**How to Kick-Start Your Success As A New Sales VP**



I’ve yet to meet a Sales VP who has taken on a perfectly functioning sales team and then kicks-back during their first 90 days in the job. Taking on the challenge of improving performance comes with the territory, but when an ex-colleague approached me recently for sales training for his newly acquired, and dramatically underperforming, sales team it gave me food for thought.

Strongly believing that there’s no need to sell a placebo when an affordable and effective cure is available I refused. Instead, we put together a plan which is a useful health check for any sales team, and a quick-start tool for Sales VPs to develop a fast and effective improvement development plan for their first 90 days in a new role.

**Mind the gap**

Don’t jump straight in. Take the time to understand your new company’s vision for the future and its strategy to get there. What are the measures that ensure it’s tracking for success? Now check in with your direct reports. What do they believe are the company’s strategy and vision, and how do their professional goals support that? If there is a misalignment here you can be certain that the wider sales team’s behaviours won’t be supporting the company’s strategy. Bridging this gap with a clearly defined and easily articulated sales strategy which aligns to the company’s vision is the bedrock upon which all future sales improvement activities should be based.

**Re-evaluate the carrot**

How are you being compensated and is your team being compensated in a way that supports you to achieve your goals? Particularly as more companies move to cloud and SaaS models we find that compensation plans don’t support the behavioural change required to achieve the company’s long term strategic objectives. The most sure-fire way to break the ‘routine sell’ that so many sales executives fall into is to change the compensation package that rewards it. In most cases there is a solid argument for a phased approach to compensation adjustments where behaviours are rewarded not just outcomes, giving the sales team time and space to learn and adopt new methods of selling. In this way the business will begin to see an immediate change in sales behaviour even while you build longer term plans.

**Re-model the stick**

Take time to understand the cause not just the symptoms of poor performance in your team before you jump to a conclusion as to how to treat it. The fast answer to improving sales is often considered to be training, but training in isolation is, at best, the equivalent of a crash-diet. While there may be gains, they’ll always be temporary. Rather than one-off training events, look instead at manager-led coaching programs – the sales enablement equivalent of the healthy eating plan! Implemented correctly this approach delivers the quick wins you get from the ‘crash diet’ approach, while simultaneously coaching individuals in your team to sustain the required behavioral change to deliver ongoing commercial improvement for the business. A one-size fits all approach rarely works here. If you need external support to build and implement a program look for people with a proven track record in delivering bespoke programs that are based on insights into your business, grounded in pragmatism and mix quick wins with longer term business improvements.

**Build for change**

If you’ve taken the steps above, or at-the-very-least, used insights from steps one and two to build a proposal for step three, you’ll inevitably need to socialise your findings and your suggested approach to tackling the misalignment. Case studies (add url) are a useful tool to remind colleagues of the improvements you’re driving for, and to recruit them to your cause. Along with your boss, gaining support from HR or the Learning and Development team is crucial. With them on side you can begin to share the heavy lifting of addressing the immediate problem and then start to plan for the future. This will mean building a bench of candidates that are A-class coaches not just A-class players. It will mean re-evaluating the behaviors and competencies for success in each sales position, and even how you advertise and interview for roles in the future.

Of course, by now you’ve realized that these changes are long-term plans not one-off fixes, but the point is they can all be kicked-off when you are new in your role, and before you get lost in the detail of the day-to-day. What’s more, the steps deliver exactly what my colleague set out to achieve. That is, demonstrate some quick-wins that prove he has a handle on his new role, while building a foundation for sustainable commercial improvement that will set up him and his team for success long after the critical 90 days has past. Something that training alone would just never do.

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