

## **My Sales Manager Runs Around Like His Pants Are on Fire**

Overachieving sales executives are revered, honoured and compensated for delivering awesome results. On the wider scope, shareholders come to rely on year-over-year performance and profit improvements that are derived from continually driving sales up and streamlining operations. In this business model senior management sets goals that are based on a culture of over performance and over stretching. But there's a price to pay if overachievers are not properly managed. It is important to recognize destructive behaviours and to intervene with a solution to grow corporate performance for the long term.

Top performing sales managers may have operating traits that deliver the results, but undermine the organization's brand. Mike J., Senior Sales Executive with a major software firm consistently exceeds his individual objectives. To further control the outcome of his team he is driven to deliver the results for others through completing pending sales transactions. This style of sales manager is so caught up in not leaving anything to chance and distrusts his employees to deliver the results. The behaviour is derived from a perceived need to rescue employees that are teetering on success, but in the end morale is undermined and trust is demolished.

An intervention with the sales manager, who completes the sales transaction, may be needed to impart expertise and training by demonstrating. When taken to the extreme, these activities lead to reduced productivity. The sales people find it is easier to let the boss do their work while they sit back and play a lesser role. This behaviour stifles subordinates and the full potential of the sales team.

We encountered another fast rising sales manager whose behaviour alienated everyone in the sales department. She had a long standing reputation for being an effective negotiator and a persuasive sales person. She always stood out by working hard and demonstrating aggressive results oriented closes. Last year management promoted her from an individual contributor to the sales manager, but it soon became apparent that she couldn't work with her new sales team.

Her caustic remarks, demanding style, arrogant and aloof manners alienated everyone. She had the inability to embrace other people's sales styles, and that led to mean spirited exchanges. Not wanting to face a complete meltdown in the sales team, management quickly reacted and created a solution everyone could live with. The problematic sales manager was transferred to manage special customer projects that required the efforts of a savvy senior resource to win difficult sales. They isolated her from dealing with the rest of the team while allowing her to pursue her business strengths. The sales team was given a new leader whose style was based on empowering others to achieve.

Another characteristic of the overachieving manager is taking short cuts. Circumventing processes, leaving people out of the loop and ignoring safety nets is fraught with many problems. Last year a Vancouver engineering firm hired 15 technical developers and product support specialists for a three-month ramp up in anticipation of a new contract. The size of the contract was significant and would have doubled their business. The President phoned the prospective company to

setup a celebratory appointment for the final contract signing, only to discover that the whole series of events had been fabricated by the new VP of sales. By letting short cuts become the norm negative outcomes frequently prevail.

In an egocentric corporate culture that reveres the top performers, management faces the added challenge of keeping motivation across the team at a high and consistent level. There's only room on the awards podium to recognize the first place performer, but it takes a whole team to deliver the corporate sales objectives. The culture that celebrates everyone's achievements stands to build depth in the sales organization; no one is subjugated or shoved aside. Everyone is recognized in terms of their achievements relative to personal quotas and market conditions.

High achieving sales managers have an important role to play in the success of a company. It is important to know when to draw on this strength and when to rein it in. To transition from a destructive performance style begins with re-defining the corporate culture and leadership style. This entails placing emphasis on developing strong sales teams with increased capabilities and coaching versus a directive and pacesetting management style. The sales manager is pivotal in this transition, but how do you transform the overachieving managers?

Just ask them. People with high achievement orientation tend to like challenging projects that allow them to learn something new. Take the coaching approach and ask them to set a goal for themselves to transform their management style into a broader approach, one that influences and coaches others for success and increases corporate capabilities. Success will take time and a personal coach may be needed to guide the sales manager through the process of change.

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