



New Sales Manager Survival Guide

*Over your first six months....
The going will get tough....
How will you tough it out....*

Here are some sample suggestions from experienced sales leaders.

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While interviewing experienced sales managers for the [realsalesmanager](http://realsalesmanager.com) podcast and book, one question I asked was ‘what would be your top tips for how to survive the first six months after taking up your first sales manager position?’ Below I’ve paraphrased but tried to keep the sense of their top 10 answers.

Keep aligned with your boss: when researching why Sales Directors or VP’s get fired the number one reason that emerged was that they were misaligned with their boss – not competency but not understanding priorities, mis-setting expectations and lack of good communication were the most common issues. It is tempting for new sales managers to want to “make a name” for themselves, but experience shows that keeping close to your boss, really understanding what they expect of you, what your boundaries are, and constant open communication are keys to survival.

Get on top of the forecast: the message that many new sales managers get is that the numbers are a result of doing the right things, don’t be too short term focused, that selling is a numbers game and a process. Inevitably though, probably a lot sooner than anticipated, the organisation is going to get concerned about orders or revenues, and also inevitably you will be put into the hot seat and expected to know the forecast, and all of the major deals within it, in detail, and with firm plans in place to counter any weaknesses or slippages. Getting on top of the forecast is normally not easy even for a very experienced manager who can navigate around understanding complex and sometimes ambiguous situations, but it is going to be



essential for any recently appointed sales manager, whether inexperienced or with years of practice, to get to understand the forecast as quickly as possible.

Build your network; The transition to a sales manager means that suddenly you have many more people that are stakeholders, or at least have an interest in you. Clearly this includes all the people who report direct to you, but also peers, managers of sales support teams, partners, customers, suppliers etc.

These people all have an interest in your success and may often have an influence over that success. Coming into the role there may be a temptation to focus just on the people who report to you immediately, and they will perhaps justify your closest focus, but getting around people to form personal relationships, even if it is just a 15 minute initial conversation, will enable you to start building an essential network, discover if you have any enemies lurking out there, and build a much more rounded perspective on your role as well as the opportunities and the challenges that you face. It will come as no surprise to good salespeople that starting to form a personal one-one relationship is going to be key.

Set up cadence; which we often refer to as a sales framework means very quickly putting in place a simple set of processes and meetings which have a heartbeat to them. Normally on a weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, and quarterly basis you will have a forecast call, meet one-one with your people, have team meetings etc. (we devote a whole chapter to this in *realsalesmanager* training). Having a regularity gives everyone a basis to work towards, and a framework for you to operate efficiently in.

Find a friend; assuming that the role is going to be enjoyable, doubtless you are also going to face difficulties, both in the business and personally. Your boss and your coach should be sources of great help over your first few months, but many new sales managers report that it is important to have a ‘friend’ or a ‘buddy’ in the organisation. This is someone, probably a peer or a little more senior, that you can just have a coffee with, or pick up the phone to when you just need ‘someone to talk to’. They can act as a release valve, a sounding board, or just someone to give emotional support.

Don’t pretend to be “one of the team”. Many newly promoted managers (not just sales managers) start out by saying that the change in role will not affect them, or the relationships that they have with people around them. This is an admirable stance, and in some senses, it shouldn’t change your philosophy or your values. But whatever your intentions things will be different because you will perceive things differently and the people around you will treat you differently. These changes can first be noticed when you start to get new information showing for example how different people are performing or are perceived by other functions. People who you have been very close to in the past will start to not share all their thoughts or feelings with you – they will start trying to ‘manage’ the relationship.

Err on the side of hardness. All managers, especially sales managers will, to a greater or lesser extent, spend some time in the first few months figuring out their



“management style”. For example, is it best to be people-oriented and spend all your time making individuals feel better, or should you be task-oriented, caring only about business results? There is no set answer to this question, and it will vary depending on situations and context; the ability to understand the best style and become more adaptable is mostly a skill to be developed over time. Most senior sales leaders advise that a new sales manager should err on the side of being hard and task-focused initially; the reason for this is that as things develop it is relatively easy to “soften up” and become more people focused, while it is very difficult to move in the opposite direction.

Get ahead of the curve; you will know this from being a successful salesperson; the importance of getting ahead of your target early. This is even more important for a sales manager, where it is going to take you longer to turn around any performance issues. It’s not always possible but put maximum effort into getting ahead of target as soon as possible – your life will then become much easier than if you are constantly chasing numbers and trying to catch up.

Expect the unexpected; even with the best preparation, training, coaching and management support, there will almost certainly be some unexpected events and issues. Experience will help you to spot these a little earlier but they will always occur, and for many this is one of the joys of the job – especially in complex B2B selling there will be things that you cannot foresee and will have to respond to. You will have to change direction sometimes, react when someone announces that they are going to leave the team, the company demands new things of you, a customer crisis emerges, or any of the many things that can happen. Having a good plan in place should give you a foundation on which to respond rather than just having to give a knee-jerk reaction.

Get yourself in good shape. For the vast majority of new sales managers, the first six months can be quite tough. It is a difficult and demanding job at the best of times, but when you are still figuring out which dials to keep an eye on, and which levers to pull at which time it is inevitable that things will often be difficult. Keeping yourself in good shape, both mentally and physically is going to help you enormously. How you do this is up to you, but everyone agrees that it is vital to look after yourself.

And another one....

Enjoy it. It’s going to be a difficult but interesting and immensely rewarding journey!

