
NorthBay biz: If You Manage Salespeople, You Better

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Why are some people wildly successful in sales, meeting and exceeding every sales goal - while others, even in the same company, with the same product, tools and compensation structure, seem to be marking time? The answer has to do with the fact that virtually all sales organizations are comprised of four different kinds of salespeople. These include: the Performer, the Professional, the Caretaker and the Searcher. Let's look at each one. The Performer is a top producer who is emotional, extroverted, intuitive, impatient, competitive, passionate, egocentric and a natural-born salesperson. As high-maintenance individuals whose emotions tend to ruffle feathers internally and occasionally externally, a Performer's greatest challenge is to balance the highs and lows of his or her emotional roller coasters, which are caused by their sense of self-importance and triggered by the uncertainties of passionate, everyday selling.

The Professional is another one of a company's top producers. These salespeople are even-tempered, analytical, logical, quietly competitive and internally passionate with controlled egos. Because Professionals tend to avoid taking risks, they find it difficult to broaden their sales strategy and to go beyond their conservative approach. Successful, for sure - even one of the best sales types - but they still fall short of their full potential.

The Caretakers are salespeople who are stuck in a comfort zone. They're passive-aggressive and will not attempt the difficult tasks. Caretakers hate change and are inconsistent or mediocre producers at best. What's really frustrating is, they're sleeping Performers or Professionals whose real challenge is to go beyond their comfort zones.

Searchers begin in sales believing selling will be easy. With that mindset, they avoid doing what it takes to be successful. The whole process becomes too painful for these individuals, who often become filled with fear. And, if they were to be honest about it, they'd admit they really hate sales. The reality is that somebody made a bad hiring decision. The Searcher's challenge is to get the courage to find another career.

What to do with what you have

Although some of the personality traits of these four kinds of salespeople can blend into one another, a dominant type always tends to emerge. A savvy leader or sales manager will identify the current makeup of his or her team and then work to help each type change their behavior to break through to the next level. To accomplish this, the sales manager's biggest challenge is to nudge Caretakers out of their comfort zone so they become the sleeping Performers or Professionals they can be.

At the same time, managers are faced with another challenge: time management. Too much focus on the team's strugglers sends a clear message to top producers that they're operating at peak performance. That's almost never the case, and managers need to inspire their current top producers to continue to break through to even higher levels of sales productivity. Too much focus on the weak players jeopardizes top line revenue because the best may not be getting better. Smart leaders and managers know how to balance their time to prevent this from occurring.

Meaningful change

While the individual makeup of sales departments may vary, the goal should always be to build a team with as many Performers and Professionals as possible. That means influencing Caretakers to seek breakthrough achievements while helping Searchers find other careers.

Self-assessment is a good way to start. If salespeople are willing to critique themselves in an objective way, they might be more willing to take the necessary steps to produce positive change. In general, Producers and Performers have already bought into the system; they only need one-on-one coaching to help them face new breakthrough challenges. When working with Performers, remind them to treat everyone like their best customers. By following this strategy, Performers will become more even-tempered, removing themselves from the emotional ups and downs caused by the big egos that can threaten to take them out of their peak selling zone.

When dealing with Professionals, the manager must illustrate the benefits of taking risks. Show them that by taking more risks, they'll have more opportunities for growth and even higher achievement as a company top producer.

That leaves Caretakers and Searchers. The manager's goal with the Caretakers is to get them to tackle the difficult things they've been avoiding. If past results have shown talent yet they blame their inconsistent productivity on a "lucky" or "unlucky" month, use examples from Professionals and Performers to help them model new behaviors. Remember, Caretakers are prone to give excuses, and their willingness to accept mediocrity is prohibiting them from reaching the next level. Simply put, managers must work with those Caretakers who are willing to make changes and focus on their own personal growth. Those who want to change can - and will - become Performers or Professionals.

On the other hand, Searchers don't belong in sales. In most cases, they'll come to this realization over time. Ultimately, they have no intention of making the necessary changes to be successful. Generally, Searchers are a result of hiring mistakes. Two things a résumé never reveal are common sense and passion - Searchers have neither when it comes to sales. Once the Searchers are revealed, replace them with Performers or Professionals.

Sales breakthroughs

The road to breakthrough performance is not a one-size-fits-all map. For real breakthrough to occur, it takes an honest self-assessment and clarity about one's true intentions. When individuals make a conscious decision to change, they're more apt to go beyond where they're comfortable. Getting to the next level in selling is never easy, no matter which type of salesperson someone is. When top executives and sales managers embrace the four kinds of salespeople and become willing to lead their team members through the uncomfortable places required to achieve real breakthrough, then

- no question about it - productivity increases.

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