

## LEADING A WINNING SALES TEAM

**H**IRING talented sales representatives is not enough. While a few will be natural “quota-busters,” most will need to be nurtured and developed in order to reach business goals. To lead a winning sales team, you need to know three things: know your people, know how to coach, and know yourself.

### Know Your People

Understand what drives your people as individuals. In all likelihood, each of them is motivated by something different. PSP studies show that success in sales is not always about money. What other buttons do you push? Some of your sales reps will respond to challenge, while others will require support and nurturing. Some seek recognition and status; others want to solve problems or make deals. Know what motivates each of your people.

To manage effectively, understand the patterns in each sales representative’s skills and behavior, so that you can predict and shape performance. Some of your sales reps will be more creative, with greater flexibility in their thinking. Some may be strong persuaders/closers, while others earn sales by their relationship skills or need-satisfaction knowledge. Some thrive on people contact; others need alone time. Understanding the differences among your people and recognizing their strengths and weaknesses will enable you to put them in the best role vis-à-vis your customers.

### Know How to Coach

Coaching a successful sales force involves leadership, management and teaching skills. As a leader, set a direction for your people. There is no substitute for clearly articulated goals and objectives. You are responsible for establishing a to reach objectives and for aligning your people to the

strategy. Once you have accomplished this, it is important to keep your people inspired. Your optimism and cheerleading” help people cope with change and with obstacles.

Coaching also involves managing your sales representatives. This is harder than it sounds; sales reps by nature are independent. Managing them, first of all, requires providing the resources needed to get the job done. These can include sales training, sales tools, budget, and staff support. Then monitor their progress and provide them with regular feedback on performance, ideally during “field visits.”

Finally, coaching involves a great deal of teaching on your part. As you do this, check your own ego needs in order to help your sales reps grow and achieve success. A good teaching coach knows how to clarify and resolve problems and understands the importance of involving sales reps in this process.

### Know Yourself

As a sales manager, know your own strengths and weaknesses and the ways in which they impact your sales representatives. Your sales reps are, in a sense, your customers. To be successful with this new “customer base,” take full advantage of your own strengths and minimize your weaknesses. Show your people that you are a continuous learner, willing to work hard at the right things in order to be successful.

This does not mean you should try to replicate yourself. Your sales reps are not mini-versions of you. Rather, knowing yourself helps you to understand individual differences in others and how these differences affect prospecting, selling, closing, and follow-up. Leading a sales team of *individuals* is no easy task, but individualization is the secret to helping sales representatives achieve success.



## DEVELOPING A SUCCESSFUL SALES FORCE

**F**EW sales representatives arrive at companies with their sales skills fully developed. Most are “works in progress.” To maximize the competitive edge over other companies in one’s industry, a company must grow its sales representatives faster than the competition does. Growing sales representatives means much more than sending them to motivational seminars or inspiring them with contests and perks.

Developing sales representatives requires two things. First, sales managers need to know the key skills and competencies



that are necessary for sales success in their business. Second, they need to know the strengths and weaknesses of each of their sales representatives. Without this information, training and development activities waste time and money.

### Assessing Strengths and Weaknesses

Sales managers usually find it easy to identify and prioritize the critical and important success factors for the job. Gaining awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of each sales representative is more difficult. There are a number of ways to assess strengths and weaknesses. These include work performance results, systematic observations, and standardized testing. Systematic observations can be performed with PSP’s 360° surveys, which enable a sales manager to obtain ratings from people who “surround” the sales representative, especially customers, peers and direct reports. Many sales organizations also use PSP’s standardized testing because of the advantages of speed, objectivity and uniform benchmarking for all participants.

Once strengths and weaknesses have been assessed for each individual, they can be compared to the prioritized success factors that sales managers have developed. This comparison, or gap analysis, immediately highlights training needs for each sales

representative. By individualizing training needs, a company can budget training dollars and training time wisely.

### Follow-Through on Training Plans

The gap analysis leads directly into formal training plans. Historically, the biggest problem with training plans has been *follow-through*. While many sales representatives are enthusiastic about training at the outset, sales quotas, life events and busy schedules often take over, and training falls by the wayside.

At PSP, we have learned several ways to increase the chances for follow-through on individualized training plans for sales representatives. First, we have discovered that customizing training plans according to an individual’s preferred learning format can increase follow-through. Some individuals prefer to go to seminars, others to read books. Some like listening to audiotapes in the car and others prefer to watch videotapes at home. Recently, some have expressed a preference for interactive CD-ROMs or e-learning courses online.

PSP also has been able to increase compliance with training plans by providing a menu of training activities in each competency area so that a sales representative can choose among a number of options. Since the menu contains multiple resources on each topic, individuals can return to the menu and select additional resources and training suggestions until they have mastered that particular competency.

### The Value of Coaching

Finally, we have learned that the use of coaching can substantially improve training plan follow-through. A monthly meeting with a coach introduces an element of accountability in an otherwise voluntary training plan. Meetings with coaches also have the advantage of keeping the training process moving along without interruption when the natural human tendency would be to let the training program lapse after a three- to six-month tryout.

We have found no shortcut to developing a winning sales force. Most development programs seem to require six to eighteen months, regardless of industry. Carving out an average of two hours per week for training activities seems to be a reasonable expectation for most sales organizations. The results of training conducted in this fashion are essential in building competitive advantage.

## HIRING STAR PERFORMERS IN SALES

**S**TAR sales representatives will sell 50 percent more of your company's product.

Accurate employee selection is essential for hiring star performers in sales. Motivational speeches and sales training will not make up for an individual's poor critical thinking skills, low energy and drive, or other deficiencies in important sales competencies.

**How do you identify the best candidate?**

**How do you predict who can produce sales results?**

**How can you predict who will develop into a sales leader?**

Selection by benchmarking with PSP's database for successful sales personnel can greatly increase your success rate in identifying star sales performers.

By measuring key sales attributes in candidates and comparing their scores with PSP's proprietary database on successful sales representatives, PSP can guide you in making good selections.



PSP has identified key attributes characteristic of star sales performers. These attributes include:

**ENERGY AND DRIVE** for sustained work motivation and productivity

**CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS** for effective problem solving and planning

**VERBAL SKILLS** for effective understanding and communication

**PERSONAL RELATIONS** for developing successful relationships

**WORK COMPOSURE** for handling stress and pressure

Most of these characteristics are difficult to identify in the interview alone. Good measurement tools are required, and standardized testing is the most reliable and valid measurement tool available. This is especially the case when the testing is backed by research methodology and a database on successful sales personnel. By benchmarking an individual candidate's score against successful sales norms, PSP can determine whether a given candidate measures up to the attributes of star sales performers.

The patterns of successful sales performers repeat themselves time and time again in research studies. PSP has gone further by creating specific databases and research studies for individual companies, allowing for greater targeting and identification of their successful sales personnel.

PSP's proprietary databases also help us identify which individuals have the leadership skills for being successful as a sales manager. Using PSP's extensive sales research, we have been able to benchmark specific profiles of successful personnel for outside sales, inside sales, and sales management. These profiles are available for a wide variety of industries and product lines to serve our clients' needs.

Star sales performers find business opportunities even in down markets and make the difference when your company needs to grow and prosper during difficult times. However, star candidates do not grow on trees, and it takes patience to review a large number of candidates to find these talented individuals. The hiring of star performers is not a matter of luck. It requires great effort and scientific measurement of the "right stuff." PSP's proprietary benchmarking can identify these star performers for **your** company.



WHAT'S  
NEW  
@  
PSP

- ❖ Facilitated a Fortune 100 metals company in identifying success factors for its sales organization of the future.
- ❖ Assisted a large Midwest utility in reorganizing its sales and marketing departments, benchmarking important job competencies with industrial sales norms and providing career development action plans.
- ❖ Participated in the nationwide selection of sales representatives to handle the after market sales for an international turbo-machinery company.
- ❖ Assisted in selecting sales representatives for the South American market of an international chemical company.
- ❖ Assessed sales representative candidates for a Fortune 100 supplier of aerospace and automotive markets.
- ❖ Customized a behavioral interviewing process for sales selection with an international packaging company.
- ❖ Conducted 360 Degree Survey Profiles for sales teams in order to target training and development priorities.
- ❖ Assisted in the selection of sales general managers and sales representatives for a large Midwestern auto multi-dealership with thirteen franchises in three cities.
- ❖ Profiled Vice President of Sales and Marketing for a nationwide distribution company.
- ❖ Validated a sales representative selection program for one of America's largest homebuilders



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## RESOURCES FOR SALES MANAGERS

Read *Proactive Sales Management: How to Lead, Motivate and Stay Ahead of the Game* by William Skip Miller. This book shows sales managers how to develop new management skills and manage the sales process as well as salespeople.

Read *Manage Relationships, Not Individuals*. This synthesis of four *Harvard Business Review* articles emphasizes giving top priority to hiring and developing leaders who can effectively manage relationships between individuals and strengthen a team's emotional intelligence.

Read *Results-Based Leadership* by David Ulrich, Jack Zenger and Norman Smallwood. In this landmark book the authors argue that effective leaders know how to deliver results, and they provide guidelines for developing your own results-based leadership skills.

Attend one of the seminars on effective sales management offered by the American Management Association. Topics include fundamentals for newly appointed sales managers, handling tough competition and technological change, and developing a strategy for managing a successful national accounts program.

Enroll in the Darden School Executive Education program on *Strategic Sales Management* at the University of Virginia. This six-day program provides practical approaches for improving the total effectiveness of the sales force.



***For recommendations on training resources on any management topic, contact PSP directly.***