



Cyber-Training for Automotive Managers

Bi-Monthly Email Lessons



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Disclaimer

These articles are written in the masculine gender for ease of writing. Salesperson, Inc. has absolutely no bias to age or sex, and believes that any person who applies himself to the study and practice of automotive management can and should be successful.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

(Click on your desired lesson)

Week 1

Asking the Most From Your People — and Get It!

Week 2

The Sales Manager as a Coach

Week 3

When You're Hot, You're Hot — But What If You're Not?

Week 4

Splitting Deals

Week 5

Eight Ingredients for Effective Sales Training

Week 6

Listen to Your Sales Staff for New Ideas

Week 7

Ultimate Customer Service

Week 8

Handling the Salesperson in a Slump

Week 9

Managing Negative Employees in an Artful Way

Week 10

Loyalty is Your Greatest Asset

Week 11

Praising Your Employees

Week 12

Where Do You Look for Great Salespeople?

Week 13

Managing Conflict is Essential for Increasing Productivity

Week 14

The Sales Manager Everyone Hates to Work For

Week 15

What Makes a Great Sales Manager?

Week 16

Assessing Your Salespeople's Skills

Week 17

Cutting Your Throat

Week 18

Hiring the Right Salespeople Depends Upon Seven Important Factors

Week 19

The #1 Mistake Made When Dealing with Angry Customers

Week 20

Understanding Hostile Customers

Week 21

Employee Orientation

Week 22

What's Training Good for Anyways?

Week 23

Turning Around Negative Attitudes

Week 24

Sales Managers Make a Difference

Week 25

Selling in Tough Times

Week 26

Five Keys to More Powerful Sales Meetings

Week 1

Asking the Most from Your People — and Get It



Cyber-Training for Auto Managers

The universal question all sales managers ask at some time or other is: “How can I motivate my people?” There are many books and theories on the subject, but the fact is that *you cannot motivate other people*. What you *can* do is hire the best people, establish the right atmosphere and ask for excellent performance. Then sales managers should ask themselves: “How can I encourage my people to perform with excellence because they want to?”

You can motivate people only on their own terms. People respond for their own reasons, not yours. You may want someone to increase productivity to meet sales quotas or to enhance efficiency. But salespeople actually carry out your program because they have their own personal motive. Sometimes the reason is that they want to please you. But motivation is most enduring when salespeople have their own inner goals and when you recognize the nature of those goals. The reason most motivational techniques fail is that they don’t focus on the individual.

The most universally successful way to

motivate is based on discovering what the other person needs. And smart questions give you the tool for discovery. The right questions can help you discover the needs of individual sales team members as they develop, grow and change.

Golden Rules Of Motivation: The Essential Eight

Through hundreds of research reports, one message rings out loud and clear: To increase motivation, create an atmosphere in which people motivate themselves. When people feel personally involved in a plan, they work to make it happen.

There are eight questions you can ask yourself to create a self-motivating atmosphere. Each one involves communications with your staff.

1. Do your people know your plans?

The best way to motivate people is to let them know your plans so they can participate in them. Make it a point to share information vital to your department with everyone on your team, including the green peas. Tell them your goals and the goals of your department. Let them see the big picture, and stress the importance of their contributions to it. When people are highly motivated, it's easy to accomplish the impossible. When they're not, it's impossible to accomplish the easy.

2. Do you give feedback?

People need feedback the way they need air. Even well-motivated people die without it. They want to be encouraged if they're doing well, and if they're not doing well, they want to know why. Give feedback immediately. When you see good or bad performance, tell the performer about it right then. Don't wait a year to correct a problem or to give recognition for a job well done. Let the person know - now.

When you give feedback, you help keep communication channels open. If your people know you're willing to discuss performance with them, they'll be more likely to bring you their problems and questions and to keep you better informed. Create an atmosphere in which people aren't afraid to tell you when something is wrong, and you will have fewer surprises.

3. Do you build on strengths?

When I begin a sales training class, I often ask participants to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Invariably, they say, "I don't know what my strengths are, but my weaknesses are . "We've been so programmed to focus on weaknesses, as though any imperfection would negate or detract from any strength. But this isn't so. All success comes from strength.

Once you get people operating from a position of strength, it is easier to motivate them. They will enjoy what they're doing, and they will do better. Look at positive, not negative, behavior first. For example, after a meeting, ask yourself, "What went right? How can I apply that in other situations?" Know the strengths of your people so you can help build on them. Know your own strengths so you also can continue to grow.

4. Do you give constructive praise?

Perhaps the most golden rule of management is: "Never be too tough on a person when he's down." When people are upset over failure, harping on the negative can hurt them and quench any incentive to improve. Even when giving criticism, you can create a positive framework: "I don't think this is up to your usual standard; how can we improve the situation?" For times when criticism is necessary, engrave this message on your mind: Give praise publicly; keep criticism private.

5. Do you give rewards?

If your people meet their agreed-upon objectives, they should be rewarded with more than kind words. Money, bonuses and incentives are key motivators for people. But another reward you can give a high achiever is your time. Most sales managers spend the bulk of their time with the poor performers while the best ones fend for themselves. When someone does a good job for you, recognize their efforts and set aside time to develop ways to motivate them to do even more.

6. Do you listen and learn?

It's reported that after finding himself at a dead end, out of money and out of prospects, Thomas Edison once asked his janitor this question: "I'd like to ask your advice, Pop. What do you think I should do in this situation?" The janitor was stunned. "Nobody ever asked for my advice before," he replied. "Well," said Edison, "then you should have a lot of good ideas stored up."

No matter what techniques you employ in the quest to motivate your people, you have to be prepared to ask questions and to listen at least as much as you talk. No one's ideas should be missed. You needn't seize on every suggestion, but if you don't at least get back to people and say, "That was a terrific idea," and thank them, they'll never give you another one. Always give proper recognition for every valid suggestion.

7. Do you set an example?

The best manager is a good role model - not once in a while, but every day. Your people pay 90% more attention to what you do than to what you say. Actions do speak louder than words. A good manager knows how to say no, to be tough but fair. In other words, if you don't handle the responsibilities of your own leadership position, you can't expect your people to live up to their job responsibilities, either.

8. Do you get people to do their best and live up to their potential?

This is the most important question of all. If you have hired high achievers (which you have hopefully done), they will strive to do more. In fact, they will be bored and stressed out if they aren't being challenged and living up to their potential. It is up to you to create an environment in which your people are constantly reaching and striving.

"The hard thing for me when I moved up to management," said a salesperson promoted to management, "was to admit that someone on my staff could sell as well as I used to and, in some cases, even better. Even harder, though, was to learn to be patient with someone who wasn't as good as I was." Successful sales managers are motivating all the time, not just when performance is down. They are always striving for maximum people potential — to get the best from each individual in their organizations. And the objective is always to let others determine the means to growth, to let them take the responsibility for their own development.

Week 2

The Sales Manager as a Coach



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Have you ever watched a professional sports coach working with a player? It's a hands-on event. The coach is actively involved in the process. There is pushing, directing, handling, pointing and instructing. Coaching may be a teaching process, but it's more than just teaching.

Sports and sales are learned in the field, and they are best taught by a coach who has experienced the event in the field. For instance, a teacher could conduct a tennis class with a text, slides, film clips and overheads, but it would take a coach to show the player how to serve and volley. Until the player hits the courts, everything is theory. It's the same with sales.

Selling skills, as well as most sports skills, are acquired through information, practice, follow-up instruction and hands-on coaching. Selling coaches understand this and become professionals at the skill of coaching. And while most successful coaches have field experience, the best players do not always make the best coaches.

There are hundreds of examples of great

coaches who were only mediocre talents on the field. On the other hand, if excellence in the field made a great coach, Hank Aaron would be on the field teaching and coaching Atlanta Braves sluggers how to hit. Instead, he is in the front office. No, the coach's greatest asset is his or her ability to observe others and patiently show them how to develop good habits and skills.

The committed sales manager is a selling coach. His or her goal is to help others improve their competence and, ultimately, their confidence at performing critical selling skills.

The Coaching Process

To bring about genuine performance improvement, the coach needs to follow a predictable process. It is a process you need to learn and practice in order to use effectively.

Here are the essential rules of coaching:

1. Set expectations

Clearly and simply state your goals for each coaching session. For example:

"Today, Marie, we are going to focus on qualifying your prospect."

If you believe the salesperson needs the information, it may be desirable to explain why the skill is important, or why you are repeating a coaching session on this particular skill. Focus on just one or two skills. It is easy to confuse and frustrate people who begin to feel they can't do anything right.

2. Confirm knowledge

The coach needs to confirm that the salesperson understands the skills needed to meet the expectation. Does the salesperson have the knowledge necessary to perform? Can she recognize a customer need and grasp how that need can be solved by the vehicle you are selling? Does Marie know how to construct an effective qualifying session? Can she build an open-ended question based on a customer's comment? Ask her to give you some examples of good qualifying questions.

If she cannot perform these skills, coaching and teaching needs to begin in the training room. There is no sense in setting the salesperson up for confidence-breaking failure just to prove a point.

3. Observe performance

Once you are certain the salesperson understands the concepts and knows how to perform the skill, you are ready to observe performance on the showroom floor and evaluate the salesperson's ability. You should overlook minor skill problems that occur in the process.

Make a note of problems when you observe them and correct them later. Remember, it is always best to stay focused on a narrow set of skills that relate to the expectations you established.

Observe to determine Marie's ability to recognize the selling situation correctly. Does she understand what to do? Is it executed properly? Does she demonstrate confidence? A good coach is concerned with identifying and coaching Marie for long-term results. This is actually more important than the outcome of the qualifying session.

Please remember, the coach cannot go to bat for the player, even if he or she recognizes that the player is going to strike out. It's a hard lesson, and the coach must often bite his or her lip. But the player will never learn to hit a curve ball if the coach keeps taking the bat away.

4. Coach the skill

Begin the coaching process by asking the salesperson to evaluate his or her results.

"Marie, tell me how you felt you did with your qualifying session."

This gives her the opportunity to evaluate and explore options and alternatives to her own performance, and even ask for help in a particular area. Her responses will allow you to focus on her questions and concerns. Most of the time, people will underestimate their own progress, but sometimes they are off target. It's your job to challenge the excuses that lead to failure, and recognize and help the salesperson stop any destructive habits and behaviors.

Identify areas and cite specific examples within the qualifying session where you can offer advice:

"Marie, what do you think you could have done differently when the prospect said he wasn't interested in purchasing today?"

Here, you are giving the salesperson the opportunity to recognize a mistake for herself and develop her own answer to the problem.

If she solves the problem, you can congratulate her. You have reinforced that she is bright enough and has the skills to solve her own selling dilemmas. You can bolster her confidence while coaching her. She will buy her own solutions much quicker than she accepts yours.

If she does not develop an acceptable answer, you can then ask her to evaluate one of yours:

“Marie, what would have happened if you had asked him why he wasn’t planning on purchasing today?”

5. Recognize progress

Most progress can be measured in small steps. Unless you recognize it and reward the behavior, the steps might start going backwards, as the salesperson begins to grope for answers and shortcuts. Point out areas of competence and strength and use them as stepping stones for skills success.

6. Follow up for success

Come back to the skill and recognize where progress has been made. Acknowledge progress, encourage future improvements and point toward solutions and answers instead of focusing only on what went wrong. Help the salesperson focus on the wins. This makes the coaching process an event Marie will look forward to, and it will help her accept the coaching as well.

The Coach Needs Coaching

The coach, like any other professional, needs coaching. This can come from one of two sources: other experienced coaches or players. The coach can discuss his or her coaching methods with others who understand the process. This mentoring process allows coaches or managers to learn from each other, to discuss cases and gain new insights or a second opinion.

Perhaps the most valuable source of information is the player. The wise coach makes a habit of trying to discover coaching strengths and weaknesses at the conclusion of each coaching session.

“Marie, I need your help to become a better coach. Please tell me how today’s coaching session was helpful to you.”

“Marie, I also need to know how to make my coaching better. Please tell me what you feel I could have done better.”

Please understand that the first time you interrupt Marie or begin a sentence with “But,” or begin to explain yourself, you have told her that her comments are “wrong” or that you are not really interested in her opinion. Your job is to listen with an open mind and try to learn, just as you expected her to do when you were coaching her.

The selling coach earns many rewards: the admiration and respect of successful sales professionals, the success of the sales team and the increased earnings from building a highly profitable selling staff.

And don't forget to attend some management seminars. There's so much more to learn in order to keep you sharp as a manager.

Finally, the sales coach must remember his or her own advice: Be open to feedback, keep learning and improving the skill, and *practice*.

Week 3

When You're Hot, You're Hot! But What if You're Not?



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Your sales team's morale is an excellent indicator of where your business is headed. A bit depressing? You'd better do something Quick!

But first, let's take a closer look at the problem. Staff morale is defined as the combination of their confidence and discipline. While poor confidence will only produce a token effort, poor discipline will see them stop even this.

As a rule, what we expect comes from our view of the past and present events. If your business is a little slow, or your dealership is having some internal problems, you'll need to establish in the minds of your salespeople that whatever went wrong is over, and better times are coming. However serious it was, your staff must put it behind them so you can all move on.

But to where? To start, we need to find something your team can feel good about. Who performed a miracle in the midst of your problems? How can we show that this accomplishment will lead to more in the future?

If you can identify even one person who produced a good result you have established the situation wasn't impossible, just challenging. And they will become an inspiration. Politicians use this technique all the time. They will even claim a victory when things are still getting worse, but at a slower rate. They know how important it is to find something to feel good about.

However modest your recovery plans, share them. Each positive step to recovery will give everyone a sense of achievement and added confidence in their ability to make it.

You don't need a massive success to change their outlook. Every improvement can provide each member with a share of pride in the accomplishment and a little greater expectation for the outcome. A series of small accomplishments will provide more reassurance than a single event.

It really is a simple process to improve the morale:

- Change their view of what happened
- Adjust their perspective
- Point out the good news
- Focus their attention on the future
- Share exactly what you are going to do and how they will know it is working
- Ensure everyone feels a part of the result
- Highlight Every Accomplishment!

Then watch how your customers respond to the change in your team!

Week 4

Splitting Deals



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One of the complaints I consistently get from salespeople is in the area of splitting deals. I think that this has become such a problem in many dealerships because there are no clear cut policies for what constitutes a split deal, and how it should be handled when the issue arises. My rule behind splitting deals is easy - if the other salesperson does 50% of the work, he/she deserves 50% of the commission. But here's what has happened. Some salespeople think that just because they help you deliver a car, or help your customer on an inventory walk, even though they're just sitting around do nothing, deserves a split deal. I'd hate to think that the only time they'd help another salesperson would be for compensation. But apparently that's where we've come.

One way to handle this problem is by working the Buddy System. I would pick another salesperson within the dealership to be my buddy. This person would closely exemplify the type of person I would want to deal with my customers and prospects. This person would be the only one who could handle my prospects and customers.

If I'm not in the dealership, and one of my customers comes into to buy another car, he would automatically be turned over to my buddy. There would be no split deals because it would all even out in the end. If my buddy wasn't available to help, and another salesperson needed to step in, then the 50% of the work rule would apply. Any mediation on the rule would always be handled by the Sales Manager, not between the salespeople.

Here are some situations that could happen whereby a salesperson would ask for a split deal. See how you would handle them:

Example 1

A salesperson is coming back from lunch and sees a prospect on the lot. He approaches the customer and says, "Hi, can I help you?" The customer says, "No, I'm just on my lunch hour and thought I'd look at some cars." The salesperson says, "Well, here's my business card, if you ever need anything, feel free to call me," and walks away. A week later, the customer comes into the dealership, never asks for the salesperson, probably threw his business card away, and gets sold by another salesperson. When the original salesperson sees his name on the sales board, he immediately says, "Hey, that was my customer, you stole my customer. I want a split deal?"

Comment on Example 1

Is this a split deal? Is it even the first salesperson's customer. He didn't do any work other than handing out a business card. He didn't even get at least a name and telephone number for follow-up purposes. And he definitely didn't do 50% of the work. As far as I'm concerned, this wouldn't even be a consideration for a split commission.

Example 2

A salesperson is negotiating a deal with a customer, when her 5:00pm delivery comes in an hour early. She needs the truck to be brought up front so the customer can at least take a look at the vehicle while she finishes up with her current customer. So she asks another salesperson to help bring the truck up front and show the customer his new purchase. After the delivery is completed, the helping salesperson asks for a split deal.

Comment on Example 2

Is this a split deal? It took the other salesperson 20 minutes to walk back, bring up the truck, and stand there while the customer looked it over. The salesperson wasn't doing anything at the time, and should realize that some day he may need her help in doing the same. As far as I'm concerned, this wouldn't be a consideration for a split deal. What I would consider is taking this person to lunch.

Example 3

You're having a big sale. There are a lot of prospects in the showroom and around the lot. One of the salespeople keeps going up to customers and says, "Hi, I'm Bob, what's yours?"

Bill? Have you made up your mind yet on purchasing a vehicle? No! All right, here's my business card. When you're ready let me know. He does this to five additional prospects until he finds one who's ready. One of the prospects he gives a business card decides to deal with another salesperson. When he sees Bill with another salesperson, he immediately goes up to him and says, "That's my customer. I'm going to want a split deal."

Comment on Example 3

I don't need to comment on this one. It's the same as Example 1. But believe it or not, in some dealerships, Bob would get away with this.

Example 4

I greet the customer at the door, do a proper job of qualifying, an excellent presentation, and go into negotiations. I wasn't able to close the deal right now because the prospect wants to think about it, and walks. About a week later, the prospect comes back into the dealership unannounced and wants to purchase. I don't happen to be there that day, so another salesperson writes it up, takes him into Finance, and they deliver it the next day. Does this salesperson deserve a split deal?

Comment on Example 4

Absolutely! This salesperson actually did a lot of work on this deal. So he deserves 50% of the commission.

These are just four examples of splitting deals. I'm sure there are many more. If you happen to have more examples, or have a different opinion on any of these, please feel free to email me your examples and comments. I hope these will at least get you thinking about developing a policy in writing for your salespeople, and discuss it in your next sales meeting. Once you develop your policy, strictly adhere to it, and personally handle any disputes between salespeople. Don't leave it to the salespeople to handle it themselves. It's the easiest way to destroy a team you worked hard to create.

Week 5

Eight Ingredients for Effective Sales Training



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How do you make sales training a meaningful, learning experience for all levels of sales performers, and still make it adaptable? This is a problem that Sales Managers have struggled with for years. You don't want to make it too easy for the high performers, yet too difficult for the green peas.

Think of the following eight elements as the keys to sales training success. These should be kept in mind when you're planning and implementing any sales training program:

1. **Comprehensive**
2. **Customizable**
3. **Relevant**
4. **Performance oriented**
5. **Motivational**
6. **Modular**
7. **Easy to test and measure**
8. **Interactive**

Key #1 - Sales training should be comprehensive

Your sales training outline should provide, to the greatest extent possible, a total solution not only specific to sales-related material, but it should also provide:

An overall plan, based on broad, fundamental and explicitly stated goals.

- A tracking system, to monitor your salespeople's progress and measure their results.
- A follow-up agenda, to provide reinforcement, as well as additional coaching as needed.
- An ongoing plan for course maintenance, to make sure that additional or revised information about your product, your advertising, your competition, is quickly assimilated into the sales training course materials.
- And possibly, a train-the-trainer program, to ensure that if you assign training to managers other than yourself, the training is done under the same standards.

Key #2 - Sales training should be customizable

Your sales training program cannot be a generic, "one size fits all" endeavor. It should be carefully matched to individual needs, limitations and prerequisites. This is true whether you're training salespeople with similar skill and experience levels, or a mixed group.

Key #3 - Sales training should be relevant

Sales training should introduce opportunities for salespeople to acquire and practice skills in an atmosphere that parallels their real world job environment. This means that customer scenarios should be used extensively, and reflect realistic customer interactions, including both successes and failures. Don't ask your salespeople to perform techniques that really don't fit today's customer. It may look good on paper, but not work in the showroom.

Key #4 - Sales training should be performance oriented

Before training begins, you should have some performance objectives that will dictate your sales training content, the learning activities, and your instructional methods. During the training, you'll need to decide the structured techniques for giving the information like group discussions, role playing, and lecture. And after the training, you have a plan for salespeople being coached, either by yourself, or by putting them with more experienced salespeople. This ensures the application and transfer of knowledge of skills while they're on the job.

Key #5 - Sales training should be motivational

Sales training should inspire enthusiasm by presenting the material in a way that imparts both confidence and competence to salespeople. If you conduct the training in a workshop format, it should be conveyed by a dynamic, knowledgeable person who knows your dealership philosophies, and can give up-to-date information. The trainer should recognize the salespeople are going to be away from the selling floor for a period of time, so the training must make efficient and best use of their time, and above all, energizes them.

Key #6 - Sales training should be modular

To minimize the time salespeople will have to spend away from the showroom floor, individual sales training components should be designed. These allow salespeople to complete only those portions of sales training that come close to their specific needs.

Key #7 - Sales training should be easy to test and measure

After you provide the training, how will you know whether the training worked, or the salespeople improved? You need to develop a way to make sure that the information has been mastered.

Key #8 - Sales training should be interactive

Sales training should consist of workshops, group discussions, and similar types of interactive encounters that allow for a maximum exchange of ideas and the sharing of experiences among the salespeople.

Sales training for the sake of providing some sort of training may not be productive. If you want to eliminate turnover, increase productivity, and keep your staff stimulated, put some thought into the type of training you'll provide. It may just come back to you in a motivated staff that actually makes a good living.

Week 6

Listen to Your Sales Staff for New Ideas



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The people on your sales staff are probably your best source of improvement ideas. But are they confident enough to always speak up and suggest them? Are you getting value from their daily thoughts and reflections?

Wouldn't it be tragic if someone on your team had a brilliant idea, but wasn't heard or didn't even bother to speak up? Here's how to help your clever people become noisy about their great ideas:

- Reward and acknowledge ideas that work.
- Reward and acknowledge the learning that people get from ideas that *don't* work.

For people on your team to take intelligent risks, they have to know it's safe to make mistakes and learn. If you reward only successful ideas, you'll get a lot fewer ideas overall.

It's the learning process you want to encourage. Make sure salespeople understand you're not rewarding failure, because you're rewarding learning with or without immediate success. Next, challenge your

salespeople to stretch their curiosity, and encourage dissatisfaction with obvious or easy solutions to problems.

Don't accept the first solution you're offered. Challenge people to create 10 or 20 feasible solutions before allowing them to judge and select their preferred option.

Your acknowledging and rewarding can be done two ways:

- Regular rewards from known and predictable incentive programs
- Random and jackpot rewards to encourage suspense and striving

Regular and predictable rewards will establish processes like allocating time and space for thinking. Ongoing reward systems make a powerful statement about leadership commitment to learning and improvement.

Random jackpot rewards will create an added intrigue because salespeople won't know which idea will bring them the big bonus. Just as gamblers stay in the game because they don't know which event will be the lucky one, your people will participate to stay in the running for your random reward.

So the keys for ideas aplenty are:

- Reward success and (more importantly) reward learning.
- Challenge people to come up with lots of ideas in order to find a good idea.
- Use regular and random or jackpot incentives.

Thinking can be hard work, but it can also be fun. You can have fun and still be successful. So get started today.

Week 7

Ultimate Customer Service



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A few days ago, a sales manager asked me what I thought the automotive market would do in the coming year or two. I looked at him and replied that markets don't do anything. They certainly don't pay your bills. I said that I could try and guess what customers were likely to do in the time frame he was referring to, but even more important is what we can do for our customers. So I gave him a list of "Things To Do" in the coming twelve months. First of all, decide who you wish to retain and who you wish to let go. Having done that, work on continuously pleasing those you wish to retain.

No matter what approach you take to please your customers, here are some points to keep in mind:

1. Great service is never an accident

It is always a function of the attitude of the salespeople who deliver it. Check your own attitude. If you don't like it, how can others possibly like it?

2. Your salespeople are as much the product as the product itself

Customers don't distinguish the products from the people who deliver them, so be at your best. Otherwise, you will lower the value of even your finest cars and trucks.

3. Your customers alone can tell you how good your customer service is

Why assume when you can ask? Don't assume, simply ask them. They will be willing to share a lot of valuable information with you. We all think we are great, but does that matter the slightest bit?

4. Customers pay our salaries, our bosses don't

In fact, customers pay the bosses their salaries as well. So instead of focusing on the boss and his/her needs, focus on the customer's needs. If your boss doesn't understand, gently tell him/her that, but with grace, wit and humor.

5. Customers are people first and customers next

And like all the six billion people on this earth, they like to be assisted and pampered. Learn to enjoy assisting others, and you'll be the finest sales department ever born.

6. Ask yourself how you like to be treated as a customer

Replay the feeling a thousand times in your mind, and then treat your customers in exactly the same way. Your customers will love you forever.

7. Learn as much as you can about your customers

This will give you new insight into the business of your customers. You will discover a hundred little things you can do which will make your customer's life a little easier. Soon, you will begin to intuitively anticipate your customers' needs, even their problems. Keep your eyes and ears open and your mouth shut. Hey, didn't you notice that we have two eyes, two ears and one mouth, so that we could observe and listen twice as much as we could speak? Didn't you also notice that while the eyes and ears are normally open, the mouth is normally shut? Try imagining your face with this normalcy reversed, and you will begin to hate yourself. Yet isn't that what we do day in and day out?

8. Set up a system to capture customer comments

Share them with everyone who matters within your dealership. You never know how valuable these tidbits can be for the future. Sears, LL Bean, Xerox, Intuit and the Ritz Carlton have perfected this into an art.

9. Never flinch when faced with a complaint

Don't justify your position. We ask our clients to complain as often as they can. Many complaints reveal a systemic weakness in many operations or processes. This gives them an opportunity to make up for their mistakes. And never forget to thank your customers who cared enough to complain (to you instead of to others). Sometimes, a customer

complains even when everything seems to be going right. Maybe she had a bad day, so she wants a shoulder to cry on — give it to her. She will repay you handsomely one day.

10. Never be dishonest with your customer

If you don't know, say so. In times so turbulent as these, "I don't know" is a legitimate answer. The trick isn't to know all the answers. Their shelf life is so short anyway. Your genius lies in asking questions, and that requires curiosity. Be curious about everything, and your life will take on a new meaning.

11. Find out one or two things that are troubling your customer

Then, research that area, read about it and acquire knowledge and skills that can help the customer. Then when you are ready, give it as a bonus. Few customers forget such acts and treat them as favors, which will pay handsome dividends one day. Even if they don't have the decency to acknowledge the extra mile you ran for them, they can't fault you for it. And who knows, they may one day return to you realizing what you have done.

12. Ask yourself the 64 thousand dollar question — Do I love doing what I am doing?

If you don't, ask yourself the 128 thousand dollar question — Can I start to love what I am doing? If your answer is negative as well, get out of the business now. You don't have a moment to lose. No matter what you do, your customers will never be happy with you, because you aren't happy with yourself. Take a sabbatical, do some serious soul searching, and discover what it is that you love so that you may change the direction of your life. I did that in 1988 and discovered that my real love was training and teaching. That was the beginning of the happiest days of my life.

These points are mere guidelines. Read them, share them with your people and then ask them to improve upon them. Ask them to come up with ideas spurred on by these thoughts. Set up a simple reward and recognition system that acknowledges your salespeople's contributions. And don't take six months to set it up.

Week 8

Handling the Salesperson in a Slump



Cyber-Training for Auto Managers

Salespeople will occasionally go into a slump. There are a myriad of reasons for any slump. It is the responsibility of the sales manager to uncover and resolve the slump. Time and care must be exercised to assist any problem employee, but the results can be both satisfying and profitable.

Probe for Information

Use the same techniques you would use with a prospect, when dealing with a salesperson in a slump. The same skills you use to determine needs and probe for information are effective when dealing with the salesperson experiencing a slump in their sales. It is important to ask probing, open-ended questions which uncover the underlying issues. Listen for the pain in the responses and this will lead you to the real causes of the problem.

Get Personally Involved

Solving problems requires personal involvement from the sales manager. The salesperson wants to get back on track, but often has to deal with problems which interfere or prevent them from doing so. It's the job of the sales manager to assist them in re-

solving their problems and improving their performance. Attacking them personally or threatening them will only complicate the problem without achieving the desired results.

Avoid Confrontation

Confrontational and combative tactics will also not work in these situations. If anything, they will only exasperate the problem and place the slumping salesperson on the defensive. Comparing them to other more successful salespeople is also a tactic which should be avoided.

Spend Time with the Salesperson

The best approach is to spend time during the selling process with the individual, observing and evaluating their performance. This enables you to pinpoint the problem and allows you to spend the time to coach the individual on the sales skills required to improve their performance. Time and space should be provided to allow the salesperson to recover their confidence and get back on track. Time and pressure should be balanced to assure results.

Use Role Playing

Another effective strategy is to use role playing during sales meetings. The sales manager should allow the salespeople to conduct the role playing and evaluate the performance to determine the problems. The sales manager should observe and moderate the discussion, while allowing the sales team to conduct the analysis.

While it is the responsibility of the sales manager to resolve the problem, they should take the role of facilitator, guiding the salesperson through the steps they need to take to resolve the issues and restore their performance.

Week 9

Managing Negative Employees in an Artful Way



Cyber-Training for Auto Managers

In many dealerships one reality exists. There are going to be negative employees. If not carefully managed, these individuals drain the life force of productivity out of the entire organization.

Managers generally think twice about terminating negative employees especially if they are good workers, productive or have the essential skills needed or experience that, if replaced, takes needed time and resources to re-train. It may also be hard to accept that their indispensable nature comes at the expense and productivity of others. Yet, if problems these individuals create places a drain on the overall workplace environment, ignoring them is one sure way to create in-house chaos, job dissatisfaction and time consuming energy and valuable resources to remedy.

What's a manager to do?

First closely examine the situation and the person absorbed in negativity.

Ask yourself, "Exactly how much does this individual personally contribute to the overall success of the department, office or

business as a whole?" Once a clear picture is determined, move to the opposing side of the equation.

Weigh your above responses against these questions.

How much discord does this contribute to their overall productivity? How much disharmony are they creating? How much of an overall negative impact are they having on others? How many times have you had to intervene because of their negativity or cause and effected related issues?

How much time and energy is personally lost because of it?

How many others are they affecting? How does this negativity translate into lower quotas, or reduced enthusiasm and productivity? Lastly, are there any legal ramifications I need to be aware of before terminating their employment or intervening in a way that can cause legality issues to surface?

Before assuming the ultimate recourse of termination, think about how the situation can be rectified. Plan a course of action. If the decision is to salvage the employee, consider using the following ideas:

Have a one to one discussion with the person involved.

Don't be surprised when they express ignorance of the situation, or blame others for their troubles. They may even become defiant and begin to play mind games over the situation to get and keep you off focus. The object is to get them to voice their own complaints so addressing the problem is put onto the table. Often times, negativity arises as a symptom, not a cause. It is best to address the causes, not the symptoms.

Evaluate what is said by the employee without jumping to judgment.

Look at things from their perspective first, as well as your own. Negative people often can have legitimate complaints and reasons behind their attitudes and reactions.

Create a list of their legitimate concerns that need addressing.

Maintain a list of personal responses to your remarks or direct questions. It becomes easier to identify whether complaints are a smokescreen for general overall negative behavior, or if the negative behaviors have a legitimate reason for occurring. Viable solutions are produced faster if these evaluations are given thought and attention.

Focus on behaviors that need changing, not individual actions or attitudes.

It is easy to confuse issues, especially if individuals are defiant or blaming. Be aware that it may be impossible to recreate this person into an ideal employee, or one you and others can legitimately live with. All good managers can do is to plan and chart a course of action to improve, one small goal at a time, following-up on it consistently. The rest is up to the employee.

Make sure all goals and actions for improvement are very specific and put in writing.

Double-check to see if they are thoroughly understood. Follow-through on the progression of goals at a minimum of once per week. Set your managerial goal on observing one small noticeable change. Make a verbal compliment upon it. Do this as an ongoing intervention. Once there is continual improvement, move to another area. Never fail to set limits on the total process. The employee should be given these limits in all fairness. If limits are not held as a top priority, there is no urgency for an employee to change.

Consider finding a place or position where a negative employee can work in isolation.

Often times this may not be possible in close knit team situations. However, if it is possible it may work to keep their negativity out of earshot from the rest of the workers. Many times, negative employees desire to seek out an audience of co-workers. You may find a negative employee wanted to work in isolation in the first place. Placing them with others might be the initial root of the negativity problem.

When written and verbal evaluations fail, and numerous written documentation falls short of expectations and other attempts to change a negative employee's behavior have become unsuccessful, termination becomes inevitable.

Once this decision is made obvious, hesitation or procrastination can become a real detriment to effective managing.

Remember, all employees eyes are on you and your managing style. If quick actions are not taken it will undermine your credibility in the minds of others, while instilling a loss of confidence in you and your management style.

Week 10

Loyalty is Your Greatest Asset



Cyber-Training for Auto Managers

The loyalty of your salespeople is your greatest asset to a sales manager. Loyalty and respect can have some tangible benefits. A good team can produce more sales and profits which reflect upon the leadership provided to them.

Many sales managers act in a machine-like manner with a simple message, "You're hired to just sell and produce results!" in a no-excuse atmosphere. They neither allow or forgive mistakes, resulting in an environment where people are hiding their mistakes and fudging their results to keep the manager off their backs. They fear their managers. A common response is that some managers would rather have their salespeople fear them rather than respect them. But fear doesn't engender trust and loyalty and it certainly undermines the overall productivity of the sales staff.

An alternative atmosphere of trust and loyalty develops a personal response by the salespeople to exceed the expectations of their managers. A synergy is developed for performance between sales team members. They are always seeking their personal best.

The most powerful medium of communication open to you as a sales manager is your character, personality and principles. Applied in a consistent and fair manner, these will result in respect and credibility which builds the trust and rapport to be effective. Individuals in this environment strive to be their best. Applied inconsistently, these elements communicate a mixed and de-motivating message.

Listed below are several strategies which you can employ to earn more respect from your sales staff:

Lead the people and manage the process

Many sales managers are so focused on producing results that they forget the human element, ignoring the fact that they are dealing with emotions and feelings and not allowing and learning from mistakes. The commitment to people is the soft side of business while the process of business is the hard side. Obviously the hard side is what matters in sales, but there is a strong interconnection between the two and a sales manager must balance the two to be successful.

Don't drive your people... inspire them

Inspire and motivate your people by showing them to be their best. People are not work horses to be driven. In the current climate, it is too easy for them to walk out the door and sell at another dealership. Finesse them and allow them to reach for the stars. A good manager is more of a cheerleader. Do your best to help rather than hinder, and inspire and motivate. They'll get the message and respond farther than you might imagine.

Gain their respect

Respect is earned by observing a high standard of personal behavior while being a part of the team. If you make a mistake, admit it. Admit that you are human. This type of accessibility will earn their respect.

Demonstrate the value of selling

Make your salespeople proud of what they do and who they do it for. Maintain their morale by finding ways to show how important they are to the success of your dealership.

Be responsive

Be proactive rather than reactive with your salespeople. This communicates that your salespeople can come to you with problems, concerns, ideas and complaints. If they come with usable ideas, implement them and provide the credit to them. This demonstrates the value of their input.

These strategies focus on the human side of selling. They are focused on the individuals and how to motivate them to strive to be their best. This is done by earning their loyalty,

trust and admiration. They will want to work with you and for you. They will make you look good.

Week 11

Praising Your Employees



Cyber-Training for Auto Managers

A common complaint among sales managers is that they don't get enough cooperation from their employees. You have to realize that you need to give before you can expect to receive. If you want employees who will work with initiative, ingenuity, and enthusiasm, you have to make them feel good about their job and about themselves.

Praise helps to focus on the positive

The main purpose for getting into the habit of praising your employees is because a sales manager too often overlooks all the things an employee does correctly and only focuses on the employee's occasional mistakes. Because bosses expect certain things from their employees, they don't feel the need to compliment or acknowledge routine performance; when in essence, this acknowledgment is exactly what an employee needs to feel worthy.

Create a stimulating work environment

A manager's main responsibility is to motivate his/her employees so that they become outstanding workers. The success and welfare of your employees is dependent

upon the supportive work environment surrounding them. Providing employees with an atmosphere that is pleasant, stimulating and verbally rewarding will gain you the loyalty and commitment you are striving for. When employees are happy in the work environment they perform more productively.

Praise helps boost confidence and performance

When an employee feels uncertain about his level of appreciation, his ability to perform at his optimum may be impaired. The key to building self-esteem, confidence and motivation in employees is to compliment them for even small contributions. Make it a point to praise your employees on a regular basis. Recognizing consistently good performance is just as important as recognizing an outstanding performance. The added confidence and pride you instill through praise will maintain your employees' momentum to achieve.

Show your employees you're proud of them

One of the biggest misconceptions managers hold is that when they praise employees, they must do it really well. Paying compliments may not be something you are accustomed to. It is a behavior that has to be learned by many people. If you're not used to praising, your initial attempts may sound unnatural. But as with any type of repetition, the more you do it, the more comfortable it becomes. The only way you can get your employees to want to work for you is to let them know they are appreciated. The one phrase we seldom hear from management is "I'm really proud to have you on my team!"

Your employees are your most valued asset.

Don't let your busy schedule and numerous responsibilities distract you from remembering that the most important asset in your department is your employees. They are the ones who will ultimately determine your success and subsequent promotions. Realize their value and nurture them because without them, you have no career. Personal praise from one's boss is one of the greatest motivators in the workplace, and ranks higher than monetary rewards. When you praise your employees always be sincere — because false complimenting can backfire. Look for legitimate reasons to compliment employees and make complimenting a part of your daily routine.

Week 12

Where Do You Look for Great Salespeople?



Cyber-Training for Auto Managers

In the best of job markets, good salespeople are hard to find. In a tight job market, they can be impossible to find. However, some of the best candidates can literally be under your nose and not in the open job market.

Where are the best sales candidates located? Look within your industry for the most qualified people including customers, suppliers, employees and competitors. A quick review of these four possibilities will provide insight into the value of each group.

Customers

An examination of the past and current customers may reveal several strong possible candidates. These people will have a first hand knowledge of your vehicles and service and can speak from personal expertise. Additionally, they have experience with other vehicles, so they can make a strong comparative argument in your product's behalf.

Suppliers

The salespeople calling on your dealership know your industry and have proven track

records. However, they will likely need to be trained in auto sales.

Employees

Review all potential employees within your company for possible sales candidates. Employees from the operational side of your business like office or service have a realistic picture of your dealership's capabilities and product features which can add strength to their sales presentations. However, they may or may not be suited to sales as a profession. It takes a certain personality and mindset to be successful. Consider starting a sales school after hours for those who have expressed an interest. This will identify motivated employees and allow you to effectively and efficiently filter out the best candidates.

Competitors

Identify the best sales competitors, the ones who consistently beat up your salespeople. These people are proven competitors in your industry with their own following.

The best candidates often have to be recruited rather than hired. If you can provide them with a better opportunity that they already have, then you have a good chance of building a quality sales team of proven sales winners.

Week 13

Managing Conflict is Essential for Increasing Productivity



Cyber-Training for Auto Managers

Conflict in every sales department is a painful reality. It ultimately causes problems for everyone concerned, and often leaves Sales Managers dealing with disharmony among individual salespeople. Many conflicts develop from a lack or a misunderstanding of specifics, like the appearance of looking busy versus being effective, or even job dissatisfaction.

The conflicts that require immediate attention are the ones that disrupt normal routines, or pose threats to others. The degree to which specific conflicts are tolerated before addressing them must be weighed carefully. Often Sales Managers fail to see the necessity of intervening between two or more salespeople, unless it expands to others and continues for more than several days. Always acknowledge every situation that produces any level of conflict with individuals and as a dealership whole. Taking the attitude "It doesn't really matter to me" attitude only adds fuel to the conflict fire. Any disharmony or discord can erupt into an out-of-control situation and can undermine sales and positive motivation faster than anything.

Determine all the facts

Initially Sales Managers need to determine the facts and seek out all sides of the story. Before a dispute can be settled, all sides and people must be fairly heard. Conflicts tend to flourish when only part of the story emerges. Put investigative skills to work to flush out all the issues surrounding the problem. Listen to everyone involved before jumping to judgments.

Don't side step issues

Focus on problems, not individuals. Concentrate on the reasons and not the symptoms. Conflicts flare because something is causing them to surface. Find that something.

Ask for input from the individuals directly involved in the conflict

This empowers them take responsibility for a solution. Allowing individuals to express their viewpoints and offer solutions helps to resolve possible hidden conflicts not easily identifiable. Offer strategies to prevent the conflict from recurring once it has been identified.

Practice patience

Take time to evaluate the situation. Take time to analyze possible solutions and ideas to resolve the conflict. Take time to respond appropriately to the people involved, and take time to allow change from the negative effect to take place. Most of all, take time to listen.

Even though a manager can be tempted to settle conflict using intimidation or manipulation, it is never wise and certainly has no effect in the long-term. Advancing a hasty effort generally leads to an ineffective solution and a general waste of time. Typically, the conflict will resurface shortly. The Sales Manager will be faced with a more complicated problem including the management of the unresolved conflict as well as the anger and hostile attitudes that have been allowed to fester from an inadequate solution.

Keep lines of communication open

This is essential during the resolution and follow-up. Prevention of conflicts can be maintained when good communication is encouraged and practiced.

Share perspectives

It is important employees know the Sales Manager's personal point of view as well as the Manager's understanding of their perspective. Managers need to practice talking with employees and not at them. They need to ask and seek input which exemplifies strength and not weakness. Managers need to be open to new possibilities and ideas. They need to ask questions with the primary motivation of finding answers and seeking solutions.

Managers need to avoid falling into the trap of asking questions to acquire quick answers and pre-assumed responses. They need to use more open-ended questioning and minimize

inquiries requiring a direct yes or no response.

Finally, Sales Managers need to act decisively. Once all the information and facts are gathered, a quick response is essential. Leaving the issues in limbo allows problems to fester and spread. Salespeople tend to make quick judgments based upon the action or inaction of the Manager. Managers can be easily labeled weak or indecisive when it comes to properly handling problems and complaints. Consequently, credibility drops which has an overall negative impact on the Manager's management style or career.

Salespeople may not always agree with solutions, decisions or perspectives, but by acting decisively they all will certainly understand what priorities are considered to be important.

Week 14

The Sales Manager Everyone Hates to Work For



Cyber-Training for Auto Managers

One of the first things you become aware of is that you have many roles to play. At various times (and often all the time) you are a time management supervisor, a meeting planner, a contest creator, a report generator, a talent scout, a disciplinarian, a coach, a salesperson, a customer service representative, a trainer and a psychiatrist. All of these roles, well executed, make for a great sales manager - one whose main purpose is to get the best out of his/her salespeople.

That is the bottom-line goal of every sales manager - to build a strong, confident, productive sales staff. It's not always an easy job, and there are many factors that block our success in that effort. Based on interviews I've had with many salespeople around the country, the following portrait of the sales manager everyone hates to work for was created.

Ever hear this horror story? A salesperson, little shakey about closing the deal, asks his manager if he'd come in for a T.O. The manager, basically a lazy desk-type says, "If you can't close it, what makes you think I

can", and continues leaning back in his chair. The salesperson makes a last effort, then escorts the customer to the door. The manager then replies, "You are really weak. My mother could have closed that deal!".

Not only did the manager lose any possibilities of a sale, he lost all credibility with his salesperson. No doubt this salesperson will complain to everyone else in the dealership. A good manager, who truly care about his/her people, and the dealership, would never make this kind of mistake. Which is not to say that great sales managers aren't infallible. It's just that if they do make a mistake, they're the first ones to admit it. Every salesperson when asked that type of manager he/she would like to work for, has the same thought: someone who is honest and upfront, who gives his all to the job and to his people, and who doesn't have time for blame or games.

Unfortunately, horror-story managers do exist. Just so you'll recognize one if you ever run into a bad manager, here are 10 most common characteristics of the manager everyone hates to work for:

1. Low energy, low enthusiasm

Mr. Negative never gets excited about anything. He's unhappy with his job and shares this information freely. He's constantly depressed and so is his team.

2. No vision

He sets no goals for himself or for his staff. He gives the salespeople one direction on Monday morning, and by Tuesday afternoon he's saying something completely different.

3. Willing to settle for average performance

He "doesn't have time" to work with salespeople or develop their potential. He doesn't expect much from his people, and he doesn't get much.

4. Takes credit for everything

This managers ego needs constant stroking. So ever success becomes his own, no matter how much or how little he had to do with it. He takes full credit for his salespeople's success.

5. A finger-pointer

When something goes wrong, he's the first one to point out who did it and what went wrong (unless the mistake was his). He is quick to point out the salespeople's shortcomings, and slow to offer any suggestions or solutions.

6. Glued to his desk

He always has paperwork to do and seldom gets out on the showroom floor. He is always telling his salespeople to get to work early and stay till the bell - but is not willing to do

the same.

7. Cares more about getting his money than he cares about his people

He's more concerned about short-term results than the long-term success of his salespeople.

8. Lack of communication skills

He knows how to tell his salespeople what they did wrong, but doesn't know how to teach them to do it right. His listening skills have a lot to be desired, and his salespeople don't feel comfortable asking his advice.

9. Let's his friends stop pulling their weight

He has favorites in his department who take advantage of their friendship and get away with low activity and poor results, causing resentment and discontent among the other salespeople.

10. Doesn't stand behind his team

He's only interested in impressing the dealer. He doesn't realize that the success of the sales manager is in direct proportion to the success of his salespeople.

Fortunately, many managers don't fit this profile. There are a lot of caring, supportive, enthusiastic team leaders in dealerships all over the world. When I wrote "**The Ultimate Automotive Manager**" it was based on the positive experiences I had with my manager when I first started. I hope that if you don't have the type of manager I had, the type that motivated me to write the book, that you will experience that kind of positive support just once in your life.

Week 15

What Makes a Great Sales Manager?



Cyber-Training for Auto Managers

There's no single, remarkable secret. In fact, great Sales Managers are many things. Depending on the situation, a great sales Manager is a time-management supervisor, a meeting planner, a contest coordinator, a talent scout, a coach, a trainer and a psychiatrist. All of those roles put together—and executed well—make for a great Sales Manager.

However, there are five key areas in which the best Sales Managers excel. Great Managers:

1 Are passionate and enthusiastic.

These traits are transferred to the entire sales staff. If the leader is negative, everyone else will be pulled down. How do great managers maintain a realistically positive attitude? Great managers are great readers; they read everything they can find about their crafts and industries. They seek out mentors whose wisdom and experience can help them achieve their goals, and they encourage their salespeople to do the same. They surround themselves with high-quality people.

2 Recruit great salespeople.

Many managers don't start recruiting until someone leaves, which means they often settle for second best in order to fill the gap. Great managers, on the other hand, are always on the lookout for talented people. One way they do that is by carrying two-sided business cards to give out to people they meet at other businesses who demonstrate great sales and service skills. One side of the card contains the standard name, address and phone number. On the other side, it might say, "I was very impressed with your service and professionalism. Please call me if you're ever looking for a career." The success of a sales manager is in direct proportion to the success of the team, which is why it's critical to hire the best people.

3 Make their numbers through their salespeople, not for them.

The greatest difficulty a sales team can have is a manager who closes for his people. When that happens, the salespeople don't learn the skills they need to move to the highest level of self-sufficiency. It's instinctive for a manager to want to jump in and save a sale, but the message you send is that you may not be training your salespeople enough. Close a deal for a salesperson and you've made one sale; teach him how to close and you've made a career.

4 Leads by example and develops a strong team.

Great sales managers develop a philosophy of "team". They wouldn't expect their salespeople to do anything they wouldn't do themselves. They involve the team in decision making processes for the good of the sales department. They work together for the success of the entire team and department, and leave selfish egos at the door.

5 Understand their salespeople' individual strengths and weaknesses.

They're able to ask non-directive questions like "What do you think you could have done differently on that sale?" or "What was your objective?" When the salespeople say it, they own it; when the manager says it, they doubt it. Great managers are aware of what motivates each salesperson and know how to get the best from everyone. They expect excellence. If your salespeople know you think they're capable of reaching greater heights, they'll strive for them.

Your role as a leader is to encourage your people to succeed. There may be substantial monetary rewards in being a great sales manager, but the greatest reward is having helped others reach their goals. Our material possessions won't really matter once we're gone. Our greatest legacy is the people we've helped build, who are left to build others in the same way.

Week 16

Assessing Your Salespeople's Skills



Cyber-Training for Auto Managers

How do the skills of the salespeople you manage stack up? Typically twenty percent of your staff are highly proficient and effective in their responsibilities. Unfortunately the remaining eighty percent may have a varying degree of proficiency.

As a training company and a producer of training programs, the majority of the specific problems which concern sales managers the most, are most often caused by a lack of sales skills.

Some of the most obvious problems concern areas of objections and closing. The most common cause of sales objections is the failure of the salesperson to adequately qualify the prospect. Additionally, most of the other most common causes are directly contributed to the salesperson and entirely within their control to prevent and eliminate.

Asking for the order or closing is another problem area. Many salespeople are not skilled enough to understand what is happening and how to read the buying signs. Incredible as it seems, almost two thirds of

all sales calls conclude without the salespersons asking for the order. Persistence definitely pays off, but consider that 60% of all customers say “no” four times before saying “yes”. Yet, 92% of all salespeople give up without asking for a order before that point.

A survey of marketing managers indicated they feel most salespeople are weak in the areas of customer, product and competitive knowledge. The results in the salesperson constantly asking questions about basic knowledge they should be required to know. This wastes time and resources and increases inefficiency.

Fear and a lack of self-confidence and esteem are another major problem. Most often, these are a direct consequent of insufficient sales skills. The salespeople feel overwhelmed and don't have the ability to deal with the complexity of their profession. Once properly trained and developed, these feelings are minimized and performance improves.

Training, in many dealerships, is a secondary concern. Unfortunately the performance of these dealership is also lower than need be. This problem is not isolated to salespeople, but also effects every employee with the dealership.

The key is that well-trained and developed salespeople are more productive, more effective and more profitable. Training must be provided on an on-going and regular basis. It must be constantly reinforced, supported and the results evaluated.

A training portfolio should be created on each salesperson. The strengths and weaknesses of the salesperson should be assessed and training provided to enhance their performance. This will move your department forward in a consistent fashion and assure improved overall performance.

Points to Ponder

As a sales manager, assess the following points:

1. Have you specifically communicated your expectations to each salesperson so they know what specifically is expected?
2. Have you effectively communicated the skills and knowledge each salesperson is expected to master?
3. Have you provided the training and support which teaches the salespeople to master their skills and knowledge?
4. Do you have a portfolio for each salesperson which assesses their strengths and weaknesses and indicates the training they require?

Week 17

Cutting Your Throat



Cyber-Training for Auto Managers

One of the temptations of sales and general managers is to look at the commissions of their salespeople as a great place to cut into their operating budget. After all, a great salesman might out earn the vast majority of sales managers. Many companies will cut commissions or earned bonuses to increase their bottom line thinking that this is the smart and clever thing to do. However there are four factors that come into play when you undertake such a strategic move:

- **Results**
- **Motivation**
- **Risk**
- **Retaliation**

Results:

Sales is a results driven profession. Salespeople are naturally competitive and will compete with other salespeople as well as themselves to increase their performance and the results they can produce. There is no bigger high for a salesperson as getting a new sale. It makes their day. They live and die by the results they produce. It's feast or famine since they have no fall back on a salary or the luxury of just showing up to be

paid. They must produce results.

Motivation:

Results are produced by a motivated individual. You either pay or fire a salesperson. There is no middle ground. When you reduce a commission rate or tinker with bonuses, you have taken the wind out of their sails. Some sales managers will tell them to work harder to make up the difference, but the trust has been broken. Without that trust between the salesperson and the company, the motivation will quickly deteriorate.

Risk:

Salespeople are natural risk takers. Being paid a commission is a natural risk in their profession. However risk takers expect to be compensated for the risk when it pays off. You as a sales manager benefit from the risk by not paying when the results haven't been produced. It is suicide to tinker with the salesperson once they have reached the level of success which is both beneficial to both the dealership and the individual. It doesn't undermine the relationship, it destroys it.

Retaliation:

Once the dealership breaks the trust with the salespeople by tinkering with commissions and bonuses, it can expect some form of retaliation. In a demoralized and demotivated sales force, there will be a notion of why even bother. Results will drop. This is the least of your problems. In many instances salespeople will actively voice their discontent with customers causing long-term problems.

Salespeople are your company to the customer and people buy from people they like. This could cause a backlash. In many instances salespeople have left the dealership and taken a loyal following with them to their new employer. This is often difficult to counter and recover.

The risks that a dealership undertakes when they attempt to alter the compensation structure of their salespeople can be tremendous, well in excess of any earnings they might wish to recoup. Before you consider such a move, it is wise to explore all the possible implications and consequences such a move could cost your business. The short-term gain may not be worth the long-term loss.

Week 18

Hiring the Right Salespeople Depends Upon Seven Important Factors



Cyber-Training for Auto Managers

Adding just the right person to your sales staff can be time consuming and yet is one of the most vital elements for securing your dealership's growth and solid positioning. Wasting valuable time and resources by hiring the wrong person for the job is common in today's fast-paced marketplace. The next time your dealership hires, think about these eight steps that will save time, energy, money, frustration... and saves having to do it all over again.

First, evaluate the exact needs of your department. Define what specific tasks need to be accomplished and what goals you have for the salesperson you hire. Define the skills you need to have mastered for obtaining the desired outcomes and tasks of the dealership. These can be converted into performance measurements for evaluation purposes.

It pays valuable dividends to write out a job description in detail. It should include all tasks, expectations and specific ways to report the detailed information you need, and ways to secure proper feedback. Also, a good job description outlines and describes

the various skills needed, and requests specific training the applicant must possess that supports the needed skills and experience the job description requires.

The search begins. Based on your written job description, use all avenues to select potential candidates. This includes the newspaper, teachers and instructors from colleges and schools. School placement offices can often be helpful as will Internet sites and searches. Tap private employment agencies and review other referrals from through past reference files as well as referrals from other businesses and employees. The search process is as important as the screening of applicants so be careful to search out the candidates from the description of what your exact needs and expectations are.

The screening process should include several things. This is the time to be careful in comparing applications or resumes to your job descriptions and exact needs and specifications of skills. Often this is where there are shortcuts taken because of the intensity of time it takes, but often it proves to be the Achilles heel of a successful hiring process.

One system that is fairly easy to use, separates into categories applicants that fall into one of three groupings: **Most Desirable**...those candidates that best match your descriptions and expectations. **Good With High Potential**...but not qualified in all areas, and lastly, **Not Qualified Or Suitable** for what the dealership needs.

From these categories the selection of interview candidates becomes much easier. At this stage, do not forget to follow through on reference checks. Especially all candidates you select for interviews. It is better to have information on hand before the actual interviews. This information can lead questioning down the path you choose much easier. These references also may be the one essential deciding factor as to whom to hire between equal candidates. Past performance is an issue never to be overlooked or taken lightly.

The interview wins the best candidate from your choices. It establishes and uncovers the suitability or inability of the candidate. Begin by interviewing all candidates from the Most Desirable Group. If no one is found to be exactly suitable, expand interviews to the second grouping Good, With High Potential. Refrain from interviewing any individuals from the third group. Rather, begin searching for all new applications if necessary. It saves efforts and frustrations not to mention added costs and overall poor or lower performance standards.

It is best to use a mixture of open-ended questions as well as closed ones. Specifically ask what skills they feel they have to offer your dealership in terms of the expectations it

has. Also ask what they liked most in regards to their last sales position. Ask questions related to the candidate's career expectations and desires. Ask specifically, "What are your ambitions in relationship to this position?" Have the candidate describe for you, using appropriate adjectives, what fellow managers and co-workers would most likely use as a description of themselves. Lastly, it is highly effective to give the candidate a hypothetical situation as a questioning technique. This reveals appropriate skill levels and insights. Further, it defines the ease at which the candidate can communicate ideas. It also outwardly displays sales ability characteristics and mannerisms the candidate may not always show upfront.

After the candidate is selected, move into proper orientation. Emphasize how things are done around the department. Procedures should be explained thoroughly. Direct new salespeople to one person they can rely upon to ask questions whenever they arise. Show where supplies are kept, and the means for securing them. Make sure they understand and know where to look up information if and when needed. Explain the unwritten rules around the dealership, as well as the written ones. Introduce them to all the other salespeople and support staff. It may help to offer them a welcome to the dealership party to break the ice. Make the new person feel comfortable within the dealership from the start.

Always follow up on new employees. Ask questions about what it is they like about their position, or if the individual is finding sales more difficult than expected? Then listen carefully. Ask them if they feel they are performing adequately to the job expectations that were outlined during the interview process. Remember, even though your dealership may have hired the right person, each individual needs different management methods to keep them motivated and focused. Be sure to know each member's level of enthusiasm and the factors that best motivate them, and continually apply techniques to keep them operating at high performance levels.

Week 19

The #1 Mistake Made When Dealing With Angry Customers



Cyber-Training for Auto Managers

We all deal with angry customers, and it's enough to drive people up the wall. Angry and difficult customers are a major cause of workplace stress, and they eat up huge amounts of your time and the resources of your dealership. There are a lot of tricks and techniques you can use to deal with an angry customer. For now, let's focus on the most common mistake employees make when dealing with the hostile, difficult or angry customer. By avoiding this particular error, you can save yourself a lot of stress and time.

The #1 Mistake

When you are faced with an angry customer, you probably assume that the customer wants his or her "problem" fixed. That's a logical approach and it's at least partly true. Angry customers expect that you will be able to help them in some concrete way, by meeting their want or need. However, there's more to the story.

Ever notice that with a really angry person, even if you can "fix" the problem, the person still acts in angry or nasty ways? Why is that? Well, actually angry customers

want several things. Yes, they want the problem fixed, but they also want to **BE HEARD, TO BE LISTENED TO**, and to have their upset and emotional state recognized and acknowledged.

What most employees do with angry customers is move immediately to solve the problem without giving that acknowledgment. Do you know what happens? The customer is so angry that he or she isn't prepared to work to solve the problem, doesn't listen, and gets in the way of solving the problem. So the number one error is moving to solve the problem before the customer is "ready", or calm enough to work with the employee. The result is the employee has to repeat things over and over (since the customer didn't hear), and has to ask the same questions over and over. And that's what drives people nuts.

The Solution

The solution is to follow this general rule: When faced with an angry customer, **FIRST** focus on acknowledging the feelings and upset of the customer. Once the customer starts to calm down as a result of having his or her feelings recognized, **THEN** move to solving the problem. You'll find that this will save you a lot of time and energy.

Here are a few phrases you can use:

- It seems like you're pretty upset about this and I don't blame you. Let's see what we can do.
- It has to be frustrating to have to return to service again.
- Most people would be angry if the paperwork wasn't done right the first time.

Make sure you address the feelings first, **THEN** move to fix the problem. You must do both.

Week 20

Understanding Hostile Customers



Cyber-Training for Auto Managers

You probably see hostile customers every day. You know, the ones that treat you like a personal dumping ground for everything that has ever gone wrong in their lives? They may be sarcastic, or abusive. They may swear at you, threaten, attempt to intimidate. They are difficult to deal with, and an encounter with one of these people can ruin your day.

Although you may be provoked, it isn't a good idea to respond in kind. Doing so will usually inflame the situation, and can in fact put you at risk. Yelling back, or trading insults can result in only negative consequences for you.

Let's face it. You don't have time to waste arguing and yelling...you have too much to do. But you do need to deal with hostile customers. You need to get the situation under control, deal with it and get on with your work.

There are a number of techniques you can use to do this, but for now I'll attempt to help you understand what is going on when hostile customers direct their anger at you. Understanding angry people helps us be-

come less reactive, and less prone to losing our own temper.

It Ain't Personal

The first thing to remember about angry customers is that while their behavior is directed at you (and it can be personally insulting), the real source of the anger is elsewhere. The angry person is not usually angry at you as a person. He or she is usually angry at you as a manager of a dealership that is perceived as cold, unfeeling, and unhelpful. Since it is difficult to yell or abuse an entire dealership, the angry customer will direct anger towards you.

What Does The Angry Person Want?

One of the half-truths about hostile customers is that they want their problem solved. This isn't the whole story. When a person is initially denied something from a dealership, they get to a point where the problem becomes secondary. Yes, they want the problem solved, but after a point, they get so angry that they are unwilling to work positively to get what they started out wanting. Even if you could work something out with them, they would still be angry.

It is important to realize that very angry people want an opportunity to vent their anger, and they want to be heard and acknowledged. If you don't acknowledge their anger, and move too quickly to try to solve the problem, you will likely make them angrier and more abusive.

What To Do?

There are specific things you can do to take control of potential hostile situations so that they don't escalate into major time-consuming conflicts.

First, you need to observe customers as they approach, and prepare yourself for the possibility that they may show hostile behaviors.

People who are irritated or upset will show tell-tale signs even before they open their mouths. They will send non-verbal clues which may include hunched shoulders, clenched fists, red face, fidgeting and restlessness, staring or avoidance of eye contact, rapid movement, etc.

You need to look for these signs so that any outbursts do not surprise you. Many hostile situations get out of hand because the employee reacts too quickly to hostile behavior, because he or she did not expect it.

If you see a hostile person approach, prepare yourself mentally by reminding yourself that you CAN control the situation, and that you need to keep yourself under control. If you get angry yourself you are likely to contribute to the deterioration of the situation.

Second, when you are in contact with a hostile customer, you must strive to present yourself in as un-bureaucratic a way as possible. Remember we talked about customer anger being really aimed at the dealership? If the customer perceives you as an object, a piece of the bureaucracy, they will be more likely to be more abusive. However, if the customer sees you as a human being who doing the best you can, it is more likely that he or she will show less aggressive behavior.

Specifics:

Let's get more specific. How do you do this?

- 1) Speak in a friendly manner. Do not speak in a monotone or in a way that implies that you are uninterested.
- 2) When possible use the customer's name as soon as possible, and also introduce yourself if that fits the situation.
- 3) Greet the person properly. Don't look up from your paper work and say "Yes?", or "Next". That makes you look like part of a machine. Try "Good morning, Mr. Smith".
- 4) Listen carefully. Show the customer you are listening by paraphrasing what was said back to the customer. This shows your interest and concern. A common error made by people is that they don't allow the customer to finish.
- 5) Don't use the "P" word. The P word is "POLICY". Many times a manager will explain that it is against "our policy to do" what the client wants. This infuriates many people. Even if the request is against your policy, find other words to say it. Rather than simply quoting policy, explain the purpose of the policy (eg. "Sir, we need to make sure that you are dealt with fairly and others are too.")
- 6) Never say "I only work here" or "I'm only following rules". Again this makes you into a non-person. It may be true that you don't make the rules, but try saying it this way: "Sir, the regulations are made by [whoever]. Perhaps you might want to talk to [so and so] and indicate that you feel the regulations are unfair. Would you like me to set an appointment to meet with [whoever]?"

Conclusion:

Every hostile situation is different, and not all solutions will work all the time. The general principles I have talked about here are to be prepared by observing customers early in the process, and make sure that you come across as a real person.

There is a lot more to defusing hostile situations, but this article will give you a starting point to begin role playing different situations you come across at your dealership.

Week 21

Employee Orientation



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I would not be understating the case if I said that orienting new salespeople to their departments and their jobs is one of the most neglected functions in dealerships today. Countless horror stories exist about how a new salesperson has received a ten minute talk with the manager, and then directed to his or her desk, with no further guidance or instruction. Not only is this exceedingly stressful for the salesperson, but it virtually guarantees a very long period of unproductiveness for the employee.

So here's a checklist that you can use when orienting new salespeople. As you read the article, keep in mind that orientation is also important for existing employees if: a) they have never received proper orientation, or b) there have been many changes in the dealership that may need additional orientation.

Purposes of Orientation

Orientation isn't a nicety! It is used for the following purposes:

1. To Reduce Startup-Costs

Proper orientation can help the salesperson

get “up to speed” much more quickly, thereby reducing the costs associated with learning the job.

2. To Reduce Anxiety

Any employee, when put into a new, strange situation, will experience anxiety that can impede his or her ability to learn to do the job. Proper orientation helps to reduce anxiety that results from entering into an unknown situation, and helps provide guidelines for behavior and conduct, so the salesperson doesn't have to experience the stress of guessing.

3. To Reduce Employee Turnover

Salesperson turnover increases as employees feel they are not valued, or are put in positions where they can't possibly do their jobs. Orientation shows that the dealership values the employee, and helps provide tools necessary for succeeding in the job.

4. To Save Time For Managers & Co-Workers

Simply put, the better the initial orientation, the less likely managers and co-workers will have to spend time teaching the salesperson.

5. To Develop Realistic Job Expectations, Positive Attitudes and Job Satisfaction

It is important that salespeople learn early on what is expected of them, and what to expect from others, in addition to learning about the values and attitudes of the dealership. While salespeople can learn from experience, they will make many mistakes that are unnecessary and potentially damaging.

Two Kinds of Orientation

There are two related kinds of orientation. The first we will call **Overview Orientation**, and deals with the basic information an employee will need to understand the broader system he or she works in. Overview Orientation includes helping employees understand:

- the dealership and the sales department
- important policies and general procedures
- information about compensation and benefits
- safety and accident prevention issues
- the physical facility

Often, Overview Orientation can be conducted by the office manager with a little help from the sales manager or general manager, since much of the content is generic in nature.

The second kind of orientation is called **Job-Specific Orientation**, and is the process that is used to help employees understand:

- function of the sales department, and how the employee fits in
- job responsibilities, expectations, and duties
- policies, procedures, rules and regulations
- layout of the department and location of specific sales tools
- introduction to co-workers and other people in the dealership.

Job specific orientation is best conducted by the sales manager since much of the content will be specific to the individual. Often the orientation process will be ongoing, with managers and co-workers supplying guidance.

Some Tips

1. Orientation should begin with the most important information (basic job survival).
2. Orientation should emphasize people as well as procedures and things. Salespeople should have a chance to get to know other people and their approaches and styles in both social and work settings.
3. Buddy a salesperson to a more experienced salesperson, but make sure the more experienced salesperson wants to buddy up, and has good interpersonal skills. This provides ongoing support.
4. Introduce salespeople to both information and people in a controlled way. A new employee can't absorb everything at once, so don't waste your time. Space out introductions.

Conclusion

Orientation (or lack of it) will make a significant difference in how quickly an salesperson can become more productive, and also has long-term effects for the dealership. This same process will also work for every other department within the dealership.

Week 22

What's Training Good For Anyway?



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What's Training Good For Anyway?

There are good reasons to mandate training and development in your dealership, and there are bad reasons for mandating training. There are ALSO good reasons for NOT training, in some circumstances, and bad reasons to refuse training. Knowing what training can and cannot accomplish enables you to make the right decisions at the right time, ensuring that your training efforts are used effectively.

The Chaotic Dealership

If your dealership was stable and unchanging, you might not need to worry too much about training. You might still do it to provide salesperson development but it would be less critical to our department's success.

It ain't so. All you need to do is look around at your own dealership, and what you are likely to see is significant changes that have occurred during the last year. You may have lived through employee turnover, new management, changed inventory, increased customer dissatisfaction, decreased sales and profits, and a host of other changes. It is

not likely that these changes will cease in the future.

You know all this. Change has accelerated to the point where some dealerships are in chaos, and many are at least staggered. What all this means is that as our work worlds change, new skills, knowledge and concepts are needed to achieve our sales department goals. And, our personal goals. Just to stay even, and just to keep your sanity. This is where training comes in.

What Training Can Do

Training CAN accomplish many things. It can help salespeople learn the new skills that are required to meet new expectations, both formal and informal. For example, a new model is coming out that your salespeople need to be prepared for, or you're developing an internet department that salespeople need to be trained for, or your closing ratios are slipping and your salespeople need to become better closers. Training can help salespeople accept the challenge of their evolving jobs.

Training can also help to:

- build a common understanding of the sales department's purpose.
- show management's commitment and loyalty to his/her employees.
- develop professional salespeople so they can become more self-sufficient in their careers.

What Training Cannot Do

There are many things that training can't do. Training, on its own, cannot change ineffective salespeople into effective ones. It is unlikely to address ALL the causes of poor performance. Limited training also will not turn a poor sales manager into an effective one, unless it is coupled with ongoing coaching from above.

Training will not erase problems that occur as a result of poor department structure, putting the wrong person in a sales position, unclear management responsibilities or other department related issues.

Training As A Tool

The best way of thinking about training is to think of it as a management tool, much like a carpenter's tool. Just like a carpenter picks the hammer and not a screwdriver to pound a nail, the sales manager should be choosing training because it is the RIGHT tool for the job.

Also, to continue the analogy, if the supporting structure (the wood) is rotted, only the

foolish carpenter would attempt to pound the nail into the wood, and expect it to help. It is the same with the manager. If a sales manager expects things to improve as a result of training, he or she needs to ensure that the supports are there for the use of the tool, and that there are no other non-training related problems hanging about.

To conclude, training can be a valuable tool for the dealership and the manager, provided it is the RIGHT tool to solve the problem or address the identified issues. Even then, there must be supports in the organization so the training can be effective.

Week 23

Turning Around Negative Attitudes



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Turning Around Negative Attitudes

At one time or another, your dealership has probably developed an over-abundance of “negative energy” or attitudes. Sometimes they can be linked to department trauma, like new management, lack of sales, but sometimes they evolve over time with no apparent triggering event. The negative sales department is characterized by increased complaining, a focus on reasons why things can’t be done, and what seems to be a lack of hope that things will get better. It feels like the department is stuck in negativeville. And, it’s contagious. Negativism can affect even the most positive employees.

What can you do?

Model Positive Behavior

It is obvious that if management is walking negative and talking in a negative way, salespeople will follow. Don’t do it. More than that, take a positive approach with your salespeople by showing confidence in their abilities. Expect a lot, support your staff, hold them accountable, confront them and be clear and honest. Set standards for

your own work and relations with your salespeople, and work towards meeting them to set an example of positive behavior.

Acknowledge Negativity

You can't ignore negativity and expect it to go away. If you do not acknowledge it, then salespeople will feel that you are out of touch, and will not be confident in your abilities. Acknowledge the frustration of negative feelings, and do not try to convince your salespeople that they shouldn't have their negative feelings. However, when acknowledging your salespeople's negative feelings, try asking for suggestions regarding what to do about them.

Look For And Identify The Positives In All Situations

Sometimes we forget to find positives. When a salesperson makes an impractical solution, we are quick to dismiss the idea. We should be identifying the effort while gently discussing the idea. Look for small victories, and talk about them. Turning a negative organization into a positive one is a result of thousands of little actions.

Give Positive Recognition Often

Pretty straightforward. Provide positive recognition as soon as you find out about good performance. Do not couple positive strokes with suggestions for improvement. Separate them. Combining them devalues the recognition for many salespeople.

Refrain From Collusion On Negativity

It is easy to get caught in the general complaining and bitching, particularly in informal discussions. When faced with negative conversations, consider changing the subject, comment on the negative content ("Let's talk about something more pleasant"), or ask what can be done about the situation (move from a negative to a positive slant).

A Few More Quick Tips:

- Hold a strategy session with the entire sales department to focus on a positive future (but make sure it is well facilitated).
- Encourage salespeople to find creative ways to make the department environment more enjoyable.
- Encourage your staff to be involved in decision-making and delegate where possible (we forget sometimes that many salespeople want to become involved in the success of the dealership above and beyond the actual sales process).
- Introduce a "work-smart" program within your department.

Conclusion

It is not uncommon for sales departments to go through periods of negativity. Dealers and Managers play important roles in determining if that negativity will increase, or whether the negativity is relatively short. Above all, remember that it is the little things that you do, day in and day out, that make the difference.

Week 24

Sales Managers Make a Difference



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Sales Managers Make a Difference

Sales managers make a difference. At least they're supposed to. Yet even though some Dealers seem to agree with this premise, they don't act as if it were true.

In fact, dealerships are often their own worst enemies when it comes to improving the quality of their sales organizations. Dealerships frequently and significantly undervalue or misunderstand the key role that sales managers should play in driving productivity and in building a sustainable sales department.

Too many sales departments are operating well below their potential. If they paid greater attention to the training for their sales managers, their performance would improve substantially and rapidly.

Deeds don't match words

Almost every dealership believes that the quality of its managers directly affects its financial results. Still, it's often hard to match a company's beliefs with its actions.

For example, in many dealerships, training

for sales managers is woefully inadequate. When I've asked dealerships about the initial training they provides to new sales reps, we usually get impressive responses about the extensive preparation they receive. Yet when I ask about the training they provide to newly sales managers, the answer is usually *zip*. New sales managers are expected to transform themselves from salesperson to supervisor overnight. The little training that is offered usually revolves around learning the policies, procedures, and paperwork that the job demands, which they usually know since it was familiar to them as a salesperson.

What's more, while everyone is in agreement that "a great salesperson doesn't necessarily make a good manager," the practice of promoting the wrong people into sales manager roles is widespread. The fact is, the best managerial candidates are *not* always the people who attain the highest sales.

But sometimes, companies are so afraid of losing a great salesperson that they promote that person despite real concerns about how well he or she will perform as a sales manager. The consequences are usually disastrous. Not only do they end up losing a good salesperson, they often wind up with disengaged employees or an outright exodus of salespeople who must report to a less-than-ideal boss.

Some suggestions

Fortunately, these problems are fixable, and the solutions can provide a rapid improvement in dealership effectiveness. Here are some suggestions that may help:

First, let's reaffirm the basic notion that good sales managers can indeed make a difference — because they do. The quality of a sales department is directly linked to the quality of its sales manager. These managers greatly influence turnover, productivity, and profitability, and they help build a base of loyal customers. So, unless your dealership is continuously improving the quality of its sales managers, it's unlikely that you're improving the quality of your sales staff.

Secondly, dealerships must pay special attention to the people they promote into these roles. Your sales team needs both great coaches (sales manager) and great players. Some of the people you hire as salespeople must have the potential to become great coaches. So, by promoting from within, your new sales manager will have gained some practical experience by selling your product line. This firsthand experience provides the best sales managers with an invaluable frame of reference that enables them to provide real help to their salespeople.

Finally, be sure that new managers receive the appropriate help in developing a management style that is most suited to their own talents and strengths. In general, dealerships don't invest enough resources in training and developing sales managers. However scarce or abundant your own dealerships training resources are, you should be mindful of this fact: Your best return on investment will come from efforts directed toward training your

sales managers.

I have seen rapid improvement in the effectiveness of dealership sales departments in which managers are trained to do a better job at setting goals and developing plans, creating productive relationships with their salespeople, offering praise, and listening to opinions. Too many sales managers are unaware of how attention to these issues actually improves sales results.

So don't stop training and developing your long-term sales managers. If you allow them to become disengaged in their jobs, it's unlikely that you'll find good salespeople working for them.

Remember that good sales managers are just that — good sales managers. They're not magicians, nor are they miracle workers. When dealerships overload good managers with too many tasks other than being responsible for sales, profits and training, these managers are no longer able to invest time and attention on their immediate source of income, their salespeople. When the crucial bond between salespeople and their managers suffers, salespeople's productivity are likely to decline.

Week 25

Selling in Tough Times



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Selling In Tough Times

There is a popular myth that everyone thrives in good selling times. The truth is that in spite of booming sales and perceived prosperity, not every salesperson shines. In tougher times the distribution widens even more between the winners and also-rans.

A logical question is why certain salespeople and dealerships stay at or near the top through boom, bust and normal times. Why is it that winners continue to win? What do they do so uniquely to sell through tough times?

Let's take a look at eight specific activities that are critical to selling successfully through economic slumps. And who wouldn't argue that the past year or so has created some challenges for the world of selling.

1. Perception is reality

Nothing is as bad, or as good, as it first appears. One of our dealerships recently informed us that he is enjoying the best year that he has had in over 17 years of business...yet dealerships in his area are off

by more than 10%! His perception? That the market is strong, vital and positive. What about others in his area? You guessed it - everything in the economy is down, depressed, soft and unforgiving.

2. Attitude is king

Selling is an endeavor driven by emotion, not logic. As trite as it may sound, attitude is the key to success in anything. It is really the single most critical key to success in sales. With a strong and positive attitude our burdens lighten, our step gets faster and our energy level is boundless. Reverse the attitude and you reverse the positive force of all the others as well.

3. Networking is the main ingredient for success

Your long-term success in sales is in direct proportion to the quality and breadth of your prospect file. This is a universal truth in selling. In tough times it is a cardinal rule for survival. Proactive selling is the word of the day. Telephoning for business is critical, contacting existing customers; orphan customers and prospective customers are the major elements to survival. The most critical ingredient for selling in tough times is prospecting and networking. If you wait for someone to find you, you will have a long and costly wait. Pursue every networking possibility there is. This takes discipline, foresight, planning, commitment and time. Without this element, any hope for successful selling in tough times is purely a pipe dream.

4. Organization is essential

In tough selling times there is no telling when or from where a single or multiple sale may come quickly or unexpectedly. With this in mind, it is essential to realize that a lost phone number, referral or prospect card could be disastrous. In this type of environment there is absolutely no room for error. That means focused, concentrated effort that is consistently leveraged against productive activity. That productive activity is not looking for papers, shuffling through piles of irrelevant materials or trying to reconstruct a misplaced prospect file. In these circumstances, time is money - and you are racing against the economic clock with an eye toward winning the contest!

5. Create or maximize urgency

In tough selling times, it is easy and natural for prospects to realize that it is a buyer's market. You know it is. They know it is. Most important though, they know that you know it is! The results? Lengthy negotiation and lots of shopping. Removing any sense of urgency in selling anything, significantly reduces the chance of a successful sale. Lessening or reducing it in tougher times virtually assures that no sale will be made. It is critical, therefore, that some degree of urgency be established in order to expedite the sale and move on the next one.

6. Service is paramount

A satisfied customer is arguably the best prospecting tool that you have. The more customers you have and the happier they are, the greater volume of “prospectors” you have in the field for you. In tougher times, it is important to understand the selling principle that states “Successful salespeople are in front of qualified buyers at a time when they need to buy, not when the salesperson needs to make a sale.” What does this mean? Simply that if you have enough happy, excited, satisfied customers talking about your professional ability to meet and exceed their needs, those prospects, who are seriously interested in your product will find their way to your door. Frankly, happy customers are in front of a lot more potential buyers than you could ever hope to be.

7. Upsell, Upsell, Upsell

Not only in terms of price and profit, but in terms of related products. With the possibility of fewer buyers, it stands to reason that it is important to penetrate every sale. One way to do it is to continue selling - during and after each sale! In tough times, customers will make a series of small decisions or a large decision with a series of smaller decisions to enhance and reinforce the major one. Keep the momentum going!

So, what are the common threads? Let’s take a look at several!

- Attitude (yours) is important. You’ll face lots of potentially discouraging selling scenarios in tough selling times.
- Prospecting, networking and persistence are key.
- Organization, product knowledge, servicing and creating urgency are paramount in tough selling times. Keep on selling.

The bottom-line? Someone always does sell during tough times. Will it be your salespeople? The answer to that lies only one place - and you know where that is, don’t you? It’s within your own abilities and desire to excel. The choice is yours.

Week 26

Five Keys to More Powerful Sales Meetings



Cyber-Training for Auto Managers

To achieve maximum value from your next sales meeting, prepare the ending first.

Throughout history, great leaders have inspired others to action by preparing, then delivering carefully constructed conclusions to speeches. Lincoln's, "Government of the people, by the people, for the people . . .," Patrick Henry's, "Give me liberty or give me death," and John Kennedy's, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country" are a few examples.

Great speakers have a clear understanding about specifically what they want the audience to do as a result. So, when you sit down to prepare your meeting, and I do recommend preparing for every meeting, write the ending first. What should salespeople be able to do after the meeting? What will they need to do different in the future? What does your top salesperson do that your other salespeople don't? When you write the ending first, it will be much easier to plan the introduction and body of your meeting.

Here is a step by step method to plan your next sales meeting:

Be very specific about what you want your salespeople to do. Avoid vague words like “understand” and “appreciate.” List no more than two or three actions, anymore will be difficult to remember. Tell them what you want them to do and when. For instance:

- Follow-up with five previous customers today and ask for referrals.
- Work with another salesperson on a product presentation.
- Make sure all your paperwork is correct before you turn it into Finance.

Make at least one of the actions something simple your salespeople can do immediately. As the saying goes, “well begun is half done.” If your salespeople leave with something simple to do they are more likely to do it. When they take action and achieve results they will be more likely to act on the other things you asked them to do.

Outline your conclusion as follows:

- Summarize key points into short, but memorable, sentences.
- Restate the main benefit and appeal to salespeople’s emotion as well as logic. Emotional appeals include financial freedom, health vitality, safety, romance, piece of mind, and personal fulfillment.
- Tell your salespeople specifically what you want them to do.

Save your best “Ah ha!” points for last. Too many sales meeting flow like a bell curve, up at the beginning and down at the end. This brings your audience down just before the most important part - your conclusion. Pull out a pad of Post-it notes and write just one topic on each note. Arrange your topics to ensure that you build up to a conclusion and not down.

Follow-up to measure the action taken. Great speakers know that their success is measured by the action that the audience takes as a result. Be specific in your follow-up. For instance, in the example cited earlier you might ask, “How many previous customers did you call to ask for referrals last week? What questions did you ask? What were your results?”

What you say last in your sales meeting is what your salespeople will remember most. A well-planned and presented conclusion can inspire your team to action. When you follow these simple steps your meetings will be more effective. Plus, you’ll feel great sense of accomplishment when you see your ideas actually being implemented on the showroom floor.



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