

How good is your manager?

A test for measuring the quality of the crucial frontline sales manager

When looking at any company's selling capability, the first thing I always examine is the strength of first line sales management because they are the people who will usually be driving best practice and improvement. It has been reported that the average state of sales management practice is poor in IT and telecoms firms, and is a global phenomena.

"Goodness" in a sales manager needs to be looked at from four perspectives – their senior management, customers, other managers in the organisation and most importantly the salespeople who work for them. Simply answer Yes or No to each of these statements and questions.

For senior management

- Does the sales team that this person manages make and exceed target?
- Is their performance consistent?
- There are no surprises in the business.
- There are no issues with any of the salespeople in his team.
- This manager contributes to my management team with new ideas and perspectives.
- This manager does not create any difficulties for me with other managers or my senior management.
- I can trust this manager to carry out his job without undue supervision.

If you answered No to any of the above, then expect your sales manager to be under some pressure, which will almost certainly have an effect on the sales team.

For customers

- I get direct added value from the manager.
- They support my account team so that they are able to serve my needs effectively.

If they answered No to either then you may have an effective manager but a non-effective sales manager.

For other managers

- This sales manager is supportive in their actions towards my team and me.
- I do not get any avoidable issues with salespeople in this sales manager's team.

If you answered No to either then expect difficulty in getting high quality resources and assistance from other departments.



For salespeople

- My sales manager sets out a clear vision of where our business is going so that I have a good sense of direction.
- My sales manager ensures that I have all of the basic tools and processes to do my job effectively (somewhere to work, ability to communicate effectively etc).
- Everyone in the sales team is very clear about his area of responsibility (portfolio of accounts and new business remit), has targets in place before the start of every measurement period (month/quarter/year) and has a commission/bonus plan that is very clear and well understood before the start of any measurement period.
- I have a regular (probably weekly) review of my forecast/pipeline with my sales manager, where we discuss variances and I get support to drive my business forward (sometimes this may be a KITA when I need it).
- Everyone in the sales team has a clear understanding of their personal accountabilities, norms and expected behaviours (possibly through a job description/set of objectives etc).
- Where appropriate I can escalate (delegate upwards) issues that are outside my ability to manage, for example getting agreement on scarce resources. My sales manager reports back on these delegated tasks in a timely manner and I have confidence that they will be resolved.
- My sales manager regularly accompanies me on sales calls and provides high quality feedback and

coaching that helps me to develop my skills and approach.

- My sales manager regularly assists me by acting as a senior sales resource, for example by calling on senior customers, directed by my agreed account plan.
- I have a regular appraisal (formal or informal) with my sales manager where we agree on my strengths and weaknesses. There are no major surprises during these appraisal sessions.
- My sales manager makes available a good training and development plan for me that is geared to the needs of the business and my personal needs.
- My sales manager reviews my account and opportunity plans, as well as win and loss reports, and adds value by contributing to improvements and coaching me on strategy.
- My sales manager gives me praise and recognition when I deserve it.
- My sales manager treats me fairly and with respect.
- My sales manager challenges internal processes and initiates change when this is the right thing to do.
- My sales manager delegates decisions and responsibilities to me that are within my capabilities.
- My sales manager celebrates success of individuals and the sales team.
- My sales manager is a professional role model in how they act, their values and their commitment.
- My sales manager and I have a good working relationship, such that I could share the results of this brief questionnaire with them if I wished.

It is unlikely that you have answered with a very positive Yes to all of the above – it is suggested that you show this questionnaire to your sales manager.

However good they are, a sales manager will benefit from good management – from salespeople. Next month we will look at: "How to manage my sales manager". **SF**

Many of these questions are taken from the Sales Manager Audit, a free resource available from ProAct Business Development. Steve Hoyle is chairman of ProAct Business Development, specialising in turning theory into practice with sales behavioural change programmes. See www.proactbd.com