

The Biggest Mistakes Made Managing Salespeople

By John Chapin

There are five primary mistakes when it comes to managing agents. Almost every organization makes one or two of these, but most make more, many make all five. Each mistake you eliminate will add about 20% in additional revenues to the bottom line. That said, if you have and clean up all five, it could lead to an exponential revenue increase of 200% or more.

The Biggest Sales Management Mistakes

Mistake #1: Having the wrong person

This is usually a hiring mistake, though it could be someone who has become complacent over the years and is no longer doing their job. If it's the latter, there is still hope but it will require relighting the fire they once had. Talk to them about this and see if you can help them find their passion once again. If not, you may have to move them somewhere else or out altogether.

If it's the former, you need to change your hiring process. While a whole book could be written on this, here are the most important pieces. **One: hire attitude and work ethic.** These are the most important character traits of any employee and they cannot be trained. They either come to you with these or they don't. While I have ways to determine these during the hiring process, many times you won't know what you're getting until they show up five minutes late day one and don't seem real excited about work. That's why it's extremely important to, **Two: set rules and expectations up front.** For salespeople, "You're expected to be in the office at 7:30 a.m. M-F and work most nights and weekends for the first three years in the business." That's an example, and one small piece. One other rule I have for on-the-road salespeople is: "If you are in the office between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. M-F it's a \$20 fine." Some other guidelines I follow are: only hire employed people, only hire in your industry if recruited, have a hiring process, do an online and background check, look for open and transparent people, shake up the standard testing process, set goals and standards in writing, have an employment agreement, establish rules of the workplace, know their WHY, test them before you hire them, hire slowly, fire quickly, give them the tools, resources, and training to do their job, and provide the right environment.

Mistake #2: A lack of accountability

This means ensuring people are doing the job you're paying them to do. Once you've set rules and expectations in the hiring stage, you've got to stick to these standards no matter what. If you see someone showing up late, leaving early, or doing anything else that negatively affects the work environment, it needs to be addressed and cleaned up immediately. There should be a series of rewards for the right activities and penalties for the wrong ones. Even after you've hired people, you need to continue to test and check up on them.

Mistake #3: A lack of training & supervision

The biggest issue here is a lack of sales training. There should be heavy emphasis on sales skills. Most companies put way too much emphasis on technical skills and product knowledge versus sales skills. While these are important, sales skills will trump technical skills all day when it comes to winning sales.

Here are some other points on this item. Micromanage rookies and make sure they are doing the right activities the right way and that they are learning what they need to learn. You can be hands-off with your veterans as long as they are doing lots of good, clean business. Have a training schedule for all training: sales, product, and otherwise and cover this along with expectations and time commitments before you hire them. Assign a competent mentor to new salespeople.

Mistake #4: No sales system and/or no sales process

Most organizations have a bunch of salespeople running around all using different sales systems and processes. While each individual salesperson is different and will approach sales situations in a slightly different manner, they should all have a well-thought-out track to run on and specific sales system to follow. The process should also be relatively similar. The sales process should cover everything from getting to the decision maker all the way through building long-term client relationships. Your system should consist of: a playbook, a binder with all scripts, a Concept Book, and a way to track and follow up with clients and prospects.

Mistake #5: Salespeople doing lots of things other than sales activities.

I purposely send e-mails to the salespeople I coach between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. It amazes me how many times I get an instant response, and not from their cell phone. These are the prime hours during which salespeople should be on the road doing their most important activities: prospecting, presenting, and closing. Yet, many are in the office doing paperwork, and other things that can be done at any time night or day. You need to set rules similar to my “10-3” Rule. There also needs to be a clear separation of sales and service with roles and responsibilities spelled out for each person in each group. Salespeople should also have a plan which includes annual, monthly, and weekly goals, along with daily activity. You may also want to put your people through a good time management course to make sure they are following the 80/20 Rule and other key productivity principles.