

Bribery, corruption and other ways of rewarding salespeople

IF the basic idea behind your commission or bonus plan is to drive salesperson behaviour (and if it has any other purpose I can't imagine what it is) then why oh why do so many of you have a plan that would take a PhD in economics to properly understand?

If your commission system is gloriously simple, could be illustrated on the back of a fag packet and allows your salespeople to quickly calculate how much a particular deal or periods performance would be worth – without employing the world's most complex spreadsheet – then congratulations and please can I direct your attention to the later part of this column.

If however you are like the countless businesses that run bonus plans like a slot machine with 15 reels then perhaps I could help you to understand that you have long since stopped using money as a driver of any of your salespeople's behaviour other than the less than desirable whining about how crap the commission system is.

Some businesses have taken the blunt tool of money motivation to quite absurd heights using it as a driver of virtually everything they want their salespeople to do – 20 per cent for customer satisfaction, 20 per cent for account growth, 20 per cent for selling the new musprogulator sprocket and 20 per cent for being able to interpret the bonus plan!

Now I do accept that these plans are often written by bean counters who have never sold a damn thing in their lives and are having something verging on a carnal relationship with Microsoft excel, however it is your job in leadership to help these less enlightened souls to understand that simple is best – no matter how complex you feel your business is. My experience is that once a plan has anything more than two elements to it the majority of the salespeople disengage from it and the best salespeople do what they always do – work damn hard, build fantastic relationships with their clients, sell loads of your stuff and earn significantly more than their OTE though often don't have a clue

how it happened. This is not because they lack the intellectual capacity to understand it, just rather that they prefer not to be distracted by some patronising plan that treats them like dogs belonging to the fabled Pavlov!

Which brings me to a statement that many will find hard to stomach – money doesn't motivate nine out of ten of your salespeople. "Ah you haven't met my lot" I hear you cry. "Each month they leap (ish) out of the starting gate and are like greyhounds chasing the proverbial rabbit". Well, if money works so well then why do lots of you feel the need to offer additional incentives like holidays, team nights out, new telly's and other trinkets and gadgets? As lovely as all these things are all they serve to do is to motivate the already motivated. The idea that bribery will improve the performance of an under-performing salesperson is as deluded as it is bone idle.

The only utterly predictable way of consistently improving sales performance is with outstanding leadership and management. Anything else will be a short-lived blip and you will spend your life seeking ever new and creative ways to coax performance out of your team. Only select the best people you can find, offer them a simple and competitive reward system, build a strong relationship with them, help them to develop their skills and regularly remind them how valued they are by telling them and you will have a highly performing sales unit.

Let me finish with an object lesson. One of the best performing salespeople I was ever lucky enough to have in my team eventually got promoted and was clearing her desk to move to another office. As I was chatting to her before she left (tear in eye and panic in pit of stomach as I wondered how we'd now do our numbers!) I noticed a pile of unopened envelopes on top of her box of papers. Yes, you guessed it. In 18 months she had never once even opened the envelope containing her commission statement. She was (and no doubt still is) a brilliant sales professional not because we bribed her to be but because she wanted to be.



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Matt Crabtree and his team deliver provocative training workshops, one to one coaching and speeches to businesses worldwide. Talk to him about kicking the tyres of your business via:

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