

The Four “D”s of Sales Management.

Recently I stumbled across some notes that I had kept from a project I had been involved in which involved looking at manager behaviours. The aim of this project was to identify "preferred behaviours" in sales managers when they were working closely with their sales representatives. The outputs were interesting and helped my colleagues identify four main types of sales managers and the differences between effective and ineffective behaviours.

Four Types of Manager.

A few years ago when working as a coach for a multinational company my colleagues and I were given the task of designing a framework that enabled managers to work more effectively with their sales representatives out "in the field". There had been considerable discontent from the sales representatives in that, a large proportion of them "dreaded" the "field visit" from the manager as it was deemed stressful and seen very much as an assessment and the manager “checking up” rather than being motivational and developmental.

We studied the behaviours of twenty-five sales managers and interviewed both the managers and a sample of around one hundred representatives in order to come up with guidelines whereby managers (and representatives) could adapt their behaviours in order to make these field visit days far more productive than they had been previously.

In this article, I will outline the four types of manager that we found were "operating" and the effect that each type had on the development and motivation of the sales representative.

Otherwise known as the "Dictator", this type of manager "rules the roost" and "dictates" what should be done in his or her opinion. Listening skills are limited and they tend to take a very traditional approach to tasks. A typical response is along the lines of "Do it this way because it has worked this way in the past"

An advantage of this approach is that people know exactly where they stand and that the rules and company regulations were fully understood and guidelines were adhered to with the result that overall the team was seen as "well disciplined". People also knew that if the rules and guidelines were not adhered to, then discipline would follow.

The major challenge with this “do as I say” approach was that the representative reported that there was little risk taking and that their opinions and ideas were not listened to, and as a result they often felt frustrated, under valued and in some cases threatened.

The sources of this behaviour appeared varied. Firstly some of the managers were simply mirroring the behaviour of previous managers that they had had themselves and in many ways did not know any form of management. Very little management training had been given to either the senior managers or the managers themselves..

When we worked with some of these managers we found that their behaviours changed very quickly and many were glad to be out of their “do as I say” role as they had never felt very comfortable with it. . Other managers, although having been trained continued to "dictate" either through fear of their own superior, an inability to influence peers and reports through collaborative discussion, and in one case, a misguided belief that their people did not have potential unless they were told what to do! The managers who continued in this fashion tended to be average performers. This group we found was the largest group within the twenty-five that we observed. Characterised by seemingly always having other things to do, this group appeared not to like to spend days visiting the sales representatives. They seemed to attend endless meetings, trips to head office and were apparently more comfortable spending time in front of the computer writing reports or pouring through sales figures.

A day "in the field" usually consisted of a quick visit, meeting up late morning, chatting over a cup of coffee, perhaps suffering a visit to one customer before having a "discussion" over lunch and then heading off back to a report or meeting. This type of manager always seemed to want to keep the mobile on during visits - "I'm waiting for an important call" was a favourite catch phrase.

Representatives reported back that this type of manager was the most frustrating. Very little time was spent with the representative and when there was there was time spent there was usually very little coaching and review. The time was spent either idly chatting or issuing directives. It was as if the representative was un-important or perhaps because the manager was uncomfortable listening to the reps ideas and challenges. This might bring about change and impact on the manager's routine!

The main reason for this type of behaviour we found was that these managers were on a succession plan. They were only going to be in the job for a short period because the company had identified them as having future potential elsewhere in the organisation. The sales manager position was a stepping-stone to higher things and as such these managers were not given enough training and coaching and were also stretched in that some of them still had Head Office projects. Some of the "NYSMNYD"s though simply were not able to handle their immediate manager and as such jumped at every request that was made by the senior manager. They had to attend every meeting, write every report and answer every voicemail and e-mail in order to keep in the senior manager's "good books". This group in the main needed to basic managerial training and training in how to influence their senior managers.

The “Let me Do It” or the “Super Salesperson” Manager -(The “Demonstrator”)

The main characteristic of this type of manager was their inability to let people work for themselves. This type of manager would love to get back into the field and would do as many field visits as possible. They actually missed the customer contact and when out with the sales rep would immediately engage the customer and "take over" the sales call. Very little coaching would be done and the manager would tend to tell the representative the best way to do things based on his or her experience and success.

Again, many representatives found this behaviour frustrating and annoying. Firstly, they actually saw far too much of the manager and secondly, when the manager took

over the sales call they felt that their integrity in the eyes of the customer was being threatened. Sometimes the customer felt very uncomfortable also.

Having said that many representatives reported that actually watching this manager operate did help them as the manager more often than not, had been a good sales executive and sales did tend to improve as a result of the representative implementing what they had observed.

This type of manager really has to learn to let go. They have to learn that they are no longer sales representatives themselves and that they must empower their team to deliver the sales. They should be coaching their representatives more, as opposed to always showing them how to do it. This is OK with some of the younger less experienced reps whose capability is low but this type of approach with experienced more able reps can usually be counter-productive.

The Coaching Manager. – (The “Developer”)

The Coaching Manager takes time with his or her people. Field visits are planned in advance, Agreements as to what each person wants to achieve out the day are reached and objectives are set and reviewed. Time is taken to plan good quality sales calls and time is also put aside in order to discuss the business plan and also to work through any ideas and challenges that the sales rep may have.

A full day will be spent whenever possible and the manager will coach the representative to assist them in identifying their objectives and also coach them through how best they are going to achieve them. Coaching will also take place when reviewing how the sales call went and good quality feedback will be given in order to raise the sales representative's awareness of their skills and interactions.

The coaching manager will be seen as support but will also be seen as the manager and not just a "friend". Sometimes the feedback will be tough but because there is mutual respect the sales representative will realise that the manager is giving constructive feedback in order to assist them in their development and ultimate success. The coaching manager will be skilled in using behavioural analysis, the skill/will matrix, motivational models and coaching models such as GROW and OUTCOMES™

Unfortunately our research showed that only two out of the group of twenty-five came anywhere near our ideal coaching manager. Those two managers were seen as role models and as such their representatives looked forward to them visiting them on a regular basis. Needless to say the sales results of the teams involved were excellent