

What Good Managers Know About Holding Their Sales Team Accountable

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Performance Based Results



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What Good Managers Know About Holding Their Sales Team Accountable

Written by **Paul Cherry** – 3/7/19

As most of you know, the key to sales training success with all my clients is the quality of an organization's management team. I'd like to share with you an article from a few years ago that I think is more relevant than ever.

Being a good manager means passing the Goldilocks test: not too hard, not too soft, but just right. Accountability can be difficult for managers to implement, especially if they did not have good managers themselves when they worked on a sales force.

Everyone wants to be a good manager, but definitions of the term can vary. Ultimately, a good manager is one whose sales team is successful every quarter. There are a lot of factors that go into creating that level of success, however, and accountability is an important one.

FEAR OF CONFRONTATION CAN HINDER PERFORMANCE

Some people see a good manager as one who gets along with everyone on the sales team. He doesn't hassle anyone about

unconventional work styles, scream about monthly quotas or demand reams of unnecessary paperwork. If it is important to you to be this kind of good manager, you are probably reluctant to hold underperforming members of your team accountable.

You are not alone, though. According to a recent Harvard Review study, **46% of managers worldwide are not good at holding their teams accountable**. Either they under-value the need for accountability in the workplace, or they are concerned with conflict.

However, a good manager employs a system of accountability that does not invite conflict. His team members police themselves because they know what is expected of them and what the consequences will be if they do not measure up. When your sales team is intrinsically motivated, you do not have to push them for results.

Conflict is more likely to arise when you do not hold your sales team accountable. Without your guidance, some of your team members will excel, and others won't. If there is no standard of accountability, your successful team members will feel like they are carrying all the weight. This builds resentment toward the others and toward you, the manager, who is supposed to set uniform standards for the team and reward those who achieve.

Conflict among team members and poor sales performance lead to diminishing motivation. The people who are not succeeding lose faith in their ability to do so. Without motivation and

accountability standards from the manager, they begin to feel like you don't think they can succeed, either.

Additionally, the team members who are making all the sales see that those who are not are treated the same way. If there are no advantages to selling well, and no disadvantages to selling poorly, your top performing sales people will lose their motivation. They may also see that they are already out-performing the others, which leaves them no reason to try harder.

It is human nature to avoid conflict, just as it is our natural tendency to thrive on structure. You may hear people complain about a manager who is too rigid, and you do not want to be that manager. People like to know what to expect, however, and when you are firm enough to hold them accountable for their performance, they are more likely to succeed. Successful sales team members tend to enjoy working with their manager.

MEDIOCRITY CAN AFFECT EVERYONE, ESPECIALLY NEWCOMERS

When it comes to holding your team accountable, you start by setting the standards. Your standards of excellence are then transferred to the whole team. If you only accept the very best work from team members, they will expect the same from themselves and each other.

When you do not hold the team accountable for high performance, though, their energy level can drop. This usually

happens one at a time. A team member gives a mediocre performance one day, and you let it slide. Before long, he is working below his potential more often than not.

The other members of the team see the poor effort, and they notice that you are not responding. When they believe you find mediocrity acceptable, other members of the team lose their desire to work to their full potential, as well.

Competition within your sales team can work in a negative direction when you do not maintain high standards. Instead of trying harder to be the best, team members may find ways to hold each other back. This way, they do not have to work as hard to keep pace with their colleagues.

A culture of mediocrity can have the biggest impact on a new employee. These are some ways the newest member of your sales team could be affected:

- The new hire notices that no one is working very hard to succeed, so he adopts a habit of giving minimal effort.
- The new hire is pressured by his new colleagues to start out slow, so he does not out shine any of them.
- The new hire is only held to minimum standards, so he discouraged from working very hard.
- The new hire feels invisible in this new work environment where he is never praised or reprimanded.

- The new hire loses his motivation as soon as he sees that no one on the sales team is working very hard.

Bringing a new member into your sales team can be an opportunity to raise the standards and improve motivation for the whole team. When you do not hold your sales team accountable, that opportunity for positive growth is lost.

A new member of the team comes in with high energy. He or she is usually invigorated by the opportunity and wants to prove you made the right choice. If you act quickly, you can harness that energy and use it for the good of the whole team.

HOW TO INCREASE ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Most employees want to be held accountable. They want someone to set standards for them, and praise them when they meet or exceed those standards. People actually like this type of structure in the workplace.

Sales professionals tend to have a competitive streak in them. Whether it is the nature of their work or the commission structure they are used to working under, sales professionals are often driven to be better than their competition. In many cases, that competition might come from other members of the same sales force.

In a mediocre work environment, competing with their colleagues is not much of a challenge for most sales professionals. If rewards are handed out for just average work,

no one tries too hard to get recognized, and no one cares about being better than the others.

Motivating a sales team requires feeding that healthy sense of competition that makes everyone strive to be the best, and at the same time, it keeps them from working against each other. Creating clear goals, providing regular feedback and holding everyone accountable will help keep members of your sales team working well together and striving for constant improvement.

Here are a few specific ways you can increase your sales team's accountability:

Communicate Expectations Effectively

Effective communication with your team on these three points will facilitate good accountability standards:

Areas of Responsibility

You want the members of your sales team to work together to achieve the best results. To cut down on unnecessary competition that gets in the way of progress, though, you need to establish clear areas of responsibility. The most effective workflow is derived from a clear distinction of duties with no duplication of tasks (or area).

Each member of your team becomes the expert or lead in a certain area. The rest of the team knows to count on that person in a specific realm. Each team member, then, is responsible to

the team to deliver results in a specific arena and this makes the whole team successful.

This separation of tasks (or areas) sets up accountability within the team. As the manager, you are not the only one holding the members accountable. Team members also hold each other accountable, and they support each other's efforts because they need everyone on the team to be successful.

Specific Performance Standards

Everyone knows the manager wants them to do better in the future. But there can be many definitions of better, and even when the future is. Even when your directives seem like common sense, you will find there is a lot of room for interpretation.

When performance standards are not specific and objectively measurable, resentment can build. If you think an employee's work falls short of your performance standards, you will likely treat them accordingly by withholding a bonus or promotion. That employee, however, may think they actually exceeded your performance standards and will be very disappointed when you hold back their reward.

You need specific performance standards to rely on for evaluation purposes, so the process seems fair to everyone. More importantly, you need to communicate those standards clearly to your team, so they know exactly what they are striving for. With clear standards, employees can check their own progress, and no one should be surprised at evaluation time.

Evaluation Criteria

Periodic evaluations of work performance for your sales team can be a good motivating tool, if you structure them for that purpose. Evaluations that are the most useful are ones that go beyond the basic sales number. Incorporating smart criteria into your evaluations will help keep your sales team motivated.

Evaluations are when you really hold your sales team accountable. This is when you can end up igniting conflict or getting your team fired up to work harder. Ultimately, a sales team is evaluated on results — or sales. In your periodic reviews, however, you should break down the sales process and establish improvement milestones.

To improve sales performance, you have to get down to the daily and weekly tasks. Think back to your own sales days and break down the work into smaller milestones. Each of these milestones becomes the evaluation criteria. When your sales team is achieving more of each of these milestones, sales will go up.

Having a discussion about how to improve performance on the interim milestones, should be motivating to your sales team members. When you are focused on what they can do, instead of poor results, your sales team members will want to work harder to achieve.

Implement Specific Procedures That Will Improve Performance

Holding your sales team accountable is more than just judging them for the number of sales they make in a particular period. Accountability includes setting performance goals, devising workflow plans to achieve those goals, and delivering praise or consequences based on performance.

No one wants to be perceived as a micro-manager, though, so sometimes managers shy away from checking up on daily tasks. They assume everyone on the team knows the value of activities like logging calls and scheduling appointments. Good managers do not use documenting tasks as a punitive measure.

Good managers impose consequences for poor performance without being perceived as micro-managers. This is because they know that consequences are necessary to improve performance. From that perspective, imposing consequences is something you do to help your team, not hurt them.

It is important to establish appropriate consequences and impose them equally on all team members based on performance. Consequences should be activities that are designed to improve performance in the long run, not busy work that might detract from time spent making sales.

Spending some time shadowing a more productive team member or working with the manager to determine what areas of performance need to improve, might be activities to

encourage better performance. However, keeping a member of your sales team out of a team building event because his performance was poor would only alienate him farther from the rest of the team. That would not be a useful consequence for poor performance.

When you set specific criteria and hold your team accountable, under-performing members will come to you for help. They want to be held accountable, but they also want to learn how to achieve better success. Good managers use accountability to motivate and train members of the team for high achievement.

Mix in a Little Fun

An ideal manager also understands the value of fun in sales, and they realize that accountability and fun can co-exist. Sales is a very stressful profession. Meeting weekly or monthly quotas that are designed to stretch their abilities keeps your sales team members on edge. They know they are only as good as this quarter's results.

Throwing in some fun along the way can help your team remain motivated and keep their morale up. After meeting a really important sales projection, take time to celebrate with the team. Everyone needs a chance to relax before diving back in for the next milestone.

When your team knows they can rely on you to throw a little fun into the mix, they will be more respectful of your criticism. A good manager establishes a relationship with the team, so they

know you want to see them succeed. From that perspective, your team sees you as being on their side and is more likely to trust you.

Trust is at the basis of all good work relationships. Your team needs to trust that you will not push them too hard, and that you will reward them when they do great work. By adding some fun activities to the work, you show them your concern for their happiness and well-being. Happy employees do their best work.

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