

The Sales Coaching Institute

PRODUCTIVITY TRAINING FOR SALES AND SALES MANAGEMENT

CREATING A WINNING SALES CULTURE



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Creating A Winning Sales Culture

One of the biggest mistakes that many businesses make is failing to invest in developing a formal sales culture. Just hiring the best sales professional and using experienced sales managers only achieves a limited short-term amount of success if the underlying culture is not sales oriented, and designed to build on positive behaviors, habits, and values that promote long-term success and produce measurable results.

In creating a new sales culture, certain aspects are non-negotiable such as integrity and respect. Then there are aspects of your sales culture that need to parallel the company culture as well as consider the solutions you are selling. One culture does not fit all. It is also a mistake to assume that a positive or winning sales culture develops on its own. Just as it takes an effort to develop any workplace culture, the team and Executive Leadership have to commit to the process and be willing to make changes to bring about positive change.



The good news for sales leaders is that a positive sales culture is something that can be molded, shaped, and enhanced. Even a moderately successful sales team has some elements of a positive culture and highlighting those while bringing in new techniques and strategies allows for growth and development. By developing useful metrics, the sales team can see how these changes manifest into increased sales, less customer churn, and a better overall relationship with their team and team leaders.

As mentioned, the culture of a sales organization needs to parallel the company culture. It cannot conflict with it but may not be the same. The nature of sales involves both teamwork as well as a drive to be competitive and to work towards individual goals and objectives. These two diverse yet similar issues can be developed in a positive, winning sales culture.



The Critical Components

There are several critical components to consider in developing a healthy, positive and winning sales culture. By ensuring these basics are in place, the rest of the process is more natural and more effective.

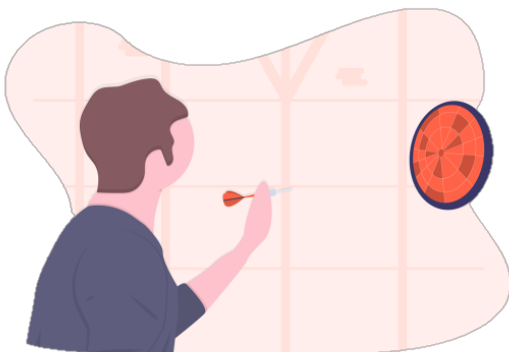
So Goes the Leader, So Goes the Culture

The sales culture starts at the top. It begins with a Mission Statement that reflects the character of the organization accompanied by a shared vision that is metrics-based and that can be measured and quantified. It is typically and most effectively created by the Head of Sales with the support of the executive management team. While it is possible to work just within a single sales division, changing the culture in one division can be difficult if it doesn't align with the overall company-wide sales culture. Alignment in cultures across divisions will more effectively leverage common processes and a consistent commitment to the changes that are being encouraged.

Without Senior Leadership involvement and commitment, the gains may be minimal because there are often limitations, restrictions, or challenges that are above the sales manager's ability to resolve or to remove. Executive Leadership buy-in ensures these factors do not negatively impact the process either now or in the future.

Ensure There Is a Clear, Unified Vision in Place

Not only does the Head of Sales and their direct reports need to understand the vision for a successful and positive sales culture, but this also has to be shared with the entire sales organization as well as the company.



Think of this as a shared value or understanding of what the team is there to do. When this shared vision is in place, the team can more effectively make changes that bring about success by doing things that are based on this clear vision. Additionally, when the individuals, managers, and executives are all pulling in the same direction, there is greater synergy and focus, bringing about results that often exceed even the projected objectives.

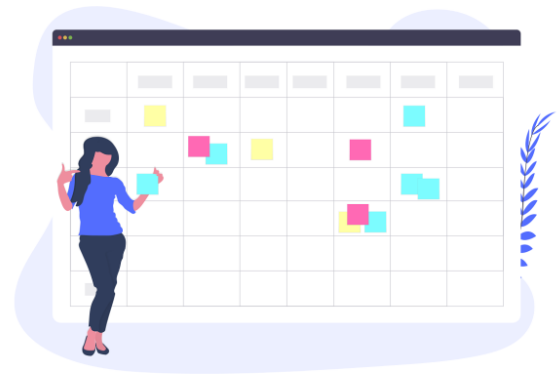


Understand the Processes That Are Required

If you don't know where you're going, you won't know when you get there. Babe Ruth said something similar "If you don't know where you are going, you'll end up someplace else." The point is changing the sales culture requires both a clear vision of the destination and an understanding of where the starting point is in the journey and the steps along the way.

Without knowing what needs to be changed to bring about the vision or the desired winning sales culture, the team can quickly become frustrated, confused and even exasperated with what may seem like random changes that have no logical foundation or end goal.

By acknowledging and defining your starting point and your desired vision for a positive, winning sales culture, the processes used become clear to get from where you are today to where you want to be. These processes may include changing your sales methodology, how you support clients, or even how you define success and winning as a team.



Provide the Resources Needed

Creating change in a sales organization's culture may require a range of different resources. Consultants, advisors, facilitators, and even specialized team coaches can all be part of the resources a sales team chooses to use to move the process forward in a team environment. These third parties can help you define your mission and vision statement. Their services may include training sales managers to be coaches or to develop a mentor or peer-support process within the team or the company. Be prepared to invest to get the right people on board and continuing education. Organizations that are engaged in active and ongoing learning are more open to trying new things and less resistant to change. Look at technologies that support your sales culture, motivate the sales team, and strengthen your customer relationships.



Defining Characteristics

Setting the goals and vision for a winning sales culture is very important. Unfortunately, many companies fall short in this area and mandate a revenue or quota objective as the single success characteristic. While increasing sales by 12% in a specific time frame is concrete and easy to



understand, it is not motivational, and it is highly unlikely to get buy-in from the sales team. Even offering incentives such as cash bonuses, trips or other tangibles only has limited impact as they only apply to those sales reps with the ability to meet those sales levels. In other words, these types of motivators only motivate those already reaching top sales levels.

These types of competitions completely discourage and demotivate the lower performing salespeople, which is the group that most needs to buy into a positive sales culture. By motivating and engaging these individuals and the top-performing salespeople, a team sees amazing results and results drive positive cultural changes when everyone is involved.

Several factors need to be considered in making positive culture changes. These are not in any particular order, and it is very likely that throughout the journey some of these factors may be refined, improved or modified as the team moves toward reaching the vision.

Think of this process as getting from your home to your workplace. There are many roads and routes you can take, but they all start at the same location and they all end at the same point. Each route may require different driving skills or changes in timing, but they are all equally effective as a way to get from home to work.



- **Communication** – Thinking about how to communicate your vision and your understanding of the current and future sales team culture is a critical point in involving the team. It is essential to have a clear message that is not confusing, and that does not change daily. Knowing what you want and how you are going to demonstrate or manifest these changes in how you work within the team is essential for the sales manager.



Taking the time to be clear in this message and the method of communication makes it easy for your team to recognize the goals, the specific elements of a positive and winning sales team and the benefits to them in bringing about this change. And most important, your actions cannot conflict with your communications. You can't say one thing and do another. You can't step out of your culture when in crisis. This is when your actions must be dictated by your culture.

- **The People Will Change, or the People Will Change** – It can be very frustrating for a salesperson to be told that things are going to change. For many people, change is a very anxiety-provoking thought. For top sales professionals on the team, the idea of change may create anxiety over having to give up a proven sales approach. For the mid to low level salesperson, change can be seen as just another hoop to jump through to keep a job in which they are not performing as well as others on their team. However, it is essential that every team member buys into the culture you have established. For those not willing to change, you have to be prepared to make the necessary adjustments quickly. It is the adage of one bad apple spoils the lot. You cannot afford to have people on your team that have different priorities or act in conflict of your sales culture regardless of their success.



- **Sales Cadence** – Executives who create winning sales teams never stop focusing on the progress that is occurring and where the team is in relation to the vision or the goal. They also do not minimize the importance of a positive sales culture. They make it a top agenda item at weekly and monthly meetings, and Quarterly Business Reviews, to ensure everyone on the team is comfortable with the progress being made and to obtain feedback regarding modifications or alternative options to explore to reach the vision or goal. It is also essential to integrate your CRM tools to reflect your vision so you can measure your progress.



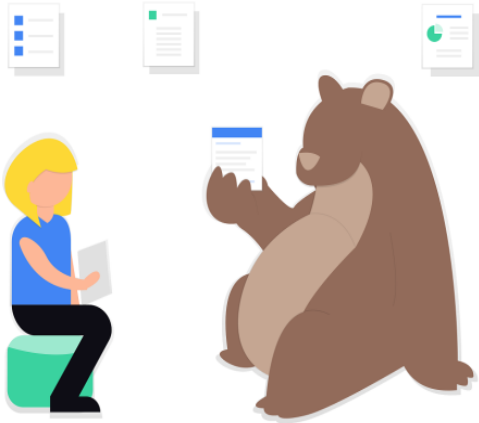
- **Team Events** – While team building exercises are not always convenient or possible, it is essential to find ways for the team to get to know each other. It is also necessary to include those that are not part of the core sales team but where there is commonly more friction such as field marketing, and professional services. These events should be natural and unforced, and often asking the team for ideas on things they might like to do outside of the corporate setting is a great way to develop this type of team interaction. Many companies are using gamification tools now to increase engagement. Other common suggestions are to volunteer as a team to sponsor a local charity or non-profit or other similar types of activities. This is less about work and more about getting to know each other outside of the office.
- **Create Healthy Competition** – It is easy in a workplace for salespeople to see each other as the competition. However, in a hostile environment, this competitiveness may go so far that one team members s rooting for someone else to fail. To bring in the team element,



consider a way to create a competition for the team as a whole. For example, one division competes against another division in an increase in quarterly sales results by the highest percentage. Have the sales managers of their respective teams lead the contest with a team reward. Make it visible to other areas of the company. Incorporate it into your weekly cadence. Having the team work together in these types of competitions encourages teamwork across the division.



- **Internal Mentoring** – New team members or those who are struggling can be paired with collaborative, productive and experienced sales professionals on the team. This is great for the experienced salesperson as it provides recognition of their skills, and it allows them to be in the "coaching/mentoring" role.



It also benefits the salesperson as they have someone to ask questions and to model their sales techniques after who has proven success. There is a third benefit to this option as well. It helps to draw the team closer and prevent the challenge of distinct factions forming within a team that can derail your progress and limits the ability to make sustained cultural changes.

- **Sales Manager as Coach** – A significant cultural change for winning sales teams is in the role of the sales manager. This individual must be actively engaged as the executive sponsor to lead the top 20% of the opportunities to closure. It doesn't mean they lead the sales cycles. However, by playing an active role in the sales cycle, they can coach the salesperson and address issues very early in the game to ensure success.

- **Understanding the Team Members** – To create a positive, winning team culture, it is important to work on both team performance and to understand the individual salesperson's goals. Some salespeople are not interested in becoming sales leaders. So talking to them about promotional opportunities will be limited in motivational value. They may be more interested in a better quality of life or making more money. On the other hand, those salespeople who want to move into sales leadership roles need to know the process or the pathway to get from where they are to where they want to be in the company.



- **Adapting to Generational Teams** – Today, you have baby boomers managing millennials, and you have millennials leading baby boomers and somewhere in the middle of this is Generation "X." As a Sales Leader, it is important to understand people on your team learn differently and want to be led differently. Leading the way you want to be led or taught may be a negative approach to the majority of your team. Think outside of your comfort zone to get the most out of your team. One universal method that works is the "All Hands Calls." It is a useful tool especially with dispersed sales teams to spread your culture and educate your team. You can do these monthly or quarterly having other areas of the company such as Product Management, Services, and even Accounting share information about their organizations and what they are working on. A side benefit to this is these other areas love to share what they are doing.



- **Trust the Team** – A common difficulty for sales managers is avoiding micromanaging by trusting the team and the individuals to be successful. Keep in mind, this is the ultimate goal for a positive, winning sales culture as there is no need for micromanaging. The team is invested in being the best it possibly can be. Managers have to act in a way that is congruent with this message. While it may not always be easy, it is a MUST, or it will derail the culture itself. Finally, if you do not trust your team how would you expect them to believe you.



- **Creating a Performance-Based Sales Culture** – It is essential for sales team members to be accountable for their sales performance at both the individual contributor and manager levels. Establishing this as part of your culture requires a closed loop feedback on a routine basis, usually as part of a one-on-one sales cadence that should be established on a bi-weekly or monthly basis. This provides an accountability process with each team member with clear, concise expectations and objectives. This continuous communication offers a channel for both positive feedback and addresses potential issues early. When these objectives and expectations are not being met, the sales leader can have the necessary conversations where improvement needs to take place. Then if progress is not being achieved, the individual that may need to be placed on a specific performance improvement plan or PIP, again communicating clear and precise steps and changes that need to be made.



- **Recruiting and Onboarding New Team Members** – The turnover rate in B2B sales organizations is a staggering 34%. Some studies have shown that a new employee knows within a month if they are going to remain in that role or company. Finding the right candidate and onboarding them correctly can reduce turnover and increase productivity. Hiring someone merely because they had success at their previous company only has a short-term impact. It may actually hurt the team as a whole if the new hire does not fit the culture. Part of your interviewing and onboarding process needs to include your culture. Creating a profile of your ideal candidate is the first step for the hiring team and acclimating them to the culture of the organization when they join ensures they understand the vision of the sales organization.



Celebrate Success

The analogy of traveling on different routes to get from home to work was introduced previously to illustrate the value of flexibility in allowing the team to have input into how they are going to move from where they are to where they want to be with regards to a winning sales culture.

For most teams, this is a not a short drive, but a long, sustained period of growth, change, and personal and professional development. As a leader, it is important not to become so focused on the end of the journey that the individual milestones are missed.

By setting these milestones along the journey, the team sees success. They look at the changes they are making in both the ability to work collaboratively with each other, as well as the way this collaboration benefits each person individually. These milestone markers need to be transformed into celebrations.



Celebrations do not need to be big and costly. They can include simple things like a potluck lunch on Friday or family events that allow for both bonding outside of the office and a way to get to know more about each other in a non-threatening way.

Managers can also use missing the mark on goals to work with the team in a collaborative, positive way. Instead of asking "what went wrong?", start the meeting with the question of "what worked and what do we need to do differently?"



Summary

“Culture is simply a shared way of doing something with a passion.”

- Brian Chesky, Co-Founder, CEO, Airbnb



Creating a positive, winning sales culture is an ongoing process. Continual training and development, having management involved and developing sales managers who are coaches are just the starting points of turning a sales team around. If your company doesn't have a sales culture that everyone understands, you may have an identity crisis on your hands. Your sales team doesn't have a clear direction or core values to help guide it into the future. There are plenty of distractions in your day to day life. But, if not now, when? Moreover, it has to start with you as the sales leader.



Authored By: David Sanders



ABOUT
DAVID SANDERS

VICE PRESIDENT OF STRATEGY &
TALENT ACQUISITION OF THE SALES
COACHING INSTITUTE

David Sanders is Vice President of Strategy & Talent Acquisition for The Sales Coaching Institute and brings a stellar history of sales leadership success from small VC-backed firms to some of the world's most successful technology companies, specifically in the enterprise software technology space.



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847 359 6969

