



# Leading Your Team to Success: Secrets to Next-Level Sales Management

Richard T. Cleary  
Hoopis Performance Network  
President – FSEdNet Division

Most people have at least one person in their past who inspired them to greatness they'd never imagined. A grade-school music teacher who saw a savant when teaching Beginner Recorder. A coach who spotted a potential future pro in the kid who showed up early and stayed late for every practice. A college professor who pulled the gifted math student aside to challenge her chess skills.

What all these scenarios have in common is an influential leader who inspired someone to do more than they'd ever dreamed they could.

A successful sales manager is that kind of leader

So let me ask you this: Are you a successful sales manager, or do you aspire to be? With this white paper, I want to inspire you to be the best sales manager possible. I want to challenge you to become the kind of leader who inspires a sales force to great success.

First, let's define the role of the sales manager. There are differing opinions on this topic. I'm often asked if a sales manager can also be a sales rep. While there are many examples of sales managers successfully carrying out the dual role of sales rep, for purposes of this paper, we are going to focus on dedicated sales managers with no direct sales responsibilities.

A Forbes article a few years back went so far as to say that successful sales reps often make lousy sales managers. I concur. This is because I believe the No. 1 role of a successful sales manager is to focus on the sales team, not on the customer.

## Successful Sales Managers Are Strong Leaders

If you have thought your most successful sales rep might make a good sales manager — or that your stellar sales record qualifies you for management — think again. The greatest numbers-driven, customercentric, goal-busting sales rep isn't necessarily a good leader.

And when it comes to sales management, good leadership is a non-negotiable requirement.

Some people have a natural gift for leadership. Others can learn it. Like every other skill, leadership requires practice. Being a great manager doesn't make you a great leader. Leadership is a skill unto itself. It must be studied and practiced.

The internet offers all kinds of opinions on the characteristics and habits of good leaders. When I'm working with sales managers (or aspiring sales managers), I look for the following 10 characteristics:

- 1. Vision** — Successful sales managers are always looking ahead and around. They're paying attention to the organization and the competition, thinking about constantly growing and improving, and fully open to healthy change.
- 2. Strategy** — They have analytical interests and abilities. They know how to use data to find flaws and how to fan the flames of success. They seek out problems early and focus on solutions.
- 3. Humility** — They are never haughty, always open to constructive criticism, and readily accessible and honest.
- 4. Honor** — They act with integrity, dignity and honor. Their reputation is above repute. They tell the truth while being kind and respectful.
- 5. Focus** — They are not easily distracted by the latest and greatest trend or the shiny new idea floating around. They plan patiently and execute with discipline.
- 6. Boldness** — They are brave and willing to take action, even if that action may make them unpopular.
- 7. Attractiveness** — I'm not talking about being good-looking, though that is never a negative. I'm talking about the kind of person other people admire and seek to be like. Their dress, posture, gait, communication style, reputation and relationships represent the ideal, and in doing so, motivates others to improve themselves.



- 8. Accessibility** — They are clear in their message and open to dialogue. Their team can access them by appointment or “open door” and know they will be heard. Clients know how to reach them, and know they can if a relationship with a sales professional goes sideways. Company leaders also know they can access them when needed.
- 9. Organization** — They prepare agendas before every meeting. They set goals and create a plan to achieve them. Their desk, car, clothes and life are tidy.
- 10. Positive attitude** — Successful sales managers have positive attitudes. They practice good habits, including self-care, and they approach even the worst problems with a positive outlook. They inspire others to be positive as well.

## Successful Sales Managers Nurture Their Teams

What is the responsibility of a sales manager? Is it to drive numbers? Ensure customer satisfaction or retention? Hire and fire a sales team? Report to the home office?

Yes, a sales manager is responsible for all those things, but there’s another, less easily defined, responsibility of a sales manager: to nurture—to further the development of, or foster, others.

While it’s critical to hire wisely, fire when needed, keep an eye on customer relations and achieve or exceed revenue goals, it’s equally critical to nurture the sales force.

You can nurture the growth of your team members by recognizing when they are bored, leading them to grow professionally, working with them to set and achieve goals, and asking for their input on decisions, when appropriate . Nurturing others involves many responsibilities:

- 1. Communication** — Clearly communicating with your team means conveying your message clearly, ensuring understanding and listening to feedback. The proverbial open-door policy is a hallmark of any strong manager. This is not to say that a



sales manager’s office should be a safe haven for complainers and trouble-makers. It shouldn’t. But it should be a place where members of the team can speak with you, ask questions, seek guidance, get your help in solving problems and receive mentoring that brings out their best selves.

- 2. Team building** — Hiring and firing strategically is an important role of a sales manager. I’m not sure who first said, “Hire slowly and fire quickly,” but that person was right. Poor performers — or worse, those with poor attitudes — are a cancer to an organization. For one, their lackluster performance requires more of the manager’s attention. For another, their weak numbers can have a negative impact on the overall sales force, dragging everyone’s numbers down.

Most damaging of all are the underachievers who make excuses for their performance or actively engage in a negative whisper campaign among colleagues.

A successful sales manager invests the time in strategic networking to attract, engage, interview, research and negotiate with top sales professionals. If you haven't seen my blog on using LinkedIn for recruiting. Other social networks, both online and in-person, are outstanding resources as well. Effective recruiting of top performers means the sales manager needs to be known everywhere those top performers are active, whether that's around town, throughout the country or all over the world.

**3. Managing the business** — Sales management isn't about numbers alone, though that's an important component. It's about managing the entire business. That includes forecasting and measuring results; setting goals; establishing quotas; defining territories; communicating with organizational leaders and customers; coaching employees; designing and overseeing training,

technique, messages and public relations; and of course, the functions discussed earlier.

When you consider the time and attention all that requires, it becomes increasingly clear why trying to wear the dual hats of sales manager and sales rep doesn't make much sense.

Would you think of raising a child without interacting with her? Could you maintain a strong marriage without listening to your spouse or spending quality time together? Could you keep a long-lasting friendship without listening to your friend in good times and bad? Of course not.

Successful sales managers actively nurture their sales teams. They spend time with the team, both collectively and individually. They care what's going on in their sales reps' lives and customer relationships. They are sensitive to the dreams, desires, likes and dislikes of their sales force.



Let me try to make this point with two real-world examples.

Sales Manager Amy loves golf. She golfed in college and was captain of her team. She belongs to a popular country club and has created a strong social network there. She speaks about golf and leadership at local businesses, clubs and schools. Many of the professionals on her sales team love to golf. All but Tyler. Tyler does not know how to golf and doesn't particularly enjoy it.

Tyler is a high-octane kind of athlete. He climbs rocks, kayaks in rapids and takes a HIIT class every morning before work. His sales performance is good, he meets and exceeds goals, and his customers like him.

There's just one problem: Amy is accessible when she's in the office, but she spends a lot of time on the golf course. If Tyler wants one-on-one time with Amy, he knows he can have it with her over 18 holes but probably not over lunch, and certainly not on the rocks or in the rapids.

The rest of the team doesn't mind that Amy is consumed by golf. After all, they like golf. But Tyler considers Amy's approach to be untenable and

insensitive. For that reason, Tyler probably won't stick around long if Amy remains his sales manager. Her lack of nurturing or consideration for his interests (and disinterest in golf) is probably going to cost her a topperforming sales rep.

Only time will tell, but my money says Tyler will be looking for a new sales job soon.

David is another sales manager with a looming problem on his hands: he does not like to be interrupted. That is understandable under many circumstances, but in his case, it's a bit extreme. He works with his door closed, holds meetings with everyone standing up (to discourage lingering and idle chatter, he says) and to ensure that there are no unplanned interruptions to his day.

David gets a lot of work done and impresses higherups with detailed reports, always submitted early. He keeps a busy schedule of community networking and has amassed an impressive social media following.

What David doesn't know is how this makes his sales team feel. They feel alienated, unheard and undervalued.





So while David might be plowing through reports without interruption, more than a few people on his sales team are looking online for a more nurturing place to work.

### Successful Sales Managers Inspire the Best from the Sales Team

The fact is, the most successful sales managers are those who bring out the best in their sales teams — the best production, the best morale, the best reputation in the community and the best overall retention.

If you're a sales manager, one way to know how you're doing is to measure yourself in those areas. If you're falling short of projections, finding yourself in conflict with more than one sales associate (or finding conflict among sales associates in general), having trouble attracting top talent to your team or losing new hires, you might need to take a hard look at where you can improve.

Remember, your key performance indicators (KPIs) are about your team's performance and your

management performance. KPIs can vary from one organization to another. For example, if you're managing a global sales operation, your KPIs will be different from those of a strictly local sales organization.

In general, I recommend taking a good, hard and honest look at your performance in these five core areas:

- 1. Activity** — This includes prospecting, appointments, presentations, promotions, time to close and new closes. You know the types of activity you need from your sales force to get the numbers you want. How well your team is doing in these areas tells you how well you're managing your team.
- 2. Team morale** — How's everyone getting along? Are those on your team friendly to one another, generally upbeat and supportive? Or are they bringing petty problems to you, complaining about a colleague or undermining one another's client relationships?

3. **Employee attrition** — This can be directly tied to morale, but it can also be tied to your hiring decisions. If you're experiencing too much employee churn, you need to find out why. It can be the result of a flawed hiring process.
4. **Client attrition** — Every sales manager knows how expensive it is to acquire a new client. Losing a client is even more expensive. Are your sales professionals attracting your ideal clients or swinging for the low-hanging fruit? A lost client is bad for business. Too many lost clients can indicate poor sales management.
5. **Growth** — Are most or all of your sales professionals growing their business, quarter over quarter and year over year? Are they improving their ratios? Are they taking the time to continue their education and training, such as pursuing industry designations? Are they participating in team and organizational events, growing their social media following, and attending and perhaps leading social and business networking events? If your people aren't growing, you need to find out what you can do differently to help them grow.

### Successful Sales Managers Resist the Urge to Micromanage

Because sales managers' compensation is tied to how many sales their teams make, they are highly motivated to ensure that their salespeople produce at high levels. That's great, but it often leads to a scenario where they micromanage the sales team, hanging over their shoulders and constantly asking for updates. This is especially common with former top-producing salespeople. They want to feel like

they're in control of every situation, especially when it comes to their own salaries.

But most salespeople are self-motivated and don't respond well to this type of oversight. Their performance will probably suffer if they are micromanaged. This can lead to a vicious cycle where the sales manager becomes more and more frantic as the team fails to meet quotas. Sales management is a balancing act between providing guidance and direction without taking personal involvement to extremes. People tend to work best when they are provided with their marching orders but then are left to execute their jobs on their own.

### Achieving Next-Level Sales Management Success

Not everyone is cut out for sales management, just as not everyone is cut out for sales. And being a stellar sales rep certainly doesn't guarantee you'll be a successful sales manager.

Successful sales managers are strong leaders. They're inspirational, they're focused on their team and they're focused on the business.

If you're a sales manager or looking to make the leap to sales management, your secret to achieving sales management success comes down to you. Can you lead your team to becoming its best, individually and collectively? Are you committed to ongoing education and training, open-door communication, leaderly oversight, faithful mentoring, maintaining a pristine reputation and diligently tracking metrics?

If your answers to those questions are yes, then you just might have what it takes to achieve next-level sales management success.

Helping sales managers and sales teams achieve next-level success is what we do best at Hoopis Performance Network. If you think we can help you step into a sales management role or step up your sales management results, give us a call or contact us here to schedule a free consultation. We'll do everything we can to help you reach next-level sales management success.