

# Now, Next, or Never



## Do you really want to be a Sales Manager?

If you are an aspiring sales manager, in complex B2B, then before putting yourself through the heartache of applying for a role, and potentially the far greater heartache of getting it and then finding out that it's not for you, you will want to ask yourself the question "do you really want to be a sales manager?"

### **Case example:**

*Alex Delawnay was just twelve months into his new role as a Sales Manager, running the New Business team for Sinta Communications, a mid sized provider of security, communications, and networking solutions for medium and large businesses and public bodies. He was struggling, to meet the targets that had been set, to work effectively with the eight sales people in the team, to get much respect from other sales managers, and increasingly over the last few weeks to have a good relationship with Emma Rodriguez, the VP of Sales and his boss.*

*Thinking back, Alex reflects on whether or not he should have pushed so hard for the job, and whether or not he is really suited to sales management.*

*His motivation after the promotion was simple, in that he had an unshakable belief that he would rise in whatever he did, such as him being elected as a student rep when he*



*was at university, or recently becoming captain of the football team that he played for. In his sales career he had worked incredibly hard, in making sure that he was always, if not the very top, one of the top salespeople in the company and every year going on the Achievers Club Trip to some exotic location. He had just assumed that promotion to sales manager would follow after a few years as a hardworking and successful salesperson, and certainly when he was promoted, after making a good case to Emma Rodriguez, he was really elated to be given the position.*

*It had been a bit of an ordeal when he first started in the role as Emma was away on vacation, and then a business trip for the first three weeks, and then extremely busy with some major customer issues. However overall, the first few weeks had gone well, as the team was well ahead of targets and there were no major problems to cope with. But then Alex started to feel a little demotivated, as he was spending more and more time sorting out the personal problems of people in his team, such as a junior salesperson struggling to stand up to an aggressive customer demanding some very heavy discounts, and a relatively experienced salesperson who appeared to be taking a lot of time off, which did not seem to impact their numbers, but was causing friction with other people in the team. Alex found it difficult to devote much time to these kinds of issues and thought that it was up to the individuals to sort these things out themselves, especially when he had given them some very clear feedback and direction.*

*He was also getting frustrated because the team was starting to perform below target and below his forecast. He had streamlined the weekly forecast review meetings because as a salesperson he had always taken the view that the number he put forward was the number that he would commit to and make happen, so there shouldn't really be too much discussion with the sales manager. Alex had obviously expected others in the team to take a similar approach. When deals that had been committed started slipping Alex got extremely frustrated because his reputation and relationship with Emma Rodriguez started suffering which in his mind was because of the shortcomings of the salespeople, and which was outside of his control.*

*Should Alex have taken the role, and should he have been promoted?*

*The above story, based on a real life example, only gives some outline information, but raises a number of questions:*

- *Should Alex have pushed for promotion just because it was the natural thing to do? He does not appear to have really examined his motives, what the job was all about and was it right for him?*
- *Should Emma have promoted him? There is no mention of any serious examination of Alex's suitability, which would have led, as with all new sales managers, to some form of development plan and support over the first few months or quarters.*



- *In particular, there are question marks over two of the basic Attributes normally needed for a sales manager; Alex's motivation to work with other people and get satisfaction through their success, and also how he will cope when he is in situations where he might have a lot of influence but no direct control (resilience)*
- *The situation with committed deals not materialising or slipping, and problems with forecasting, also point to Alex not having some basic skills around running forecasting meetings, analysing the sales pipeline and putting forward a considered team forecast. It is normally essential that Alex quickly get in control of his short term business and Emma should have coached him, or got him some other form of support very early on.*
- *Similarly from Alex's actions and approach there are questions about his ability to delegate, and his prioritisation of his time, again he or Emma should have recognised any potential shortcomings, which can be relatively easily fixed with training or coaching.*

*Hindsight is wonderful, but was Alex, twelve months ago, in the position of being moved into a sales management role Now, Next or Never.*

*From the little evidence that we have, it must be concluded that it was not a Now, in that with hindsight it is fairly obvious that he was going to struggle after any short-term 'honeymoon' period.*

*Emma Rodriguez, and the team of people advising her have some serious questions to answer, as it appears that they didn't have any in-depth consideration or discussion with Alex about suitability for the role. Many senior sales leaders find it useful to look at two aspects of suitability for a role, one is the basic personal attributes that are needed, things like a strong desire to succeed (which Andy appears to have) and what is often called 'Consideration for the success of others', meaning that the manager gets genuine satisfaction through seeing others succeed, rather than just being resources to be deployed (it is not at all clear that Andy has this attribute, and has maybe never really asked himself the question). Similarly, a basic attribute such as resilience when you face difficulties with things outside of your personal control, can be a major issue for some successful salespeople who are used to being in total control of their destiny. Because of Andy's shortcomings in these aspects, potentially he might have come to the conclusion that it was Never, and that sales management was not for him, in which case he needs to figure out what he sees as his future career. It may be however, that if he had discussed these aspects, and examined his own motivations and character more, he would have accepted that he needed to develop these attributes, difficult though that might be, and the conclusion would have been Next – promotion in say 6 or 12 months, once he was more comfortable with these Attributes.*

*In addition, either before being put into a management position, or shortly afterwards, he would have benefitted enormously by getting some training or coaching on how to*



*run forecast meetings, how to delegate, how to prioritise your own time as a manager etc.*

## **Dealing with Alex**

From the thousands of sales managers and senior leaders that we have trained, through in-depth discussions with successful sales leaders in our podcast series, through researching much publically available data and opinion, and considering numerous sales manager job descriptions, here is our view of what most people will consider when promoting someone to a sales management position.

## **Demonstrable Sales success**

Practically every sales leader will want to see demonstrable sales success over an extended time, preferably in a number of different situations (markets / customer types etc). You do not need to be “the best” salesperson, but you do need to be very competent, and credible. If you do not currently have the credibility of being successful as a salesperson, you will find it almost impossible to get the trust and confidence of people in your team and you probably want to wait before putting yourself forward.

## **Essential Characteristics / Attributes**

Secondly, there are some basic characteristics or attributes that every sales management candidate should possess to some degree. If you are considering a move into sales management then it is strongly recommended that you understand what these are in your company, and be really honest with yourself as to whether or not they describe you. These are qualities that can be demonstrated in many different ways, and can be developed over time through self-reflection and personal development, but typically they cannot be easily learned quickly through training. The most common attributes that we have found are:

- *High levels of personal integrity*
  - To be successful you will need to build trust, and to do that you will need to be trustworthy, based on high levels of personal integrity
- *High consideration for others and their success*
  - Sales management is about achieving results through the efforts of others (your sales team), and you can only succeed in the long term if you get genuine delight from the success of others
- *High level desire to succeed*
  - By itself this will not make you successful, but your desire, your drive, your passion and your hunger to succeed is going to be infectious for others



- *Strong resilience*
  - You are going to face difficulties and frustrations, both externally with customers and partners, as well as internally; are you equipped to deal with adversity, especially in situations of ambiguity when many factors are going to be outside your direct control
- *Growth mindset*
  - You are entering into a new career, in a role that is constantly changing; if you have got this far you probably have a growth mindset, you are continually curious, but you should check that you still have the desire and motivation to constantly try to improve
- *Proactivity*
  - Not only having a strong desire to succeed for yourself and others, as well as cope with set-backs, you will need the mentality to drive through actions to make stuff happen.

## **Competencies**

In addition to the basic characteristics and attributes above, there are a large number of competencies that anyone hoping to be a successful sales manager needs to demonstrate. These can be developed relatively easily by training and coaching, and again your own company will have their particular set. The Sales Manager Readiness Indicator, is a tool that you can use to first check out the suitability you have for a sales management role and is available as a resource as part of our free Aspiring Sales Manager Programme\*, to help guide your development before taking up a role. It will be important for you to modify the list of competencies to reflect your own company and the particular sales manager role, but this in itself would be a great exercise to go through.

If Alex had insisted on an in depth and totally honest discussion with Emma Rodriguez a few months before applying for the role, then the outcome could have been far better, and far healthier, for all concerned, with Alex either deciding that sales management was not for him, or with a solid development plan to ensure that he was successful in the role.



## 20 questions to ask?

Salespeople who are aspiring to sales management might want to ask themselves the following 20 questions (and sales leaders might want to discuss the answers!):

1. Do you really understand the role and what it entails?
2. How have you got this understanding, have you talked with all of the various stakeholders that you will have to deal with as a sales manager?
3. Are you very clear and honest with yourself about why you want to move into sales management, and does this align with the values and life goals that you have as an individual?
4. Are you prepared to put in a lot of time to develop a whole new set of skills and knowledge?
5. How will you react to starting a new role as a rookie who will make lots of mistakes?
6. Do you enjoy operating in multi-faceted, multi-dimensional situations often with a degree of uncertainty and ambiguity and where you are accountable for very precise objectives and targets, involving many factors where you may have some influence, but are outside of your direct control?
7. How will you respond when you are now a member of two primary teams; your sales team of which you are a leader, and the (sales) management team of which you are a (initially junior) member?
8. Are you prepared to handle the administrative duties and paperwork associated with sales management?
9. Do you have a strategic and proactive mindset so that in addition to managing hard against short term targets you are able to drive long term strategic growth?
10. Do you have the temperament to analyze sales data and performance metrics to identify areas for improvement and optimize strategies?
11. Do you really like working closely with people?
12. Are you prepared to lose business so that others can develop?
13. Will you get real satisfaction from others succeeding and getting the limelight, applause, recognition and reward?
14. Are you prepared to trust people?
15. Are you happy that your personal recognition and reward will probably suffer, at least in the short term?
16. Are you happy that your personal recognition and reward is dependent on the efforts of other people?
17. Are you prepared for the fact that you will no longer be “one of the team” (even if you want to be, others in the team will treat you differently)
18. Are you able to cope in situations of potential intense short-term pressure, at the same time building for the long term?



19. Will you be able to 'defend the indefensible' for example supporting management decisions that you do not necessarily personally agree with?
20. Do you really have the strength of character to 'do the right thing' in situations of ambiguity and conflict, for example where your seniors are telling you to do one thing, which is against the best interests of those in your team, or where the people in your team are demanding some actions from you that are not in the company's best long term interests.

*\* the Aspiring Sales Manager Programme is offered free of charge to successful salespeople in B2B considering a move into sales management. It includes the Sales Manager Readiness Indicator, allowing you to pinpoint which of 25 identified competencies you should focus on to get appointed and be successful in the role as quickly as possible. For further details go to [www.realsalesmanager.com/Aspiring](http://www.realsalesmanager.com/Aspiring)*

