

## Sales Architects: The Unprecedented Sales Management Challenge for 2009

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Sales managers are facing a set of challenges that they've never experienced before. They think their team is focused on generating sales, but they are completely distracted.

By Lee B. Salz

As a sales manager, you've had Human Resources preaching to you for years about the importance of work-life balance for your sales team. They've reminded you that studies show productivity increases when employees have balance between their work life and their personal one. They told you that your team needs time to recharge their batteries so they can sell more for the company.

Some still talk about work-life balance, but the truth of the matter is that this is a yesterday issue. Work-life implies that "work" is a stressful world and "life" is a place of solace. Those days are gone with the way our economy has evolved. Your sales team is getting it from both sides now. They have unprecedented, high levels of stress at work and at home. The former life of solace is now filled with concerns of mounting debt, drastic drops in home values, a real fear of job loss and disgust over their investment portfolio.

When your sales team arrives to start the day, the reality is that their day is already over. They began by watching the morning news. "Unemployment is at a record high! Housing values continue to fall! Consumer confidence is non-existent!" What a way to start a productive sales day&hellip

### They've Already Tapped Out

Imagine a boxer who gets beaten up before he enters the ring&hellipWhat chance does he have of being successful in the match? ZERO! Today, your sales team is faced with the same challenges as that boxer. The media is defeating them before their day even begins. They arrive at work to begin their day, but the truth of the matter is that they are already finished. They've already lost.

Despite all of these woes, the company is relying on the sales team to pull the company out of the painful downward spiral driven by the economic mess. Logic would tell you that with the present state of affairs, the sales team is more focused than ever on generating sales. Every minute of the business day, they are either on the phone with a prospect or meeting with one. All they can think of is: Make a sale!

Unfortunately, logic does not come into play here. All of the external noise is leading your sales team in the complete opposite direction. They are checking the market hourly, their 401k every 15 minutes, and checking the job boards incessantly. It's as if there is total sales paralysis. Sales productivity is probably at an all time low at a time when the company needs them most. As the sales manager, this all falls in your lap. You are the face of the sales organization. The company needs you to change your hat from manager to leader to help focus the troops on the task at hand.

Since this is a relatively new issue, most sales managers have not been trained how to help their team regain their focus to drive productivity (a.k.a. sales). Here's what you can do to regain the reigns of the team and lead them to sales success:

- 1. Communicate, even...over communicate.** Open and honest discussion about the present state of affairs helps to relieve the angst that the team is experiencing. As a manager, you may be in a leadership chain, but the team looks to their direct leader for guidance and support.
- 2. Hold the team accountable.** While empathetic and understanding, the sales leader needs to remind the team of the task at hand. Direction provided to the team should be clear and team members should be held accountable for performance.
- 3. Coach them.** Little things can help your team regain their sales edge. Suggest that they not start their day by watching the morning news. Have them read the news online so they have total control over which news to become informed. They control the information saturation point, not the television media. (This is a prudent thing for you to do as well.)
- 4. Lead by example.** While challenging, put on your game face and show confidence. Keep the conversation on the task at hand, not external influences. Smile! If you walk around showing stress, your sales team will mirror your behavior. They will think something is wrong and sales paralysis enters.

**5. Be visible!** When the number of closed door meetings increases, sales people speculate that something is wrong. While a productive meeting may be taking place inside, on the other side of the door, your entire sales team is talking about what you may be discussing in your meeting. In the absence of direct knowledge, your sales team will guess the meeting is about gloom and doom. Limit your closed door meetings. Be visible with your sales team. Join them on sales calls. Meet with clients.

Other industry experts have also weighed in on this issue. If they were talking to a sales manager about how to focus their sales team and drive productivity, they suggest&hellip

"Sales managers must remember the behavior of sales people is driven by the desire to avoid pain or gain pleasure. The more powerful of these two drivers is the desire to gain pleasure. Smart sales managers recognize that achievement and recognition of that achievement are the two most powerful motivators in sales. So instead of cracking the whip, they are whipping up contests, games, spiffs, and awards that keep their sales professionals focused, happy, and engaged."

— *Jeb Blount, CEO of SalesGravy.com and author of "Power Principles"*

"Stop being complacent to selling professionals. Selling professionals control their destiny more than any other organizational function. Nothing happens unless something is sold. Selling professionals must speak with customers, requesting referrals and closing business. Watching the news is simply a form of procrastination. They must discover the unspent allocated money from the current budget year and request the business. Products and services are still needed. Tell selling professionals to do what the competition is not—sell something!"

— *Drew Stevens, PhD, Business Growth Consultant and Author of "Split Second Selling" and "Ultimate Business Bible"*

"Managers need to shift away from fear-based management and develop more of a collaborative coaching culture. You cannot inspire others when you are afraid and you can't be inspired when you're full of fear and worry. Conduct more frequent one-to-one meetings, build greater accountability by relinquishing your role as Chief Problem Solver and have less tolerance for mediocrity. Ultimately, management needs to adapt, innovate and evolve or suffer from corporate inefficiency, rigidity and declining profits."

— *Keith Rosen, Executive Sales Coach and author of the award winning, "Coaching Salespeople into Sales Champions"*

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