

## Why Do Sales Managers Fail?

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My purpose in writing this article is not to discuss all the contributing factors to failure of those in the position, but rather to address some of the hidden reasons for lack of success. The Sales Manager (SM) is one of the most difficult positions in a company. The success of the position directly impacts the profitability of the company.

### Handling the Pressure:

The pressure placed upon the SM can be intense. If the SM does not do a good job of controlling his/her emotions that person will most likely not be making good decisions. Emotions trump competencies, experience, values and behaviors. Bad decisions negatively impact everyone including their producers. The SM who allows emotions to rule, run the risk of losing the endorsement of their team. This is never a good scenario. Why or how might this happen?

When a salesperson realizes that their SM's emotions are *not* under control they will most likely delay any conversation until their manager is in a better frame of mind. Personally a wise decision on their part but the impact of that delay in communication and the subsequent delay in resolving business issues will negatively impact everyone and everything including closing sales, customer retention and the motivation of the Salesforce.

It is vital that upper management consider how able the person in this role handles pressure. Success in leading is directly connected to making good decisions. Staying in control and making good decisions contribute to an engaged, high-performing team. However, when conditions exist as mentioned above, the whole organization including its customers will be negatively impacted.

### Good Salesperson-Bad Sales Manager:

Let's take a quick look at those most directly affected by the SM – *the seller*.

Salespeople thrive in an environment that provides the resources that helps them to be successful. Just try taking a valued resource away and you will have a mutiny on your hands. If a SM doesn't understand this and arbitrarily removes a valued resource there are bound to be repercussions. One such consequence is the salesperson losing respect for the SM. What follows is the loss of motivation. You are no doubt aware that it is easier to demotivate than to motivate. A consequence of being managed poorly and no longer being happy is that good sales people may leave. If they don't actually leave they may quit and forget to tell you. In other words, they will show up and collect a paycheck, but they have checked out emotionally.

Salespeople are typically persons who value personal recognition, freedom, making money, control over their own destiny and the destiny of others. They thrive on *DOING*. Their desire is closing as many sales as they can. The big mistake organizations make is trying to clone a good salesperson by promoting the top seller into a Sales Manager position. When the salesperson moves to managing others, he/she needs to understand that their role is no longer *doing* but rather, getting *others to do*. Let me give you an example of when that transition to a new set of values was missing.

I received a call from a frustrated salesperson who shared the following story: She had set up a face-to-face meeting with a prospect with whom she had a number of previous conversations. Her objective for this

meeting was to close the sale. She invited her manager to come along to observe and provide feedback on the way back to the office. To her disbelief the sales manager completely took over the call devaluing her in front of her prospect and closed the sale.

Why did this happen? First, the SM didn't review how the sales call would go and what his role would be. In this case, the SM loved to sell and wanted the adrenaline rush of closing the sale. He wanted to *do*. Unfortunately his good feelings were at the expense of the seller who had worked long and hard to position the prospect for the close. How upsetting and demoralizing it was when she watched her manager close her prospect!

I quickly realized that this good salesperson turned sales manager was not afforded the opportunity to develop the skills and values of managing others. After similar reports, my recommendation to the CEO was to return this person to his previous sales position before any more damage could be done and until such a time as proper coaching could be provided and he actually understood what being a SM really is.

Understanding the competencies, acumen and skills of a SM is crucial for those responsible for hiring and developing others for this position. Placing a person in the role of SM before they are ready is poor management. Sales Managers should score relatively high in the following competency areas:

- Self Management
- Developing Others
- Leading Others
- Accountability for Others
- Personal Accountability
- Results Oriented
- Goal Achievement

### **The Ability to Influence:**

As far as communication is concerned the SM must be able to apply good selling techniques internally. Remember, TELLING IS NOT SELLING! Just because a SM tells the account manager that they should be doing a better job in a certain area doesn't mean that the salesperson has been *sold* on improving. People buy for their reasons. Salespeople are people too. So they naturally will buy for their personal reasons. What does that say? The SM must be able to sell improvement for the salesperson's reasons. The connection must be made between what's important to the salesperson, i.e. money, recognition, customer satisfaction, etc. and development. Also, people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. The SM must build trust with their team and demonstrate that they care. How do they do that? They need to be *great listeners*. This point about how a leader communicates would be true for any person in a leadership role.

### **Sales Process:**

Having a sales process is missing in most sales organizations.

Think about it, which is easier ...Managing a sales process or managing personalities? Process of course. Manufacturing has their processes. The accounting department certainly has its own well-defined processes.

As a result both of those departments are able to count on predictable results and there is no mystery to what happens in those environments. Methodology and procedure provides predictability for those departments.

*How predictable are sales?* I think I heard you chuckle. Certainly sales are not as predictable as a manufacturing line. Could it be that there is a connection between a sales organization having a well-defined sales process and predictability in sales? I believe there is. A sales process doesn't have to be complicated. It should be ethical with no gimmicks or tricks. The professional salesperson will reject those types of methods and the potential customer will know that they are being manipulated.

### **Company Contribution to Success or Failure:**

Up to this point I have identified a few areas for failure in this position. Identifying and addressing the key reasons for failure will mitigate risk, prevent a poor hiring decision and all the unintended consequences of that decision. However, we cannot end this overview without mentioning the leadership team's contribution.

In many companies upper management will promote the idea that the SM should spend a large portion of his/her time in the role of a coach. Great, I'm onboard with that! But how much time is upper management actually allowing for their SM to spend coaching their team? How much time during regular working hours is the manager spending filling out reports, going to internal meetings, etc., instead of coaching? We all appreciate a person who not only talks the talk, but walks the talk. Upper management should follow that example.

Great care must be taken *before* hiring or promoting anyone to the position of Sales Leader/Manager. That is the sole responsibility of upper management. It's important to understand the following distinction: Managers manage things, process, or money. Leaders lead people. It is crucial that a SM understand how to do both and those hiring or promoting a candidate for this position should consider these points when making their decision. My advice is to benchmark the *position* (not the SM) and clearly understand the accountabilities, values, soft skills, hard skills and behaviors required by the role. Then match or groom candidates to meet the requirements of the job.

Like everyone else, the SM needs a coach. The manager of managers should have an in-depth understanding of the job of leading and managing others, while being equipped themselves with appropriate mentoring and coaching skills and the commitment to follow through.

Failing is a combination of lack of a sales process, the right qualities, abilities, values, soft skills, hard skills and we might add, not having a professional Salesforce (Good Manager – Poor Salesperson).

After your organization becomes aware of some of the hidden reasons for failing the leadership can then make the needed improvements in development processes.

**About Jason Kleid:** Jason is focused on optimizing performance and getting results. Underscoring this philosophy is a belief that it is always the individuals in any organization, where the greatest potential for improvement and possibility of change resides. It is the mind or one's thinking where new ideas broaden understanding and cause things to happen. However, it is the heart, the inner person, where transformation occurs.