

Five Traits of a Great Sales Leader

By Barry Farber

What makes a great sales leader? There is no one remarkable secret. In fact, great sales leaders play many roles, and they play them all well. At various times, a great sales leader is a time management supervisor, a meeting planner, a contest coordinator, a talent scout, a coach, a trainer, and a psychiatrist. These roles together, well executed, make for a great leader. However, there are five key areas in which the best sales leaders excel.

1. Great leaders are passionate and enthusiastic.

These traits are transferred to the entire sales team. If the leader is negative, everyone else will be pulled down. How do great leaders keep a realistically positive attitude going? Great leaders are great readers; they read everything they can find about their craft and industry. They seek out mentors whose wisdom and experience can help them achieve their goals, and they encourage their reps to do the same. They surround themselves with high quality people.

2. Great leaders recruit great salespeople.

Many managers don't start recruiting until someone is leaving, which means they often settle for second best in order to fill a gap. Great leaders are always on the lookout for talented people. One way they do that is to carry two-sided business cards with them to give out to people they meet in other businesses who demonstrate great sales and service skills. One side of the card contains the standard name, address, and phone number. On the other side it says, "I was very impressed with your service and professionalism. Please call me if you're ever looking for a career." The success of



a sales leader is in direct proportion to the success of the team, which is why it's critical to hire the best people.

3. Great leaders make their numbers through their people, not for them.

The greatest difficulty a sales team can have is when a manager closes for all his people. When that happens, the reps never learn the skills they need to move to the highest level of self-sufficiency. It's instinctive for a manager to want to jump in and save a sale, but the message that sends is that you don't trust your reps—and when the reps are on their own, they won't have the experience of handling tough situations themselves. Close a deal for a rep and you've made one sale; teach him how to close, and you've made a career.

4. Great leaders lead by example.

Great sales leaders are out in the field with their people 60 to 80 percent of the time. There's an old saying that goes, "Don't expect what you don't inspect." If you don't inspect your rep's performance in the field, you can't expect improvement. A day in the field not only shows you how your reps are doing, it gives you first hand knowledge of what customers are thinking and what their needs are,

based on your products and services. Most important, sales reps respect a leader who knows what it's like in the trenches. Surprise your reps every once in a while by saying, "I thought I'd travel with you today and see how you're doing." How was their day planned? How do they do on calls? What prospecting methods are they using?

5. Great leaders understand their reps' individual strengths and weaknesses.

They're able to ask nondirective questions, such as, "What do you think you could have done differently on that call?" or "What was your objective?" When the reps say it, they own it; when the manager says it, they doubt it. Great leaders know what motivates each rep and how to get the best from everyone. They expect excellence. If your reps know you think they're capable of reaching greater heights, they will strive for them.

Your role as a leader is to help your people succeed. There may be substantial monetary rewards to being a great sales leader, but the greatest reward is to have helped others reach their goals. When we're gone, our material possessions don't really matter. Our greatest legacy is the people we've helped build who are left to build others in the same way. ♦

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