

Change management in poorly performing sales organizations

When I did this interview earlier this year, I was really excited to write up the notes since I've always been interested in the art of change management. My counterpart on the other end of the phone was Stephen Pia, Founder and Media Sales Trainer & Coach of Coach MEdia. I got the idea of slotting Stephen for an interview when he moderated a sales panel at the SISO Executive Conference in New York last year as I came away from the session with a lot of good ideas. One theme became the article I did with Dan Cole with CES (http://www.theeventmechanic.com/articles/SISO_Article_9.pdf), so I decided to speak to all of the panellists, since it was a great session.

Stephen had said in the session that still hasn't left me is "selling isn't selling, it's 'helping people buy' if you're doing it properly". Too true.

A theme emerged from our conversation how real change can occur in poorly performing sales organizations. Stephen is passionate about this in his business and I think they come through in this article:

1) Get the decision maker involved in the process

Assuming you've made the decision to upgrade performance either as a team or with individuals, you **MUST** have senior sponsorship and participation for two reasons:

- So you can understand the problem at a detail level;
- So the staff sees that you are truly interested and committed to the process.

2) Create a groundswell by creating value for the participants

With any project, all of the participants are going to ask, "what's in it for me". Your job is to make sure that each participant understands the value of improving. For a salesperson it's pretty easy-a repeatable process for satisfying customers thereby assuring sales and commissions, if they are willing to put in the hard work.

4) Start with their data and explanations

You've identified a problem, but have they? If the salesperson agrees, ask why he thinks so and what he/she would do about it. Take the explanation into consideration as you chart a course moving forward.

What if he/she doesn't see a problem? Then discuss any performance issues and see if you can't agree on a common ground and work from there.

3) Keep the participants involved

Give them homework and figure out how to solve the challenges for themselves. Who likes to be presented with a problem and given the answer? Solutions are more likely to be solved if the sales person participates in the customized solution.

5) Measure the number of meetings they get not the number of calls as a sales metric

One of the biggest errors sales management makes is evaluating the salesperson on the number of calls or dials they make, rather than the number of meetings (either in person or on the phone). If a salesperson can't convert a conversation into a meaningful discussion of customer's needs, then increasing the number of calls will not likely result in increased performance.

6) Evaluate their ability to story tell

Can your salesperson paint a picture of how the product or service they are 'helping the prospect' buy will positively effect the customer? If not then going back to basics on the dynamics of the sale might be in order.

7) Evaluate their ability to convey a value proposition

Can your salesperson effectively gather information from the customer and formulate an offer which makes sense and will bring value to the customer? Perhaps the skill missing here is the art of listening.

8) Manage actions

Ultimately, it's what each of the members of the team agree to do (and actually get done) that should ultimately be measured, rather than less meaningful data that can be manipulated. A good attitude is key to improvement, so make sure there's evidence of that, and prepared to get your hands dirty.

Stephen closes by saying that it's the 'B players' that make or break a company, so be prepared to assist, train or move along those who need that extra elbow grease to get to the next level. Increased performance may very well be your reward!

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