**Why not Fire your Entire Sales Force?**

**By: Steven Rosen, MBA**

Happy holidays! Are feeling like the “Grinch” again? I know that it is very difficult to down size your sales force. How do you think your remaining sales team will perform? Can you say with good conscious that your sales force is making a difference? You are selling “me-to” drugs with minimal points of difference. Product differentiation is not a source of competitive advantage. Ask yourself this, is your sales force a source of competitive advantage? Traditionally during the arms race days, having more sales reps calling on a doctor was *the* source of competitive advantage. Not so anymore.

The fundamental issue we now face is whether the sales force is actually making impact. Do your sales reps make an impact on each call or do they just go through the motions? The days of the sales reps being a product infomercial and the product deliveryman just don’t cut it. Do your sales managers continually work to develop their reps into top performers or do they just ride along side and make suggestions on how to improve but make little impact on the actual performance?

Most sales reps and sales managers fail to make impact in their daily activities. Yet the daily charade goes on. Sales reps make their calls, and sales managers do their field visits. The business grows (in good times) and we overlook the true impact of the sales force.

How do you turn your sales force into a competitive advantage? You can spend more money on sales rep training, hiring practices, targeting and better pay incentives, but as we have seen over the last 5 years none of these actions actually make a difference. The key is simple. Build a team of the best front line sales managers and you lay the foundation for success. The front line sales manager is the unsung hero who is given tremendous responsibility but very little support or development.

As responsibilities increase the time to perform daily activities that drive revenue decreases. The role of the manger is to hire, develop and retain top sales people. The only way I know to directly affect results as a manager is to be *in the field* coaching/developing and inspiring sales reps. The problem is two- fold. Firstly the activity that managers are least adept at is coaching. Secondly, they spend less time in the field because of their ineptness at coaching and developing and instead are tasked with doing non-revenue generating activities.

Relentlessly developing a team of “Top Performing” front line sales managers is the key to turning your sales organization into a source of competitive advantage. Top sales managers are capable of developing their teams to their fullest potential. This will only snowball into all other areas, for example top managers with a full tool kit will help you reinforce any sales rep training. Strong training efforts turn into professional learning’s that in turn become increased profits. (see [**“To Train or Not to Train**](http://www.starresults.com/blog/2010/11/19/to-train-or-not-to-train)**”).**

The foundation of a high performance sales organization is the strength of the sales management team. Therefore before you start considering any initiative to improve sales rep training, targeting, CRM, bonus plan, call ratio or reducing your number of reps in the field, first ask yourself, how strong is my sales management team? And let your answer be your guide to action!

I can’t help stirring it up,

Steven

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