

What Leadership Needs to Know about Sales

By John Chapin

In the leadership role you probably already get that sales is the primary key to massive success and prosperity. As you know, the most successful companies sell better and more than everyone else. Starbucks doesn't have the best coffee, they've simply sold an enormous number of people on doing business with them. That said, to ensure colossal success for your company, here are the sales facts you want to ensure your company is living by.

Fact #1: Sales has to be at the top of the food chain.

Everything starts and stops with sales. Without sales, there is no service department, no installation department, and in fact, no people because you're out of business. Until a product is sold, nothing moves. No money goes into the bank account, trucks don't move, customers aren't helped, nothing gets installed or serviced, and economies stop. Companies go out of business because they don't sell enough at high enough prices. Companies thrive because they sell enough at the right prices to cover bills, payroll, growth, and mistakes. If you want to thrive in good times and bad times, independent of the economy, the President, rules, regulations, and other factors, you do so with lots of sales. Everyone and everything has to support sales first and foremost.

Note: This is not permission for the sales department to run roughshod over everyone, treat anyone like a second-class citizen, or break rules in order to sell something. All business must be clean and ethical, and all other departments treated with the utmost respect and professionalism. Also, for the love of God, *don't ever verbalize "sales department first"* to other departments. "Sales first" is an unwritten rule. I don't want to see this in an e-mail or even scratched on a random notepad in bad handwriting. The other departments need to know and be told they are important. **The key point:** when push comes to shove, sales comes first. When the receptionist says, "that's not my job" to a simple, reasonable request from sales, the receptionist's attitude is addressed, not the salesperson's demands or expectations.

Fact #2: Your focus needs to be on attitude and activity within the sales department.

A sales team with superior attitude and activity levels will always outsell a sales team with superior skillset and products. While skillset and product are important, and will be discussed in Fact #3, the actual acts of going out and connecting with a high number of people are paramount. The most important factors are how motivated the sales team is and how many people they talk to and connect with.

When you're hiring salespeople, you're hiring attitude. You can't teach drive and work ethic. You're looking for people who are hungry, with a blue-collar mentality, and a thick skin. You're also looking for people who are extremely persistent and resilient. They need to follow through and follow up, and follow up, *and follow up*.

Next, what is the activity level? Are they coming in early and leaving late, are they working on the weekends? Are they working on the right things? Are they selling anything? If you aren't sure of their activity, go on calls with them. You can also call them, ask where they are, and

surprise them in the field. I know of one company that tracks their sales reps activity via GPS. They are able to ensure they are making the required 10 to 12 sales calls a day, beginning by 9 a.m. at the latest and finishing by 4:30 p.m. at the earliest. For those of you cringing right now, the only people offended by this will be the people who aren't doing what they're supposed to be doing.

Bottom line: hire attitude, set expectations around activity level, and hold people accountable. And remember, at the end of the day it's all about production. They are either paying their way and getting the job done, or they're not.

Fact #3: You must invest in your sales team.

A highly effective sales team needs tools, resources, training, and support. Your goal is to have them spending as much time as possible prospecting, presenting, and closing. This is going to take one: support people to do paperwork, order entry, and other non-sales related items, two: tools and resources such as CRMs, computer systems, and other technology, and three: systems and processes that standardize operations and remove all guess work. Among other items, you should have selling system in place complete with scripts, competitive information, and anything else that a salesperson could possibly need during an interaction with a prospect or customer.

Next, invest in the development of sales skills. While attitude and activity are most important, a sales team that also has great sales skills is lethal. Invest in learning tools such as books, CDs, DVDs, classes, and seminars. Salespeople should be continually practicing, drilling, and rehearsing sales skills in sales meetings, in the car, with you and other salespeople, and even with friends and family members. You should also be throwing objections at them when you simply walk by them in the office. Preparation and knowing exactly what to say are critical.

Fact #4: Everyone and everything affects sales.

Everyone affects sales at your company from the receptionist, who is the first person people come in contact with, to the janitor, who runs into people walking in and out of your building, to your truckers, your customer service people, and your salespeople. All make an impression, good or bad, and that impression helps determine whether or not people do business with you. Taking it a step further, it's my belief that because selling is your company's most important activity, everyone should be *directly* involved in sales. Everyone knows people and they should all be looking for possible prospects for your product or service. Yes, even the janitor and receptionist. If they pass on a name to the sales department and a sale is made, they should be rewarded with money, a gift, or something else of value, but all employees should be sold on your product and looking for people to help.

Everything counts. From clean floors, to correct shipments, to properly spelled names, to all employees interacting with customers with caring and enthusiasm, everything sends a message as to whether or not your company is one people should do business with. Even the smallest item can affect a sale. On that note, you should be shopping your company. Call and see how the phone is answered. Ask for information. Is it sent? Does someone follow up? How and when? If they'll know it's you calling, have a friend or family member call.

John Chapin is a sales and motivational speaker and trainer. For his free newsletter, or if you would like him to speak at your next event, go to: www.completeselling.com John has over 28 years of sales experience as a number one sales rep and is the author of the 2010 Axiom Awards sales book of the year: Sales Encyclopedia. For permission to reprint, e-mail: johnchapin@completeselling.com.

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