

Meet the new boss

Our movers pages show that sales directors move jobs a lot – how should you respond?

In recent weeks several companies that I work with have appointed new sales VPs, sales directors or sales managers. I can see no industry trend at work here, but this coincidence has allowed me to observe how different salespeople react when faced with a new boss, and how they survive, or even exploit the new situation.

In the majority of cases relationships between salespeople and New Boss develop well, particularly when the reps think about what New Boss wants and needs, plan how to build the relationship for mutual benefit and act in a reasonably mature and open way. There are, however, some behaviours that do not appear to be useful, characterised below.

Sandy Superior is a fairly successful salesperson who is in no doubt about her own abilities, which are good but not as good as she believes. Sandy did not become successful by fawning to sales managers, who she believes need to understand who is the real boss. She will feign being too busy to be seen by New Boss, until she is ready to make her presence felt. The smart New Boss will simply ignore her until she stops her childish behaviour.

Harry Headdown is a salt of the earth type of salesperson who simply gets on with what he has been told to do. Hard working and technically competent with some good customers to look after, he is quite successful. When asked what his strategy is for building a relationship with New Boss he will reply: "I dunno – we'll see how it goes." It will be many weeks before New Boss realises Harry is part of the sales team.

Freddie Face will have no such difficulty being recognised by New Boss, because from day one he has been constantly in the face of New Boss, who has been treated to updates on the great and exciting things that Freddie is about to achieve. These things are so exciting that New Boss soon manages to be very busy whenever Freddie is in the vicinity.

Mick Moaner is a close cousin of Freddie, and also demands large amounts of time with New Boss. Mick, however, uses this time differently, by giving "feedback" and "observations" on the many "issues" that are stopping Mick being more successful.



Marketing, service, support, pre-sales, as well as product availability/quality/pricing will all be areas where Mick has a (long and negative) opinion. New Boss realises that Mick is only "representing the views of everyone here" and there may be some truth in the observations but wonders why it is that Mick's performance appears to be affected when so many other people find a way through all of the difficulties.

Pat Pet is well remembered from school days for doing all her homework on time (in very neat handwriting), never being

late and bringing in little gifts for the teacher. For New Boss, Pat will have prepared well laid out reports of deals and accounts, presented with a smile in the first few days. While not as presumptuous as Freddie Face or Mick Moaner, Pat always manages to be in the close vicinity of New Boss, or at least always bumping into him. New Boss doesn't mind, but just wonders when the selling gets done.

George Grudge should be easily recognisable, but usually hides in the shadows (the opposite of Pat Pet) and is sometimes mistaken for Sandy Superior. In fact, George's problem is that there is some deep feeling of antipathy towards New Boss, probably as a result of being passed over for promotion, not being consulted in the selection process or perhaps a feeling of sadness at the departure of Old Boss. New Boss will be searching for George to have an "are you part of the solution or part of the problem" conversation.

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WHAT THE NEW BOSS WANTS

The key to all good selling is understanding life from your customer's perspective, and so it should be easy for salespeople to effectively manage New Boss. The key is to understand life from their perspective. All New Bosses have different backgrounds, values, experiences, skills, and knowledge, but most have a few imperatives when they start:

- Use the honeymoon period wisely – it's the only one I will get and it will probably come to an end sooner rather than later
- Reassure and build the relationship with my boss – the person who hired me obviously has high regard for me, but will also suffer a little bit of "buyers remorse"
- Get my bearings – figure out what are the problems, imperatives, who can be my allies, who can I rely on
- Make at least one friend; not someone who works for me, but a peer, maybe someone outside of sales, who will act as mentor during the initial period
- Make an impact and send a message, but without rash decisions I will later regret.

HOW THEY WANT TO BE HANDLED

Again, all New Bosses are different, but the ones that I have experienced recently have some common messages for salespeople:

- Reach out to me, but don't pester, and don't become a pain
- Don't give me BS that you think I want to hear – I'll find you out eventually; give me good factual information
- Manage me (take an interest in me, find out about me; a good salesperson always appreciates being sold to)
- Don't expect miracles quickly
- Listen to what I say; if you don't understand then ask me to clarify, but don't ignore me
- Don't talk about "the good old days." I'm not interested in how Old Boss interpreted expenses, the forecast and the pipeline.