (economic and non-economic) for each of your team members.



Examples of economic payoffs are things like incentives, bonuses, etc. I think we are all too familiar with these. They involve money as a reward for doing something well and they certainly have their place.

Now, let us move to non-economic payoffs, since I believe this is an area in which we have a tremendous opportunity to improve. An example of a non-economic payoff is a handwritten note on your personal stationary that may read as follows: “Laura, 158 percent of plan for the month. Great work! Just know we appreciate all that you do and we look forward to even bigger accomplishments in the future. Kindest Regards, Nathan.”

I can tell you from personal experience that one of my mentors in life recognized everything. It got to a point where I would smile with excitement when I saw that envelope on my desk. As I write this article, I can see a box in the corner of my office — a box filled with personal notes from my boss written years ago. On any given day, I can reach in, read something positive, and walk away feeling special and proud. Within moments, it can turn a lousy day into a good one.

Another example is recognizing a salesperson for a job

well done in front of his (or her) peers at your next team sales meeting. Ask your employee to stand up and throw much-deserved accolades his way. You can also allow one of your good people to prepare and present something at a sales meeting. This can be very empowering. Also, why not send an e-mail to your employee with a carbon copy to the big boss? How about lunch with you? The ideas are endless.

I think you get the point here — the more personal payoffs your people can get by working with your company, the more tenure everyone will enjoy. We need to figure out what people want and need from their jobs.

■ **Expect that Your People Will Stay** — For those of you who have been in the world of document management for some time, it is apparent that the way we have hired many is by providing money and autonomy. In other words, “Come to work for me Michael. I’ll pay you more money and I’ll get out of your way and just let you do your job.” Herein lies the rub. Once your salesperson has had these benefits for a while, they lose their luster. Thus, the vast majority of your team members want more from a job than being left alone and making money. They need to feel inspired by you.

So much has been written about the X and Y Generations. I believe it is important that we now apply what has been written to our business models. Let us do a brief exercise and compare traditional work environments versus contemporary work environments. Please think about where you are on this motivational road.

Also, is it possible that while you may be more traditional in your approach, you are in constant conflict with workers who are more contemporary in style? Could this be the reason they left?

I want to preface this by saying that you need a good mix of salespeople encompassing both. This is the goal. Each has his strong points and needed areas of improvement as well. I never said this was easy. Traditional salespeople may be your foundation. Contemporary salespeople can be brilliant and get you to that next level. Having all of one type is not going to get you very far.

Traditional workers (Generation X) have grown up believing that when you work hard, rewards will eventually show up. Contemporary workers (Generation Y) want instant gratification in whatever they do. Your work environment must provide positive experiences for both.

Traditional workers are willing to work longer hours without complaint in order to achieve while contemporary workers require more life balance. This means they are willing to work 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., but at 5:01 p.m. they have their

Your business must have a well-developed, ongoing training plan to give your employees what they need — not just today, but down the road as well.

sneakers on and are leaving skid marks out of your parking lot. Consider sharing written expectations with each of your employees up front so there are fewer surprises — for example, child care issues or simply “me time.”

Traditional workers prefer predictability and consistency in their work while contemporary workers need more variety. If your work environment is stale and non-challenging, the Y’s will simply lose interest, get bored and leave.

Traditional workers really do learn better via experience. They need training, but after some brief training they want to try it out. Contemporary workers receive more gratification and crave additional training. Your business must have a well-developed, ongoing training plan to give your employees what they need — not just today, but down the road as well.

Some employees find comfort in the more traditional manager/subordinate relationship. If you ask them to jump, they ask “How high?” On the other hand, if you ask a contemporary worker to jump, they ask, “Why?”

So, create a work environment where your employees have a voice and can be heard. They want to have input and understand how decisions are being made. This means you need to watch and learn. Listen to their views. Ask them about their aspirations.

We can safely conclude that by moving everyone a little more toward the middle of the motivational road, you can create a more positive environment for all and be well on your way to building the tenure you need and deserve.

If you are a more traditional manager, reach out to contemporary workers since you need them to challenge the “old guard” and promote new ideas. Teach your more traditional salespeople to be adaptable, and for your contemporaries, teach them some patience.

It is management’s responsibility to offer the opportunity for positive gratification to each of your salespeople. After all, they are your major accounts for development. Keep in mind: the work environment you create is not for your motivation, it is for your employees’ motivation. ■

Larry Coco is president of Coco Training & Consulting Inc. For the last 28 years, he has focused his career in the world of document management, working with both dealer and direct organizations. Previously, he worked at Ricoh Corp. in a variety of positions. He can be reached at larry.coco@salesoptimizer.com or (914) 588-5384. Visit www.cocotraining.com.

