

CALLING ALL CONTROL FREAKS

Let's get straight to the point this month. Do you trust your sales people and leave them alone to get on with their job without undue interference? To many managers this is an anathema – the very idea that without consistent monitoring and control salespeople would do what they need them to do seems counterintuitive.

Modern technology in the form of CRM and sales tracking systems has made it even easier to keep tabs on everything the sales team are (or more commonly are not) doing. Of course CRM is nearly always deployed under the highly unconvincing ruse of 'helping the salesforce' (I speak as one who has installed several CRM systems in passed lives). In actuality it is more often than not a means of the management exacting greater control and, whether or not this is the real reason, inevitably that's what the salesforce will think anyway with the result that the usage of the platform will be variable at best. If I have heard clients (and myself) say "is that opportunity on the abc system?" once, I've heard it a million times.

So am I advocating sales anarchy and some bizarre arrangement where managers simply sit in their chairs, ask no questions and wait in silence for the deals to come in? Of course not. Rather I am proposing that we consistently treat our sales people like the adults one assumes they are. Constant reminders of how important it is to hit their targets is rather like the nagging wife or husband – rarely effective, irritating for all involved and often escalating into larger conflicts.

In previous columns we have discussed the importance of having the very best people you can find and then treating them like

customers. I'll make a wild guess that you don't ring your clients every day and berate them for not buying stuff from you in the belief that this will inspire them to want to increase their business with you.

How do you find out then whether you are in the nagging husband/wife category in the context of your relationship with your salespeople? Well here's a radical idea – ask them! (and I get paid for this stuff!). Why not ask your salespeople at the end of each month to tell you specifically what you did best this month and also one thing that you could have done better in terms of your working relationship with them. This is best done by email since people often struggle to say exactly what they think to your face. Unless you wear your pants on the outside of your trousers I'm sure there will always be one thing that you could have improved no matter how minor. Encourage your salespeople (and also anyone else that you manage) to tell you exactly what they think on a regular basis without fear of retribution. Treat their comments seriously, if necessary ask for clarification and then, most importantly, take some noticeable action. If you don't value the opinions of your people I'll ask you the same question I posed a couple of months ago – why the hell are they still with you?

As a sales leader you have every right, in fact an obligation, to objectively monitor the productivity and performance of your sales people. The question however that only you can answer is whether you do this in a way that confers respect on the individual involved and leaves them feeling inspired to do more, or whether your approach verges on the nagging and leaves them feeling patronised and irritated.



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