



Sales Manager Coaching

Overcoming the barriers

Why people don't do things

Version 2.1

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As Sales Managers we are often astonished when people don't do things that we expected of them. There are many reasons why people don't complete actions or tasks. The **Six Reasons Why People Don't Do Things** is a well-proven model to help in understanding and providing remedies.

Why People Don't Do Things

This is a model that we have been using for some time as a quick checklist, to help in determining why it is that some sales people simply fail to carry out tasks or activities that we expect of them.

Performance Specification

This is simply where we haven't told the sales person that something is expected of them. It is a very obvious cause of frustration (on both sides), and in our work it is surprising how often this is the case. Just because we believe that we have communicated an expectation, doesn't mean that it has been received and clearly understood by the people in our team.

A good example would be: "I didn't realise that you wanted that report by end of the week; nobody told me".

A good question to ask yourself is the famous: "I thought I heard myself say, but what was their understanding of what they thought they heard me say."

Lack of Feedback

It is well understood, that sales people respond to feedback, and also that lack of feedback in itself sends a clear signal – that something is not important. Most sales managers are well aware of the importance of feedback, yet simply do not give it on a regular basis.

A good example is the experience of one sales manager who took over a sales team, where the level of customer facing activity appeared to be very low. The previous manager had identified this as an issue, but it still persisted. The new manager concluded that lack of feedback was the real problem, and pinned a chart on his door, which simply listed all of the sales people, and the number of face-to-face customer calls each individual made every week. Nothing was said about this being an issue, however within six weeks the number of customer visits had doubled. Obviously face to face calls is only an indicator of selling activity, and would not be relevant in all situations, however the story illustrates that simply providing feedback can have a dramatic effect on behaviour.

Not understanding Consequences

Even when sales people know that they should do something, and are provided with feedback, they can still fail to carry out tasks if they do not understand the consequences of their failure. The consequences here have to be personal, and answer the 'What's in it For Me' question.

An example here could be forecasting. Every sales team has (at least one) forecasting process, and sales people will have been told to complete it accurately by the end of every week / month. They may well get feedback if it is not completed, and systems may even give feedback on forecast accuracy. Sales Managers may explain the consequences of poor forecasting – that people in the manufacturing / provisioning group need the data to be able to do their job properly. And yet, poor forecasting may still be prevalent.

An alternative approach might be for sales managers to explain that this is a requirement of the job, that they will provide feedback on forecast accuracy, and that this is viewed as a primary indicator of the professionalism and quality of the sales person, which will be used in appraisals. Clearly this will need to be followed through, but the consequence is now understood in terms that affect the sales person directly. [If even this fails, then the other 'consequence' that some companies have introduced is that the sales person will not get credited for business, which has not appeared in an appropriate manner on the forecast system.]

Lack of Knowledge, Skills and Tools

In order to do something, everyone needs some basic knowledge, skills and relevant tools. Sales people will tend not to do things where their confidence is low because of a lack of these basic elements. Giving a formal presentation is often a good example. It is recognised that this can be a key part of the sales process, but some sales people will avoid them at all costs. There could be a multitude of reasons for this, but a primary cause may well be that the sales person has not been trained in the basic principles of presenting, or does not have the subject matter knowledge that they believe is required.

While this is a very valid reason for not doing things, it can also be used as an excuse. Lack of tools or detailed product knowledge in particular should not be valid reasons for failing.

Task Interference

This means lack of time to do something. Basic Time Management teaches us that it is all a question of priorities, and a sales person saying that they don't have time to complete account plans for example, means that they are not prioritising this over other activities.

Sales is a high-pressured environment, where there will always be more things to do than hours in the day. Sometimes sales management have expectations that are unreasonable, or not appropriate, however the sales person always has an option to prioritise.

People are very rarely late when they have to catch a flight home, especially at the end of a very busy day. Somehow they manage to get to the gate on time. If they can do this, then they could, if they choose, complete other tasks and activities, and normally it is a case of not putting sufficient urgency or importance onto completion of the task.

Task interference, or "I didn't have the time" is almost always an excuse. Sales managers need to push back hard on sales people who use this regularly, and help them to realise that it is their responsibility to manage their time. If they accept tasks, or don't set realistic deadlines for completion, that is their problem which they need to rectify.

Psychological

The last reason is perhaps the most difficult, and fortunately the least common. There may be some deeper psychological reason why people don't do certain things. This may only become apparent over time when you observe a pattern of behaviour and is most often concerning some inner fear that people could have. It can sometimes apply to cold calling based on a fear of rejection, or giving presentations to large groups of people based on a fear of losing respect.

If you start to suspect that psychological reasons apply then simply helping people overcome common fears by confronting them, will often work. For example arranging group cold calling sessions with competition and fun built into the event can be useful. If simple techniques such as these do not work then you are faced with the choice of either accepting

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the situation, for example changing a sales person's role to one that doesn't involve cold calling, or seeking professional help.

Summary

The model is designed as a quick checklist that is useful in the vast majority of cases. When confronted with a sales person who is not carrying out some specific task then you can diagnose and remedy quickly:

Cause

Question to ask

Performance Specification *Have I made it clear to them exactly what is expected*

Feedback *Are they getting clear feedback on their performance*

Consequences *Do they really understand the effects of not doing it*

Skills, knowledge & tools *Do they know how to do it, and are they properly equipped*

Task interference *Normally an excuse, but are they able to prioritise time to do this*

Psychological *Is it a rare case of deeper issues; can I mask it or get help*

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