

# Sales Management Development

coping with the changing complexity of the everyday sales situation

Leroy G. Cogle

Change is a significant factor of life in every business today. The ability to master and deal with change has become an important factor in sales management development. Today's sales manager faces an important, yet baffling dilemma . . . how to sell maximum product volume and to recover maximum dollars, while controlling the cost of distribution, to adequately service the product in such a way that builds the company and product reputation. In our changing socio-economic environment these objectives can be challenging and frustrating to the sales manager.

To accomplish the effort, sales managers must achieve their objectives through individuals, through concerted team effort, through effective control mechanisms and through organizational leadership. The changing complexity of the everyday sales situation requires individual as well as combined group efforts. Sales managers are often charged, not only with the responsibility for writing business volume, but also controlling the business in terms of recovery on the sales, expense of securing the sales and maintaining

sound customer relations which leads to increased, sustained organizational growth. Sales managers achieve their objectives by developing and applying the capacities of the people under their direction. The sales manager must practice the techniques of securing objectives through group effort directed toward the basic purpose of the existence of the organization, earning an adequate profit on the invested capital.

Sales managers are charged with comprehensive, stimulating and challenging circumstances. Yet, as they are promoted from selling, to supervising, to managing, they recognize that the jobs of selling and managing are not necessarily the same, and do not call for the same skills. Competence as a salesperson is no guarantee of management success.

Salespersons promoted to the job of managing are often expected to perform the management role with little or no development. When jobs of selling and managing are not properly differentiated in the promotion-selection process, there tends to be a self-perpetuation cycle of management. Not

only are managers expected to behave as salespersons, but their replacements are selected on the basis of selling ability and continue to receive little or no management training and development. This pattern of inadequate management development tends to perpetuate any ineffectiveness of the sales management organization.

Today's sales managers will be tomorrow's top sales executives, and, in all probability, will continue the cycle under which they were developed. It may well be that they know of no other pattern to follow in developing their subordinates.

Any sales management training effort should be directed toward developing a better understanding of the job of managing and administering the sales effort. It should also attempt to provide knowledge of the concepts, approaches and methods that can best be utilized by the sales managers when performing their managerial function.

The sales management development effort should also attempt to develop an awareness and ability to cope with the changing environmental factors which impact on the

organization, its product, and the sales manager's job. Finally, the sales management training effort should provide a framework for continuing study and development of the manager.

### Influential Variables

The sales management training effort will be influenced by the following variables: the manager being trained, based on the personal characteristics which that manager brings into the sales management training situation; the immediate associates and the interpersonal relationships which the manager has established among subordinates, peers and superiors, which will be influenced by the formal, as well as the informal role expectations and group values of the individuals involved; the task assigned to the sales manager and the behavior change

which should result from the program will be an important influencer in determining the effectiveness of the sales training effort; and finally, the organization with its formal and informal authority structure, work environment and control system.

If the variables influencing any sales management training activity are accepted as the personal skills, the interpersonal skills, the task skills, and organizational skills of the manager involved, one can develop a general sales management training strategy focusing on strengthening any or all of these skill areas. As we examine these specific skill areas, it will be seen that virtually anything which impinges on the exercise of sales management can be subsumed within one of these areas. Virtually anything that impinges upon the exercise of effective management

can be identified and included within one of these areas.

Personal skills are those attitudinal and motivational dimensions and areas of general knowledge which accrue to any sales manager through the normal education and socialization processes. The general appearance and stature of the sales manager can be classified as a personal skill. The sales manager's personal code of ethics, though not specifically measurable, is manifested in daily managerial activities and behaviors. What is generally considered to be one's general attitude toward life, such as enthusiasm, initiative, loyalty and perseverance would all be included under the set of personal skills.

A salesperson observing the sales manager in action develops insights into the personality of the sales manager, and these insights will greatly influence the salesper-

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fluence sales. They can create favorable buying attitudes by the image they create of the company and the product through personal activities, by use of advertising and promotional materials, and perhaps, by manipulation of the terms of the sale.

Not only do the interpersonal skills of the sales manager strengthen the selling skills of the sales force, but they also help identify and bring along for advancement those unusual individuals with management potential. This aspect of sales management development can be viewed as *vertical loading* as opposed to *horizontal loading*. Sales managers are in the ideal position to watch for promising candidates, but must be cautious of building a sales management team built on their own images.

Management potential is hard to measure and reasonable judgments require considerable periods of personal contact. Sales managers must recognize that in their interpersonal relations with their sales force, they greatly influence their attitudes, knowledge and work habits. Whether they choose to or not, sales managers are constantly affecting the salesperson's ability to succeed.

### Motivational Effect

The task skills are those developed by the manager within the sales management development program. The manager can also develop these task skills as a result of prior experience. However, the development of the skills is the responsibility of the employing organization. While motivation might be thought of as a personal skill, it might be worthwhile to consider motivation as an aspect of task skill development.

In general, it can be accepted that for a given increment of motivation there is a more positive effect on the performance of sales managers high in their managerial

ability, rather than those low in managerial ability. Motivated sales managers, when given the skills and knowledge to perform the task in a specified manner, but denied the full opportunity to employ the task skills, and perhaps provided negative feedback which might adversely affect their original motivation, will perform less positively than sales managers given the opportunity to perform their task skills.

For this reason, it behooves the superior to specifically identify those task skills and knowledge related to them in such a way that allows the sales manager to develop an adequate level of performance within the task skills.

Some of these task skills might include: the maintenance function within the organization to maintain the quality standards required of the salesperson; the selection and the training of the sales force; implementation of company plans and policies; supervision through direction, motivation and control; administration of the office and sales force; and related general duties expected of the sales manager. The development of these task skills must be based on the organizational as well as the sales manager's needs. It behooves the superior to provide the techniques and training strategy best suited to the particular sales manager . . . consistent with the prevailing climate within the organization.

As a part of the task skills development, the training program must be stated in objectives which are operational and which suggest the operation's necessity for results. The objectives should also provide some means to measure the accomplishment of the sales manager during his or her task skills development process. At the same time, the objectives must be directed and geared toward the needs of the organization. The objectives should be coordinated, not only with the development objec-

tives of the sales manager, but also with the overall developmental objectives of the organization.

### "Ideal Climate"

The ideal climate for developing the sales manager can be thought of as one in which the objectives for development are clearly identified and understood at all levels within the organization and within the development process. Also, that the basic principles, intentions, beliefs and assumptions of upper management are communicated and understood by the sales manager. That responsibility and authority is delegated to the sales manager in order to promote challenge, and allow him or her to profit from any mistakes through guidance from superiors.

Controls are established so that sales managers can periodically review their own development process. Current managerial practices do not conflict with the sales manager's development program. The management must accept the responsibility for the development efforts of the sales manager. Merely sending the sales manager to training programs, outside seminars and workshops, and expecting change and improvement to occur, is not sufficient.

Top management must realize and accept that improved performance within the development effort is not likely to result if top management does not take an active part in the sales management development program, especially in the area of developing those task skills necessary to perform the job functions. It is the responsibility of upper management to identify those task skills and behaviors which are critical to the success of the sales manager's performance.

In carrying out its role, the organization relies on the individual inputs which relate closely to personal skills, task inputs which relate to task skills, and organization inputs which are those elements that rely on the organizational en-

purpose and direction, selling ability, sympathetic understanding, enthusiasm, tact, and faith.

In addition, the manager brings to the job personal needs, a need for security, attention, acceptance, status, association, responsibility, accomplishment, friendship and righteousness.

### Education vs. Success

Upper management is increasingly recognizing that the best salespersons do not necessarily make the best sales managers, and that selling and managing require different skills and abilities. However, many managers are being selected for promotion to sales manager based on their character traits and sales success.

"Typical" character traits ascribed to salespeople since the early days of the hard sell have been found to have little basis in reality. Those traits which make for success in sales management are the same as those traits which win the approval of employers in other occupations. In some cases, we find a high degree of emphasis on the level of education. There seems to be limited significance or correlation between level of education and sales success. Education will assist the sales manager in adjusting and accepting the training and development he or she will receive.

Sales managers must attempt to update their formal education in some way by achieving: an appreciation of the quantitative methods used in business today; an exposure to the social and behavioral sciences necessary to work with people and better understand subordinate behavior; and an understanding of the other functions of the business, especially finance and production.

The sales management development effort will not be to change these needs, drives and characteristics, but to build on them by developing a realistic and comprehensive training and development

effort by strengthening those characteristics which the individual has which contribute to the overall success of the organization sales effort. The point to remember in dealing with the personality skills, is to clearly identify those skills which are necessary to effectively manage the sales effort and which are important to the sales management structure, but not to try to develop a training program to develop, modify or replace any of the personality skills which the individual brings to the sales management situation.

### Interpersonal Skills

Sales managers are responsible for more than establishing positive attitudes among their salespeople. They are important contributors to the salesperson's knowledge of selling techniques, product, work organization and work habits. Ordinarily, a salesperson's ability depends a great deal on the efforts of the sales manager. Some companies run formal training courses and expose their salespeople to lectures, seminars, demonstrations, etc. Even in these circumstances, the sales manager, if he or she is not, in fact, conducting the training program, has a great deal to do with the individual and eventual success of the formal training through interpersonal actions with the salespeople. The sales manager must give support to the sales techniques learned in the training, and must follow up in the initial training with on-the-job coaching. It takes time to develop skills to learn product adaptations and improvement, and to practice new presentation procedures — and, all along the way, the sales manager is the key element.

Sales managers contribute to the development of the salesperson's work habits. They also have the responsibility of providing proper field service to the salesperson. Equally important, sales managers can personally in-

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In carrying out its role, the organization relies on the individual inputs which relate closely to personal skills, task inputs which relate to task skills, and organization inputs which are those elements that rely on the organizational en-

environment and interpersonal skills practiced by the members of the organization. It is the interaction of these elements which determines the effectiveness of the organization and of the sales management development effort.

### Summary

This article has attempted to identify the need for personal skills, interpersonal skills, task skills and organizational skills in the development of the sales manager. The personal skills are those attitudes and motivations which the individual brings to the sales management job. The interpersonal skills are those behaviors which relate specifically to the interaction the sales manager has with other members of the organization, and with persons outside the organization. Task skills are those behaviors that deal specifically with the technical competence of the sales manager. Organization skills are knowledge and abilities that allow the sales manager to function within the organization. No sales management development effort can be successful without taking into account all four factors. In each area, the superior must identify the important ingredients to be developed and provide a climate and strategy for developing them.

In order to adequately manage the sales force, the sales manager must understand the organization variables and the philosophy existing within the managerial structure. The demands that the various managerial roles make upon an individual may be harmonious and confident with each other or they may be in conflict. In conflict situations, the organizational effectiveness, as well as the well-being of the sales manager, are placed in jeopardy. It therefore behooves the organization to make certain that the sales manager, as part of his or her development process, understands the philosophies and concepts practiced within the

organization.

Any work organization is an open system consisting of the patterned activities of a number of individuals engaged in transactions within their surrounding environment. These transactions were discussed in an earlier article in this journal relating to transactional analysis. The organizational system operates within a given boundary which separates it from its environment. The organization takes inputs from its environment and carries these out by way of the sales manager. The organization collects information about its market, its competitors, etc., and analyzes the information, makes decisions about the quality, quantity and price of the product, and passes these decisions through to the

sales manager. All of these are a part of the organizational environment, and if the sales manager is to succeed, he or she must understand the meaning, place and utility of each, as they apply to him or her and to the total environment.

Leroy G. Cogle, Ph.D., is president of Associated Training Systems, Libertyville, Ill. Prior to forming his own consulting firm approximately six years ago, he worked for several major corporations in the area of training and organization and development. Associated Training Systems provides services to client companies in the full range of training and organization development. He has provided sales training consulting assistance to major companies. In addition to ASTD, he is also a member of NSPI.

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