

ProActivate Free eBook Sales Leadership

ABSTRACT

Find out more about how to motivate your team and dominate your market by tapping into the power of authentic sales leadership.

All About Sales Leadership

There is a lot of talk these days about sales leadership. There is a reason for that. It can be the difference between crushing your metrics or being crushed *by* them. But sales leadership is about more than numbers. While profits and revenue streams are important, there are other critical components to success that are harder to pin down.

These have to do with things such as developing a forward-looking mindset, creating an overall vision, coaching your team in a way that helps them to become who they want to be. Sales leadership you see, is really an inside job.

These kinds of skills are hard to track on a spreadsheet, but vital to the health of your company.

Being a sales leader seems like a simple concept. You are supposed to define the end goal and then create practical steps to fulfill it. Many managers, caught between the numbers and their “leadership” role, see it as either a stick or carrot proposition; meaning that they either rely on rewards or punishment to motivate people.

Lao Tzu, the ancient Chinese philosopher had a different take on it that still applies today. He said, “A leader is best when people barely know he exists - when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say; *we did it ourselves.*” That, in a nutshell is what authentic sales leadership really is- a strategic ability to motivate others from within so that they are happy to perform based on their own ambition rather than simply toeing the line out of obligation.

While this may all seem a little woo-woo and out there, the truth is that real leadership is dual engine based on solid, sales driven metrics and team empowerment. Smart companies understand that they must bridge both worlds if they are to survive.

You have probably heard the famous quote, “Failure is *not* an option.” To which we reply, “Sure it is.” And a lot of companies are proving it every day. In fact, according to a study presented by none other than *Bloomberg*, 8 out of every 10 business will fail.

That’s right folks. 80% of all companies will not only hit the wall, and then it will fall over on top of them. Sobering isn’t it? And one of the biggest reasons cited in the study was that they did not create relevant market discussions. They did not present their value propositions clearly enough, either to their customers or their team members.

Remember the old classic prison movie starring Paul Newman? What was it? Oh yeah, Cool Hand Luke. The warden has this one line that is quite powerful. He has Paul Newman (Luke) shot and says, “What we have here, is a failure to communicate...”

Just like your mom always said, you need to learn to get along with the other kids. This was a nice way of saying that you have to communicate in a meaningful way. And not just with your customers either. Poor communication and a lack of leadership can shred your company from within by undermining team morale.

Want to kill your sales? Damage your reputation? Destroy your profits and demoralize your troops?

It is easier than you think. And it is expensive too. Researchers at Fairleigh Dickenson University determined that stress and negative mood states lead to lower productivity. How much lower? Try an estimated financial loss of over \$200 billion dollars per year.

Here is something else to chew on: a recent study published in the prestigious *Statistics in Medicine* magazine showed that moods are contagious and they have a direct and quantifiable impact on how well your sales people do in the field. Suffice to say that happy sales people sell more than unhappy ones.

Sure-fire Ways to Sink the Sales Ship

- Create a culture of fear by focusing on mistakes
- Micromanage them to death
- Don't Keep Your Word- make empty promises
- Demand immediate results
- Dismiss ideas that do not conform (kill originality)

It's Not My Fault

First, you can easily create a system in which people scapegoat, point the finger and deny responsibility by 'killing the messenger'. The idea of killing the messenger is actually based on real history. Some emperors did, in fact, behead those who brought bad tidings. All they accomplished was to create an atmosphere in which no one talked about problems because they did not want to put themselves at risk.

The solution is to be transparent. People have to be able to talk about what is wrong in order to make it right. Think of a genuine open door policy as GPS. You cannot move forward if you do not have a clear idea of where you really are.

Micromanagement Versus Empowerment

Next, if you really want to kill off productivity, micromanage everything. Don't trust your people. Never give them the power to make decisions. Instead, make them jump through hoops and demand to know what they are doing every second. If you do this well enough, they will spend more time tracking their time that they never actually get any real work done.

The solution for this is to set attainable goals and delegate. You have to trust your people and allow them to solve problems as a team. Good leaders know that people have a tendency to rise (or fall) to the level of our expectations.

Tell the Truth

Here is a great way to really handicap yourself. Promise them everything and then never deliver. Trust is a two-way street and what you say matters. It is better to under-promise and over-deliver than the other way around. As Albert Einstein once said, "Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted with important matters." People notice when you keep your word.

Demand, Demand, Demand

Heidi Grant Halvorson wrote a bestselling book entitled, "*9 Things Successful People Do Differently*." The upshot of the message is that successful people don't get there because of who they are, *per se*. They reach goals because of how they take action, what they *do*. Successful people, for instance, tend to set very specific goals. They also focus on what actions they can take, rather than what actions they need to avoid.

It is the same thing when setting sales goals for your team. Simply making demands without providing the tools is like telling someone to build a house without lumber and nails. It's probably not going to end well. If you want to grow a tree, you do not just dump a seed into the ground and yell at it. You must plan, cultivate and *create* change by taking incremental steps.

If You Don't Understand it, Kill it!

Lastly, if you are dead set on drilling holes in your boat while sailing on the high seas, make certain that you automatically reject any and every idea that does not fit the cookie cutter model already in place. Never think outside the box. In fact, try staying in a fetal position inside of it.

Research has shown that creativity and laughter can help people solve problems faster. For example, when teams were allowed to approach difficult problems in a creative manner, they fared better than those who were more limited. Humor and social bonding as well as a positive mindset, helped teams solve problems faster.

Now that we have talked about building sales leadership into your team, let's flip the proverbial coin and look at your customers. How does sales leadership appear to your customers? From the customer perspective, sales leadership means understanding that ultimately, the customer is large and in charge.

In order to succeed, you have to adapt to customer behavior. One of the biggest trends in that area to emerge in recent years is that now, more than ever, customers are informed. In fact, maybe a little too much so because they are constantly bombarded, and overloaded with information.

In response, many are looking for solutions they can trust. This often means that they rely more on social media and trusted networks to help them make buying decisions. Companies have responded

with clever marketing geared to social media. Studies show that over 90% of companies use some form of social media marketing to gain market opportunities. The only problem is, what exactly is being communicated?

Talk about being lost in translation

In 2009, HSBC bank created a \$10 million rebranding campaign. The reason they needed it? They had created a world-wide tagline that read "Assume Nothing." Sounds pretty cool right?

Assume nothing.

Take nothing for granted. It implies that they had their proverbial stuff together. Sadly, though, they didn't. You see, when translated for audiences in some countries, it became "Do Nothing".

Oops.

Have you ever tried to stuff something back into its original container only to find that it has magically morphed into some mutant mess that refuses to go back into the box it came in? Well, it was kinda like that.

This brings us to our thought for the day: critical mass

The thing about critical mass is that it is basically a tipping point. And that, my friends, is what happens when a minor change precipitates a massive shift. They made one itty-bitty boo-boo and ended up spending millions of dollars trying to undo it. The only problem is that once it is inside people's heads, it is kind of like telling them to not think of pink elephants. They tend to take on a life of their own and soon enough, pink elephants are dancing across the frontal lobes of everyone within range.

Think Tsunami

Critical mass can either be a negative or a positive, depending on exactly what has reached the tipping point. For instance, if it is a nuclear meltdown, that's probably not a good thing. If it is a massive rise in sales (other than ones involving suddenly necessary radioactive protective gear), then it's great.

And here is how it applies to your sales numbers. Critical mass can mean skyrocketing to the next level, or plummeting back to earth in flames. The kick in the head here is that even if you are flying high at the moment, it is not guarantee that you are not close to making re-entry, the hard way.

"I am a broken record when it comes to saying, 'We have to focus on the consumer.'... I don't think the answers are just in the numbers. You have to get out and look." – A.G Lafley CEO of Procter and Gamble

You see, customers are somewhat...well, flaky. One day they are beating a path to your door, the next, you can hear crickets chirping. Even though you may feel that you are on top of your game it never hurts to take a fearless inventory and check your facts.

Mutant Mice and Massive Traps

In order to attract and *retain* customers you need to accomplish three basic things: first, you need to have a better mousetrap. Secondly, you need to make it known that your mousetrap is capable of hauling in mutant mice that are roughly the size of bears. In other words, you have to inform your audience as to why your particular mousetrap flat out rocks.

Thirdly, and possibly **most importantly**, you have to create a customer experience that far surpasses that of pretty much everybody else and their brother. You really do have to create a superior customer experience *in the mind of your client*.

Got that? Their perceptions. **Not yours.**

Superior Service (Really?!)

You often hear terms like excellent customer service bantered around. (Not just good mind you, but *excellent*.) That's because many companies think they have this one nailed. Sadly, not so much. One research group found that while 80% of companies think they are offering stellar service; their customers don't agree. Statistics compiled from actual customer surveys basically shredded all but a handful of the 362 companies included in the study. In fact, only 8% (!), of the companies in the study actually performed at a superior level according to the responses of their customers.

They are Just Not That into you

Basically, your clients may not think you are as hot as you think you are. So what can you do about it? You can start by taking a really hard look at how well you stack up. If you don't have a really good handle on this, your sales can tank and you will be scratching your head and wondering why.

It all comes down to being able to **correctly** assess what the customer experiences. How happy is your customer? Are they dissatisfied, but using you anyway? Will they jump ship if another supplier comes along? Where is their tipping point?

As Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon.com put it, "We see our customers as invited guests to a party, and we are the hosts. It's our job every day to make every important aspect of the customer experience a little bit better."

Your customers are not stupid, but they are busy. They are also living in microwave popcorn reality. What I mean by that, is that they are more plugged in, have more options and will not tolerate anything less than a fluffy bag of yummy popcorn goodness at the push of a button.

The takeaway is that customer relationships are really a slippery slope. You can't rest on your laurels and always believe the numbers. Not only gets that, but a lot of information gets uncovered by your sales team. That knowledge has to be transmitted up the ladder and the people at the top have to listen. You have to get out there, find the pulse of your customers and then create actionable plans to meet and exceed their expectations in the real world.

If you would like to learn more about what it takes to lead in the world of sales, please subscribe to our blog.

About Jamie

CEO and Founder of ProActivate, Certified High Performance Mindset Speaker

Author of "The Power of 2, Exponential Sales Leadership", Speaker specializing in Peak Performance Mindset within Sales Organizations, Expert in Sales and Sales Leadership Talent Acquisition, Sales and Leadership Training, Consultant as Fractional VP of Sales.

Jamie has 20 years of experience in sales leadership and the talent acquisition industry. She founded ProActivate over 12 years ago. She started her career in traditional recruiting firms primarily in sales leadership positions. The following five years were spent within online recruitment where she served as Vice President of Sales at Career Builder.

At Career Builder, Jamie successfully led a team of 80+ people and continued to exceed her revenue goals on a quarterly and annual basis. Her sales business experienced 50-85% revenue growths annually. She also previously served as Vice President of Training and Development at Career Builder which illustrates her passion to lead and develop individuals to their full potential.

Jamie received her Bachelors of Science Degree in Journalism with a minor in Business from the University of Kansas. She has also pursued post graduate work with an emphasis in Entrepreneurial Management from the University of Dallas.

Jamie is a certified speaker in The High Performance Mindset[®] system, a revolutionary model that is elevating the performance of professionals ranging from athletes to executives to sales leaders. During these trainings she shares both the science and working tools that you can use immediately to enhance performance both for yourself and your team members. It's proven that human performance is limited not primarily by skills and knowledge, but by the nature of our thinking, our mental preparation for success and the environment within which we choose to operate.

Contact Jamie to find out more about peak performance, developing a superior mindset and improving your top line.

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