

Strategic Sales Reinforcement – Reinforcing the Desired Cultural Changes within Your Organization

Our first objective in reinforcing cultural change within our organizations is to “blend” the reinforcement principles into our day-to-day business. That is, reinforcement is not an “event,” it is a process that needs to be woven into the fabric of our day-to-day lives in order for it to be absorbed by our team.

Using a sales team as an example, it is important to understand that your level of influence on habit creation is related to the number of “touches” you have with your team over a period of time. I have had clients with sales teams who only “met” once or twice per year and (not surprisingly) had trouble accomplishing change. There are 365 days in a year. If the leader is “touching” his team once or twice in that period, who do you think has more influence with the team member – the leader or the person(s) working with the team member the other 364 or 363 days? The answer is obvious. You cannot have substantive influence on your team with this limited interaction.

The sales teams we have worked with over the years that excelled at change and accountability to that change had some key things in common, all centered around consistency of contact and influence. In this article we will discuss some best practices that high-performing sales teams engage in to accomplish this.

Let’s begin with. . .

Regularly Scheduled Sales Meeting Best Practices:

- ✓ Meetings should occur no less than once per month (preferably weekly). With today’s meeting technology, there is no reason for not hitting this goal.
- ✓ Meetings should occur on the same day and at the same time. This allows participants to plan accordingly and leadership to demand attendance.
- ✓ Meetings should have strict agendas, but allow time at the end for unplanned items to be discussed.
- ✓ It is up to the facilitator to make the meetings interactive and participative – not the participants! Proper planning will help with this.
- ✓ Keep the meetings reasonable in terms of length of time and amount of information disseminated.
- ✓ Facilitators should seek out and implement feedback from participants with respect to constantly improving the quality of meeting content and facilitation.

There are plenty of resources that can help facilitators improve their meetings. That being said, just holding the meetings improves the likelihood that change and accountability will occur.

Now let’s discuss one-on-one time with members of our teams.

One-on-One Planning Sessions Best Practices:

- ✓ One-on-one plan and review sessions should also be conducted at least monthly (preferably weekly).
- ✓ Like sales meetings, these should be prescheduled and have strict agendas.
- ✓ The key differences with these sessions are: a) they are all about the sales representative (not the sales manager); and b) the sales representative should have a prescribed list of materials, numbers, reports, etc. to present to the manager during these meetings. This allows accountability to be transferred from the manager to the representative.

Field Ride Best Practices:

- ✓ These **MUST** occur! I am amazed at the number of owners / sales managers who believe they are acting in the best interest of the company when they spend all their time in the office pouring over sales reports and call notes and not in the field with their reps understanding what is happening day-to-day in the trenches. Don't get me wrong. Sales reports and call notes are important. But they are not a substitute for time spent in the field seeing your sales team in action!
- ✓ Eliminate distractions. Since you are taking time and money to spend time in the field with your team – spend time in the field with your team! Don't spend it on the phone or on your BlackBerry emailing. Spend your time interacting and getting to know your reps and what they face day in and day out.
- ✓ Model the desired behavior and skills relative to the change you are looking to influence. Most sales representatives are visual learners; they need to see you show them the skills you are expecting them to implement in the field.
- ✓ Provide feedback. Make sure you are providing coaching and feedback live throughout the day and in writing at the conclusion of the day. Live feedback throughout the day allows for practice, role-play, and immediate implementation. Written feedback following a field ride allows for reinforcement and action items to be identified and inspected later. Also, a key point – make sure your verbal feedback matches your written feedback. There is nothing that destroys continuity, change, and accountability faster than saying one thing and writing, doing, or expecting another!

Inspect what you expect!

Quarterly and Annual Reviews:

Way back in our recruiting and retention articles we discussed the importance of clearly defined and documented roles and responsibilities. Not only are these essential in terms of providing clarity of objective to our team, but they also provide the measurement aspect relative to our inspection.

Quarterly and annual reviews are critical in driving change and accountability. This is the time to draw a direct result and measurement to the objectives. These do not need to be complicated to be effective. Simply take the roles and responsibilities documents you created earlier and create another document that captures, measures, and quantifies the results. Too many sales companies focus on just end sales numbers. While that is the ultimate measurement, there are intermediate steps that need to be done in order to accomplish those results. To add in the sales change relative to skill set and training topics covered earlier, simply transfer the individual action plans arrived at during the training sessions to this document and inspect whether or not these action plans were implemented. As you progress and train on additional topics and build additional action plans, add these to the quarterly and annual review documentation. This builds in the accountability needed to impact the desired behavioral changes.

Supplemental Training at Regular Intervals:

As you progress through sales meetings, planning sessions, field rides, and reviews, you will start to notice trends and commonalities relative to training “gaps.” These training gaps are normal and should be expected as your staff begins to implement the new skills they have learned in the course of their regular activity.

Keep track of these gaps and create a training task list that can be used for supplemental training. These gaps create your subject matter and priority for your supplemental training. It is also wise to understand why these gaps occurred so that when you conduct your supplemental training, you can adjust your content, delivery, or tools that you use in order to ensure that these gaps are filled.

Change and accountability don’t occur overnight. Think about the habits you’ve built for yourself over the years (whether good or bad). And remember that doing something once does not create a habit. Repetition is an aid to learning and is critical when instituting change and accountability.

In our next article we will discuss employee types and how they impact (positively or negatively) the success or failure of the desired change.

Until then...

No part of this site or the publications described herein may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, used in a spreadsheet, or transmitted in any form or by means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without the permission of The Sales Matrix Inc