

But I Wasn't Hired To Be A Sales Manager!

by Barbara Sanfilippo and Bob Romano

Banks all over the country are spending thousands of dollars to put employees through extensive sales training. The employees return to the branch eager to sell. But they soon find little has changed.

In a way, the wrong person receives the training. A manager who is self-motivated and people-oriented -- and who understands how to manage a sales team -- can do more for your bank's bottom line than a whole flock of sales-trained employees. With a little sales management training, your managers can be the driving force in your sales effort.

Therefore, this article will outline the true value and duties of a sales manager.

Training

A bank sales manager provides training in the four top concerns of a salesperson: Product knowledge, potential customers for products, the bank's competition and sales skills.

Product training is continuous and works best when presented at a set time each week or month. Whatever the format, several facets are included: the product's features, benefits to the customer, cues and opportunities, open-probing questions and typical objections. Providing technical information alone is not enough -- your people need the sales information.

The sales manager involves the team in keeping an eye on competitors. Each officer or Customer Service Representative may be assigned to monitor a specific competitor by collecting the bank's sales literature, clipping pertinent ads and articles and personally shopping the competition. The staff reviews its findings at a monthly competition meeting and maintains a binder or board where results and progress are collected for future use.

The actual sales training can take several approaches, depending on the bank's resources. Some institutions have formal sales training programs. In other cases, the manager may conduct the training or bring in an outside consultant. Role playing -- having one employee act the part of the customer and another play the banker -- is used whenever possible and demonstrated by your manager.

Coaching

When evaluating in-house sales staff -- such as new accounts officers, platform officers and tellers -- the manager can observe the employees' efforts and then offer coaching and feedback. On customer calls, your manager can offer pre-call planning and accompany your officer to observe the calls, taking care not to take over the call. Afterwards, your manager and officer debrief on strengths and weaknesses to improve.

Having seen your officer in action, your manager may decide that improvement is needed. This is where coaching comes in. From our experience most calling officers need better pre-call planning

and practice in determining needs and probing on calls.

After reviewing tracking reports, your manager must determine why the employee isn't performing satisfactorily. Does the employee know their performance is below par? Are obstacles beyond the employee's control hindering their efforts? Does the employee know how to reach their goals?

Setting and tracking goals

Your sales managers must set realistic, achievable goals for all staff with sale responsibility. Goals can be expressed in several ways; dollars of new business, numbers of new accounts or ratios of sales per customer. Additional goals may be set for prospecting efforts, such as a weekly quota of minimum outside visits and phone calls. Depending on the bank, the goals may apply to tellers, new accounts representatives, officers and/or managers. .)

Once goals are set, results are tracked and publicized. Posting results in a highly visible way, such as on a central bulletin board, often is a booster. Sales may be tracked in several ways. Many reputable firms provide sales tracking software and others offer paper-based tracking systems.

Recognition and reward

We mentioned earlier that employees showing only slight improvement need encouragement. But don't forget that top performers mean the most to your bank's revenue and deserve special recognition. Besides annual bonuses, a wide variety of tangible incentives can be offered -- extra vacation days, a roving trophy, gift certificates, for example. Something as simple as public praise at sales meetings also may be important.

Exclusive sales and achievement clubs are an excellent vehicle to provide continuing recognition. Clubs are commonly used in many sales organizations such as Xerox Corporation, New York Life Insurance, Coldwell Banker. They work best when applied bank wide or to a particular group of branches. In this approach, targets can be set for each team or group of employees. When individuals reach the threshold for their group, they automatically join the club and receive special perks and recognition. To maintain a standard of excellence, the threshold is difficult, but not impossible. For example, any officer reaching \$400,000 in loans per quarter, is a member of the Silver Club and \$500,000, the President's Club.

Organization and follow-up

Another prime role of a sales manager is to help the sales staff be organized.

Successful sales managers require their staffs to maintain active tickler files or contact management reports on all prospects and customers. By requiring sales employees to plan outside calls in advance and follow a systematic call report process, the manager keeps close tabs on staff activity. These processes also assist the manager in offering appropriate advice and encouragement.

Sales meetings

One of the most important roles of the sales manager -- and the one that bankers seem to understand the least -- is running sales meetings. When conducted properly, sales meetings provide tremendous learning and motivation.

Sales meetings are held at least twice a month and weekly meetings are even better. A sales meeting might include the following:

1. A review of goals and progress to date
2. A review of individual performance, using a comparative chart of staff and officers' results
3. A "sell and tell" session, in which staff share success stories and frustrations
4. A role-playing practice session for probing questions or handling objections
5. A relevant guest speaker, such as a bank customer
6. A product knowledge quiz
7. Selections from motivational book or tapes
8. Recognition and rewards

The meeting ends on an upbeat note with recognition whenever possible. A sales manager wants team members to leave feeling excited about the goals set for them and armed with the tools and motivation to do so.

Conclusions

An accomplished sales manager is worth their weight in gold. A CEO is well advised to provide sales management training for their managers. Please keep in mind, however, that "unwillingness to change the players" or trying to create a sales manager from someone with little natural ability are two common pitfalls to avoid. To boost your efforts, focus on identifying your key sales managers and give them the resources to succeed!

Barbara Sanfilippo, CSP, CPAE is a keynote speaker, author and consultant specializing in [sales training](#), service and motivation.