

IN PRACTICE

June 2003

Even Sales Managers Need Attention!

by Shelley Gaynes, Gee Wiz, LLC

Have you ever wondered why sales training techniques are practiced more in the classroom than with the customer? Why is it that the sales force understands what they're supposed to do in theory, but when it comes to execution, that's another story? And, what role does the Sales Manager (SM) play in making things work?

We asked ourselves some of those same questions and came to the following conclusions: if the SMs can't model the skills taught in class, and if they don't "walk the talk," and if coaching their sales team takes a back seat to everything else, then the sellers won't maximize their performance or reach their goals.

It is with those thoughts in mind that a division of a Fortune 500 telecommunications company decided to focus on the often-neglected population in need of development and coaching: the Sales Manager. Senior executives realized that the sales management team was one of the key ingredients to achieving success. While many SMs were more comfortable crunching numbers or fighting fires, the ones who really made the most impact were in the trenches consistently coaching. As a result of these insights, a targeted coaching initiative was created to address these issues. Utilizing one-on-one coaching, coupled with best practice sessions and workshops, our coaching team traveled to six sales centers spending four weeks in each center. Our mission was:

- to improve SM coaching skills and
- to begin to develop a coaching culture in the corporation.

What transpired really made an impact on the organization. In the words of one Assistant Vice-President (AVP), "My managers are more confident and more competent. The impact is that my managers more readily coach. Their increased confidence level and improved competence has made them more assertive in dealing with skill and performance issues. Now they do it quicker and more effectively." Another AVP summed it up by saying, "This effort re-energized us!"

A customized coaching project was created utilizing outside coaches with extensive experience in sales, sales management, leadership,

About Shelley Gaynes



Shelley Gaynes is the owner of Gee Wiz, LLC, www.geewizwow.com, a leading provider of sales management training, assessments, coaching and consulting services.

To learn more about this or other projects,

Contact her by phone: 678.441.9449 or email: sgaynes@geewizwow.com

and coaching skills. Briefly, here's what occurred over a four-week period at each sales center:

Pre-Work:

- Account Executives (AEs) provided Web-based feedback to their SMs.
- An on-line sales refresher was administered to each SM.
- A conference call was held with each sales location.
- Each SM informally met with their assigned coach and completed a survey.

Week 1:

- Provided the sales management team, from the top down, with a project overview and a self-assessment coaching styles inventory.
- 360 feedback sessions were conducted live with the AEs, SMs and AVPs.
- SMs met with their individual coaches for a goal setting meeting.

Weeks 2 - 4:

- Over a 3-week period each SM received 18 hours of individual coaching.
- Mini-workshops on topics such as sales techniques, time management, effective meeting tactics, funnel management, and coaching for improved performance were taught twice weekly. SMs and AVPs attended all of the sessions.
- Weekly summary meetings were held with AVPs.
- SM and Center recommendations were provided at the end of Week 4.

In addition, a SM success profile was created as a benchmark against which to drive the process. Other tools that were developed and used in this project were a SM Scorecard, a SM Toolkit, and a SM Effectiveness Survey.

While it is still too early to assess the total impact of this initiative on the field, the coaching initiative has already achieved the following results:

1. SMs and AVPs are conducting regular funnel reviews and more meaningful sales call observations.
2. The feedback from the AEs at the end of the initiative was that: (a) the SMs are spending more productive time with their team doing observations and coaching; and (b) the program is helping the AEs to better move their opportunities through the funnel to closure. SM ratings on this survey improved approximately 8% within 6-8 months.

3. Funnel reviews saw a 50% increase within the same time frame.

4. Revenue results even showed strong improvement, although we were reluctant to attribute all of the revenue growth exclusively to this coaching project.

Finally, SMEs and AVPs alike raved about the personal growth they experienced due to this one-on-one coaching experience.

Comments included:

- "Thank you for equipping us with new and improved coaching tools and an awesome coaching experience."
- "No doubt this has improved my coaching and focus. My results are better - the whole team is more on track and has a high energy level."
- "Thank you for making the investment in all of us. It will allow us to be the best we can be as leaders. We are excited about the coming year!"

And now this telecommunications concern is working on the next phase of the project in order to protect their investment. They recently created an internally staffed sales coaching team to carry on the coaching concepts started last year. The "coaching culture" at this company has truly just begun.

*Thank you for reading this article.
For more information, please contact:*

*Shelley Gaynes
678.441.9449*

sgaynes@geewizwow.com

www.geewizwow.com

