

The Elite Sales Rep

Drive key values to build stronger sales teams

by: Larry Coco, Coco Training & Consulting Inc.

In today's business world, it is imperative for dealer and direct organizations to keep sales turnover to a minimum and to grow sales tenure. This is not an easy task. While many struggle with this, there is a solution. In short, it requires a plan and effective execution.

There is solid research that tells us the five key values of successful people are as follows:

- A willingness to follow direction — Generally speaking, your best sales representatives are willing to take direction. If not, there will be problems.
- Exhibiting a high amount of self-discipline — Your task is to place your sales rep in situations where he (or she) can be left alone to accomplish relevant tasks.
- The ability to work under pressure — Successful sales reps are able to work under tight deadlines and manage multiple priorities.
- A strong desire and commitment to succeed — A successful rep is willing to put forth the time and effort it takes to win.
- General comprehension abilities — Reps should have a keen awareness of how to handle people and situations. In other words, they should have “street smarts.”

Think for a moment about the most successful people you have ever met in your life, whether it be from your school days, a sports team, a friend, work associates, etc. Perhaps it is even someone you greatly admire. Do these people have these attributes at a very high level? I think you may be nodding your head in agreement right now.

Here is the point: These five internal values reside in the most successful people you know or will ever meet. If this is true, then we need to absolutely measure these values in



our salespeople. There is no reason to reinvent the wheel.

Here is an exercise that will truly make you think. Write the five key values of successful people on a piece of paper. Put your sales rep's name at the top of the page. Next to each of the values, rate the rep on each of them by putting the numbers one through five next to each value. One is the lowest score and five is the highest.

Next, have a meeting with your sales team members and let them

know you have identified the core values of successful people. Ask them to think about someone they admire. Discuss the values in detail and let your team know you expect every employee to exhibit these values at a high level. In other words, you are “raising the bar” and your expectation is that your sales reps will embrace this new company culture.

Next, distribute individual sheets to each member of your sales team and have your reps do a self-evaluation. Ask them to rate themselves with these values in mind, thinking about their work over the past six months or so. Are they a three (average) or are they better, or perhaps worse? The lowest score a rep can give himself is a five; that is, all ones for each key value. The highest score a rep can attain is a 25, or all fives.

As we share in my Sales Management Leadership series, this is the time for you, the manager, to take a very proactive approach. The time is now right for you to share your evaluation of each sales rep by scheduling a meeting with him.

These meetings represent a tremendous opportunity for you to let each sales rep know where he stands. That is a good thing. Too often I speak to reps who do not know where they stand in management's eyes. This simply leads to high levels of stress and anxiety. I believe it is important for

your reps to know where they stand, since only then can individual and team development occur.

Experience tells us that interesting dynamics will take place during these one-on-one meetings. For example, your best reps may tend to underestimate their abilities since they are often self-critical and demand a great deal of themselves. While you rate them a 22,

they may rate themselves only a 16. At this point, let them know they are appreciated and challenge them to bring even stronger values on a consistent basis.

Now for your struggling reps. They may tend to overestimate their abilities and sell you not on what they have done, but rather what they are capable of doing in order to save face. While they may rate themselves a 20 or so, you may have rated them a 14 at best. In this case, as a good manager/leader, your job is to communicate their strengths, as well as areas needing improvement. As these meetings conclude, you need to be very clear with your sales reps as to what values they need to focus on to be in good standing with you, your team and your company.

This system, tied to key internal values, allows you to create a benchmark (perhaps a score of 17 or lower is not acceptable) and to give each of your employees goals. In turn, you will drive these attributes on a consistent basis by giving your sales reps activities tied directly to them. For example, if I am a sales rep reporting to you and I am exhibiting a low level of self-discipline, give me a task that needs to be completed on a timely basis.

Another takeaway from implementing this type of system is that you will have a better understanding as to why certain sales reps are not performing with consistency and are on the verge of being deselected. You are frustrated, as are

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they. In short, they are not bringing these high-level values to the table. It is no wonder you do not spend a great deal of time with them and find more important things to do. They may not have what it takes to be an elite, high performer. Knowing and measuring these values in your new hires will often lead to better decisions. As discussed, holding on to a sales rep and hoping

that things will magically improve will just cost you too much money and time.

I know what you are thinking: If these values are strong indicators of success, then why not make them part of the recruiting and selection process? This makes sense. Share expectations with your candidates, tell them the key values of successful people and explain that your company culture is driven by them. Have them come back and “sell” you on the idea that they are the right hire. Ask them behavioral questions tied to these key values. (I will be happy to share these with you — just send me an e-mail.)

Let these attributes become the basis of how you develop your people. Put a plan in place to continually measure your sales reps and other employees with the five key values in mind. Only then can you build that elite, high-performance team you so want and deserve. ■

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.

