

Leverage Leadership Skills and Break through Sales Management Today a Literature Review

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Abstract: Finding and keeping talented and effective sales leader who can persistently drive up sales target is not an easy task. Most of businesses today are results oriented as such; they real pose a demand for effective sales leaders who is talented and energetic and risk takers. Failure to consider sales leadership traits during recruitment process has a greater chance to bring some challenges in executing daily sales task of the leader. Moreover, breaking through sales may be cost full if poor investment is dedicated to training and development of authentic sales management leadership.

Keywords: Effective sales leadership, Coaching, personality traits for sales job, Commercial competence for sales people.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is the capability to inspire others in the direction of attaining mutual ends by endowing those powers to accomplish the ends (Sherman, 1995). Leadership is all about being rational, making strategic decisions, taking prompt actions and doing thoroughly analysis. Cashman (1998), once said, "Who you are can easily be manifested by your leadership" and therefore, effective leadership is not all about attributes rather it is driven by results (Drucker, 1986). Business markets are evolving tremendously today calling for one to be sharp in grasping the markets opportunities by creating them rather, than waiting for opportunities to come from nowhere, and this is a task of great leadership. Mostly, business success is a result of effective sales management practices derived by effective sales manager. A good number of sales managers all over the world are struggling to find proper ways for crushing out their sales targets, managing sales territories, improving each team member performance, hiring and retaining potentials sales representatives (Wang, 2017). The finest answer for this is one to cultivate unique leadership skill and highly invest in your sales force, by doing so, you will empower yourself through their contributions and become a star although this is not always true (Sales Readiness Group, 2016). Businesses looking for super performance have to transform their sales activities into entrepreneurial perspectives by improving in strategic sales leadership, as Rosen (2019) said; there are three main factors in raising prosperous sales managers in today's businesses is based on: -one assisting them, second is coaching them and thirdly is having understanding of issues in them. Effective sales leaders are those who are not passionate with their personal issues, care much about their rather they are change oriented, flexible, have ethical values and confident (Samet and Nihat, 2016).

Managing sales activities traditionally possess a huge challenge to sales managers demanding them to shift to the current trends which affect Sales management including responding to behavior forces, Managerial forces and technological forces that has paved the way to social media channels which now calls for sales manager again to undergo developing leadership skills that will match with the trending issues in this arena (Lacmanović, 2010). Persistent increase in business competition, the ever rising of customer demands and expectations and the complexities of product produced has paved way for sales managers to think of new way of selling called consultative or relationship selling which now poses a demand for reliable but also honest leaders to undertake sales activities. Customers have become more sensitive on how reliable and honest the sales representatives are, due to the behavior tendency of pushing customers towards closing sales. Customers hate sales people who are pushing to reach their ends goal of meeting targets. Sales managers have to teach their sales representative to do their sales activities by considering quality and quantity factor, the big challenge today is, most sale representatives have the tendency of focusing just on quantity and forgetting about the quality of customers their recruits, example in the banking sector the lending business is highly challenged by this problem that is why most of banks ends up with poor loans repayment. Loan officers (sales representatives) fail to assess customer behaviors properly because they are not endowed in doing assessment leading them to poor quality of loans generated but at the same time attaining good numbers of their targets (Chakrabarty et al., 2008; Shannahan et al., 2012).

Motivations for investing in your sales managers today

Companies have to understand that, sales managers are super role models to sales representatives as sales representatives attitude towards their work and behaviors are molded by their sales managers taking into account the challenges experienced by reps of attending anticipated and numerous customer needs (Nonis & Sager, 2003), as well as working alone with minimal supervision (DeCarlo and Leigh 1996). It is believed that, employees have the tendency of reacting positively towards their leader behavior (Jaramillo et al., 2009) therefore, they need to invest much to their sales managers to assist them in overcoming the problem of generating lead by having a tailor made development programs that will cater for specific problems. Hence, the investment is indispensable (Schenk, 2016). Among those motives are:-

Sales managers' drives output from productivity, they manage sales process, transform sales representatives to management level, assume the greater role of harmonizing business, people and customer's needs. Sales manager does vibrating coaching role to their sales representative; hence, they play a transformation role. Sales managers are the lead generator and finally sales managers have great influence towards the success of investment made to sales representative (Schenk, 2016).

Choosing the right personality traits for sales leaders

Hiring good performers in sales leadership is not a trivial task and may be a little bit demanding as it is one of the strategic decisions that will drive a business or a company towards attaining their strategic goals as well as differentiating themselves from their competitors. The decision to use personality test in determining individual performance during recruitment and hiring time has been very much undermined or ignored due to the fact that, its contribution towards job performance has not been sensitized to that extent due to fact that, its contribution towards job performance is not vividly seen and in turn other factors like knowledge, ability, skills, and experience have been put forward than personality in selecting sales leaders (Burmam & Konig, 2011; Qureshi, 2015). Today, among the megatrends affecting sales management is behavioral forces that include buyers' attitudes and favorites, these behaviors are fluctuating, necessitating alteration of selling strategies and tactics. Behavior changes in buyers have led to over rising of customer demands and expectations that has called for management to have better and effective selection of sales personnel who have exact personality characters that can interrelate soundly. Building customer relationship will also depend with how interactive the environment is between the customer and the one who is serving him/her. The human touch has a great role in determining today's customer satisfaction; therefore there is a need of finding a good fit between sales leaders and customer which can be achieved through proper personality selection process. Before it was believed that, agreeableness and extrovert-intuitive-thinker-judger personality was good in sales leadership as they can plan and make sound decisions, prefers working in groups, trustful and fair have enduring view, supportive, very considerate and tolerates others (Abdullah, Rashid & Omar 2013; Colorlib, 2015). Today, people believe on ambiverts personality as being more effective in the field of salesmanship due to fact that, they can listen and talk flexibly, they are aggressive enough and very passionate in closing sales (Grant, 2012), and this personality has both characters of introvert and extrovert. Businesses have been advised to pay a big attention to personality characteristics and once ability of being coached because these two factors determine individual competence of being transformed into leadership positions (Shannahan, Bush, & Shannahan, 2013).

Insight to become an effective Sales Manager today through Coaching

Designing effective coaching programs and investing in it is somehow tough though, it yield good output that will always take the sales leader to high peaks of performance. Effective coaching today demands crafting and developing of sales management skills of managers and designing a culture that will help sales representatives to achieve their forthcoming goals. So sales managers can:-

- Teach your sales representatives to execute distinctive value that have not been grabbed by competitors to differentiate themselves and being cost sensitive by building competitive advantage blocks which are efficiency, quality, innovation and customer responsiveness (Clulow et al., 2003)
- Do effective coaching to drive high performance.
- Design aggressive sales team.
- Practice *GO TO MARKET slogan*, this will help a sales manager to understand challenges in the market know the strength and weakness of the reps, opportunities available and making strategic decisions with reliable information.
- Instill the mindset of asking what and why to your sales representatives rather than the mindset of asking how and when.
- Inculcate flexibility towards accepting changes and change in behavior
- Optimize your sales representatives' strengths by having an effective coaching plan.
- Find the best way to instill a sense of responsibility as well as maintain and transforming your sales representatives so that they can feel as being a part of you.

- Experience them in executing strategic decisions in sales.
- Teach them to do sales analysis and manage their time and territories
- Persistently, teach your sales representatives to avail chances among themselves to cultivate leadership skills
- Teach your sales representatives the culture of responding promptly to customer demand as well as knowing where customers are.
- Support your sales representatives without prejudices as they get to higher sales management levels.
- Coach your people to execute the sales process that is highly featured by emotional turbulences. (Rosen, 2019).
- Stop critiquing your sales reps in front of customers. This is an old way of managing your reps as this will demoralize them and lower their morale (Cargil, 2015).

Commercial competence of Sales representatives that needs to be addressed

Sales representatives need to know about materials to be used to fight against competitors in trade. Managing exterior signage of the outlets by doing away of things that are not needed like outdated graphics, not to allow competitors brands and signage to dominate, replacing damaged signage, do away with cluttering of posters and make sure that the signage or posters are current and are in ideal position as well as regular check for product availability. Executing promotion at the right time with right mechanisms is also important aspect of commercial competence of sales representatives. These competencies will only be gained by sales reps from their sales managers (Schultz, 2018).

Roles of sales representatives

- Sales representatives have to be taught to execute sales activities by their sales manager who does management of sales activities. And this is the major difference between the two which is also not well understood. Sales representatives are the one to do what the company has promised to its customers.
- Enhancing business for value addition to their customers
- To understand varied consumer needs, occasions and promotion tools
- Sales representatives have to know how they can build desire for their products through in trade activities based on consumer insight and brand relevance.
- Lastly is to build image of the company.

Pillars of Sales representatives

When undertaking sales activities sales representative have to adhere to the following pillars that will always guide them.

- Sales representatives have to adhere to professionalism
- Values driven by not been arrogant, have good morals and maintaining confidential information (Sullivan et al., 2012)
- Preference for actions like enjoy having excitements, humors, passionate for the company, familiarity with everyone in the outlet, have a sense of ownership, helpful and being decisive
- Understand customer business, help and advise them

Sales managers have to help their sales representatives to understand their competitors profile and activities as well as the trade and consumer needs.

Reasons as to why sales managers have to makes sales representatives understand the value of promotion

- Promotions help building relationship, build and rewards loyalty to customers
- Help to establish competitors gap
- Leverage sponsorship programs
- Enhance brand visibility
- Promotions creates brand awareness and trial
- Promotions increase volume and market share

For promotions to be meaningful, they need to have objective, a well-crafted strategy, an action plan, budget and lastly is to evaluate for the purpose of knowing what has to be improved and what were the success factor. An effective sales manager will also help sales representative understand the types of customers patronizing the outlet he/she is promoting. By insight a sales representative has to understand the demographic characteristics of the customers, what attract customers to the outlet, brand repertoire on average, consumer segment falling into the outlet and if customer profile is the same throughout the week as well as knowing what are the popular and non-popular brand in the outlet.

Segmenting consumers

Today, businesses are highly experiencing markets fragmentation which has now called for sales managers to see the importance to segment consumers so that you can serve them well. Yes, behavior of consumers will differ between outlets. Example, a sales representative dealing with beverages will meet with these customer segment given below:- There are seven segments which are (1) Bulk Breakers with age ranges between 20-40 years, they like doing blue color works, they take drinks at the end of the day, they stay in rural areas and have big families. They like taking strong alcoholic drinks that resemble the value of their money and likes staying in crowds. (2) Mission town have age ranging from 30-40, these are people trying to make their life being better, and they don't have stable income. (3) Sun Shine Crown are those with ages between 20-30 years, they are young professionals who have been to school and they believe that, one day they will make it in life, they like fun (Outgoing). (4) Solid and Settled; their ages ranges from 35-55 years. They always talk of their country economy and poses arguments on political issues, they feel they are very successful and like staying in local bars. They are connected to the Government system; they are confident and always complain on tax payment. (5) Passive Escapist; these are customers who do not work; they like staying with friends and have expectation that one day they will win in their life struggle. They feel that, the government has to play role in their life. (6) Old timers; most of them works with government and they dream a lot of the past. This people like to be respected and seek recognition from people. They drink very irregular but they like drinking. (7) Rural Joes; they are typically older and aged between 60 and above, they live in extended families and are farmers. They generate income from their farming and they use local brewers. They like staying in outlet called KIJWENI where they sale beer and local brewers together and they prefer using benches. It is important for to understand consumer behavior as some of products purchases are affected by age and individual or group habits.

Business value chain

Sales representatives need to understand the value of business value chain in order to succeed in sales performance, from the point of production to sales and distribution up to outlets and ultimately to the disposal point. This will not be possible unless the sales leader is effective enough in coaching his/her sales representatives. Understanding business value chain will help to manage cost, volume and price relationship of the business (Roko and Opusunju, 2016). To a larger extent, business value chain creation is a part that is still undermined by most of sales representatives who are not aware of its value to their daily business operations. Sales leaders and sales representatives have to keep in mind that, business value chain is a fundamental part of strategic sales management today.

Major reasons as to why some sales managers fail to perform well

Wrong choice of a sales manager (Kryscynski, 2012)

Scant sales management skills

Poor orientation to customer relationship

The fusion of sales, marketing, and financial knowledge is unsatisfactory

They fail to create opportunities

Developing Sales Managers for future conquest

To flourish in coming periods, sales managers will have to pay attention on the following:

- Adopt to consultative selling and cement their relation with customers to optimal level
- Handle your sale representatives as your kids
- Use creative motivational mechanism in managing sales diversity
- Keep in touch with technological changes (sales automation)
- Quick response to emergent of social media channels
- Be able to come up with vibrating strategies
- Find the best ways to surpass customer expectations

Contemporary defies facing sales managers in managing sales activities today

- Leading sales team that is not endowed in dealing with difficulties and instead sales managers have become the paramount solvers of difficulties arising (Behar, 2019).
- Retaining and finding talented representatives with right sales traits that can assist in achieving sales quota is also a problem (Kryscynski, 2012).
- How to design and train a sales team (Tebeian, 2012).
- What is the best way to compensate sales representatives given their fragile working environment (Crumpton, 2013)
- What is the best-selling strategy to use?
- Been reactive coacher rather than proactive coacher.

- Generating qualified leads is a problem
- Strategic decisions require more time like allocating resources for sales activities to deliver value
- The aspiration to win extra sales proposals from existing and new customers is confronted by competitor
- Competing with low price competitors
- Too many competitors
- Fragmented markets have made customer loose interest
- Reshaping organization culture to upkeep consultative selling
- Hard time to cut back training and instead look for readymade sales representative who are hard to find
- The risk of losing existing potential customer is also high
- Managing customer profile
- How to impart adaptive negotiation skills to sales reps
- How sales manager can differentiate their offers in the market given the fact that, today's customers are looking for products and services with lower prices.
- A big failure to recognize that, leadership is responsibility and not a job as it is used (Deloitte LLP, 2014; Estis & Macpherson, 2018).

II. CONCLUSION

With the changing environment specifically in sales management, the traditional responsibility placed by sales managers has changed to more relationship building between sales representatives and management (Piercy & Lane, 2009; Flaherty et al., 2012). To be an effective strategic sales leader, at one time you will need to give your sales representatives opportunities to learn so as to prepare them towards personal life and work, moreover, companies have to invest through their sales leaders by training and developing them into the *coaching culture* for gigantic and better results as the sales leader will impart the knowledge and skills to his/her sales team widely as compared to individual investment that would have been made to sales reps. For effective sales management, training and development of sales managers should not be confined to coaching and leading skills only, rather, it should also put emphasis on managing different management roles (Vazzana & Jordan, 2012) as well as build the block of competitive advantage to their sales reps. So, successful sales management will always depend on how far the business has gone by investing in their sales leaders who on the other way can forego their personal interest and hold tight hands to their sales representatives and gain better results (Dalton, 2016).

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