
The High Performer Sales Managers and Their Seven Characteristics

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What characteristics have high performing sales managers had? How did one go from being an ordinary sales manager to a high performer? Were better managers simply good salespeople? Good leaders? Or was there something more, some intangible quality that took an ordinary sales manager from ordinary to extraordinary?

High performers had a combination of characteristics that made them top contributors. It was not one skill or characteristic that made the top performer; it was several that combined to form an effective whole. These characteristics included great leadership and focus; an ability to effectively build and maintain the sales structure; expert skills in recruiting and placing salespeople; recognition of the importance of coaching and training; great time, territory, and forecasting management; and top-notch communication in a variety of areas.

1. High performing sales managers had great leadership and focus

The best sales managers have had great leadership skills. Performance management was directly related to leadership and the leader's ability to define performance in each sales role and identify gaps in performance. Therefore, the high performing sales manager got to know his or her team in order to deliver the best team performance.

Their leadership focused on four key areas:

1. Creating and closing opportunities
2. Setting sales strategy
3. Developing sales force capability
4. Coaching for sales results

In this vein, these sales managers ensured that their salespeople remained motivated and did not become frustrated, allowing for their salespeople to feel that they have control over what happened in their sales career as well as what contributed to their success.

➤ “Our lives are frittered away by detail: simplify, simplify.”
Henry David Thoreau

2. High performers were adept at building and maintaining the sales structure

Understanding the value of recognition and rewards in motivating salespeople was essential to the high performing sales manager. Managers knew to recognise high performing salespeople as such with recognition and rewards.

Recognition ranged from being a tangible item such as a plaque awarded at the annual company Christmas party to intangible items that held intrinsic value, such as the manager favourably commenting on some aspect of the salesperson's job performance. High performing managers learned what their sales staff was most motivated by in terms of recognition.

One way the better managers kept sales people motivated through compensation was by tying compensation to the top line. This allowed salespeople to aim for their own quota, and tied their responsibility to those numbers. This top line focus offered the security and control that salespeople like to have, and offered the manager the opportunity to allow his or her salespeople to guide the direction of their own career.

They also identified what excited their sales people – it could be cash bonuses, gift cards, prestige, recognition by their peers, or even job satisfaction.

Most of all, they understood the one quality that unified sales reps: they wanted to win, and they wanted to do it in a unique way. Therefore, the high performer understood that rewarding salespeople when they win is integral to sales success. One way top performers ignited that winning attitude in his or her salespeople was by finding ways to fire up the whole department, not simply the leading salespeople. They created a program that allowed every salesperson to win on some level, regardless of sales ability.

Figure 1

Top Performing Sales Managers motivated their staff using a wide variety of rewards:

To improve performance, the better manager thought outside the box by offering unconventional rewards for excellence:

1. Experimenting with different prizes and bonuses.
2. Discovering what the sales team values.
3. Getting creative. For example, the high performer offered incentives such as “power prizes” that rewarded sales people for achieving outstanding sales over short periods.
4. Rewarding frequently.

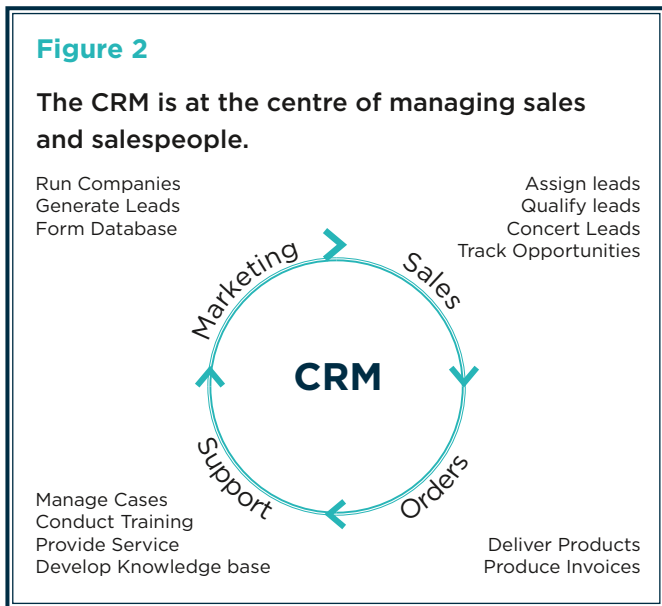
Understanding the customer as well as the salesperson was also essential to high performance. This was done by effective utilisation of CRM. High performing sales managers understood the advantages and disadvantages of CRM practices to their business operations and utilised those to increase business performance and profit.

- First, the high performer manager integrated CRM into the sales strategy
- The manager also showed his or her sales team the direct benefits of CRM
- The manager made salespeople accountable for the data in their assigned accounts

They saw the value in sales reporting. They utilise their sales reporting system to identify what is and isn't working, and to refine the sales system and help it move forward. In addition they understand that including the essential information and reporting on it regularly will keep the business running smoothly.

3. Better managers were good at finding, placing and inducting salespeople that best fit the company vision and mission

Effective hiring was another tool top performers possessed. These sales managers held a keen understanding that recruiting the right people is essential, and had a clearly outlined plan for hiring their salespeople. One way they ensured success was a holistic and fully integrated approach. This meant that the right people get hired and developed through having a cohesive set of tools that were aligned with each other.



➤ “Sales training is about creation not consumption” Anon

4. Top performers offered ongoing sales coaching and training

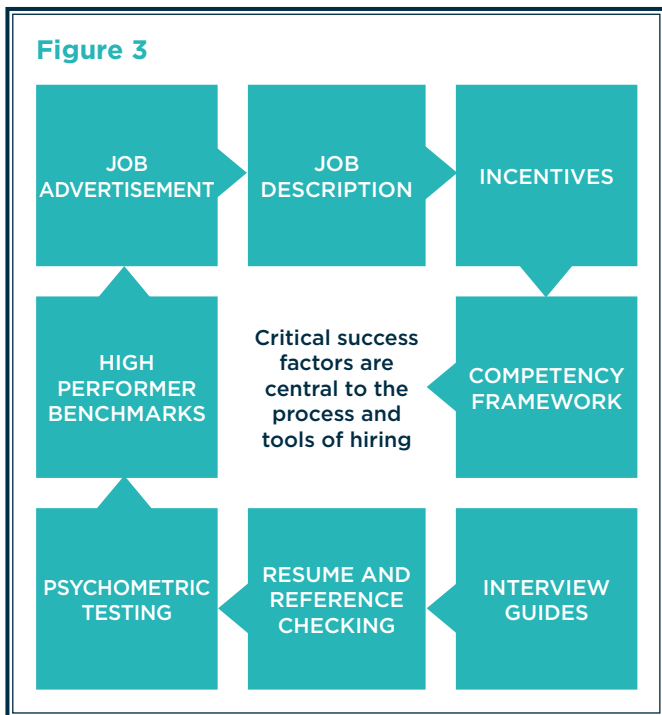
The better managers also made sales coaching and training ongoing. Through offering training and coaching, the manager helped their salespeople hone their skills. This advancement in skills in turn led to higher sales.

Additionally, the high performing sales manager had a valuable opportunity through training and coaching to get to know their salespeople on a deeper level and come to understand their world, their strengths and weaknesses, and whatever obstacles there were that stood between the salesperson and greater success. If a salesperson was consistently not reaching goals, high performers utilised this knowledge to reassess and reassign the roles of that salesperson. High performers valued the relationships built through training and coaching, as these help strengthen the sales team and increase sales.

5. High performers managed time, territory and forecasting effectively

Another way the top quartile managers strengthened the sales team and increased sales was through effective time management. Time management was an important part of every sales manager’s job, and high performers managed their time very effectively.

Territory management was also important, and was achieved in a number of ways. One way managers did this is by maintaining clearly defined territories.



Once a salesperson is recruited managers then focused on their induction program. To get the sales recruit up to speed quickly they focused training on the competencies that drove sales results.

High performers recognised several key advantages to clearly managing their territories to:

- Keep salespeople focused on their targets.
- Eliminate long and ineffective travel time, allowing the high performer to focus on sales instead of spending half the days travelling to various territories.
- Help build name recognition within the target area as well as build rapport for selling.
- Focus on making their individual sales approach more efficient.

In addition, the high performer utilised sales forecasting. Sales forecasting offered an idea of future sales and gave the high performing sales manager the power to effectively manage inventory and cash flow and to plan for future growth. The information obtained from sales forecasting allowed the manager to make intelligent business decisions in securing adequate resources for their sales teams to be successful.

6. The better managers held a strong understanding of planning

Top managers also understood the value of corporate planning and playing well with others. They knew that one of the best ways to align corporate strategy and tactics to sales activities is to involve the entire company in the sales strategy. Coordinating sales and marketing led to the delivery of exceptional service and happier customers. The high performer saw the value in developing a solid plan to ensure that these two groups work together effectively.

Steps considered in the development of this plan were:

- Knowing who they want to target. Both groups should understand who the ideal customer is, and the high performer tried to

meet marketing in this understanding.

- Working with marketing to define what a “lead” is. Top managers cultivated a meeting of the minds in this area by aiding in defining what a lead means.
- Figuring out why customers wanted to buy from their company and designing a content generation strategy to create things customers might be interested in.
- Sounding different and interesting. The better managers understood how to generate interest that worked with different personality types.

Further, they also managed sales by managing customers. The high performing sales manager did this effectively by first aligning the sales and purchasing processes. The manager worked with his or her team to ensure that sales messaging aligned with the buyer’s dilemmas.

Figure 3

The focus needs to remain on the customer and generating sales rather than completing tasks and projects



The high performing sales manager treated sales account management as a science, and focused on the following four main elements of account management:

1. Profitability management.
2. Account relationship.
3. Account planning and analysis
4. Creating actions for salespeople to execute.

7. High performing sales managers communicated well

Top quartile performers also possessed some personal skills that made them high performers. They were first and foremost an effective listener, which gave them the ability to better understand how the team was functioning, how sales were faring, and so on.

These managers understood the extent to which effective listening paid off. Understanding their sales staff as both employees and as people helped them come to a greater understanding of what it would take to help them succeed and in turn increase sales.

High performers also had the ability to work with different sales styles, and they understood how to meld these styles into a cohesive sales team.

This kind of manager understood how to present to his or her sales team in such a way that guided, and encouraged them to produce.

They understood that when a company's sales team flourished, the whole company flourished. The top sales manager focused on three main things that can be done to empower salespeople. These were:

1. Provided salespeople with automation of repetitive tasks so they spent time on what was important, such as building relationships and closing sales.
2. Provided salespeople with instant access to contact and other information. Trained them on CRM software and made all data easy to access.
3. Provided a cohesive and collaborative team environment.

In focusing on these three main empowerments, high performers effectively increased efficiency and rapport among team members, which led to higher sales.

Running an effective meeting helped the high performing sales manager motivate his or her sales team to achieve more. The best performers tried:

- Not to have too many meetings. High performers let their team get out there and do what they love to do: sell!
- Not to pack too much information into the meeting.
- Better managers worked to present their most important points at meetings, with the most urgent points being presented first.
- Not dominate the meeting. The high performing sales manager allowed his or her sales team to weigh in.
- To keep the meeting to an hour or less.

High Performing Sales Managers

Accela works with sales organisations designing and executing programs to create high performing sales environments and sales managers. If you would like to improve your sales managers or sales environment, we can help you.

➤ “Seek first to understand then to be understood”
Steven Covey

About Accela

Accela is an Australian owned company, established in 2005, renowned for exceptional sales management and leadership training, coaching and consulting. Accela has assisted many Australian blue chip and international companies realise their teams' full potential with a comprehensive range of development solutions. To complement their existing methodology, the Hub was created for clients to measure, report, manage and continuously drive faster, easier sales results.

Accela has over 30 accredited trainers and facilitators across Australia and New Zealand, and over 40 accredited local multi-lingual trainers across Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Tokyo, London, Frankfurt, Milan and Paris.



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