

# Managing your manager

How to work effectively with your sales manager

Last month's quiz, "How good is your manager", generated a number of interesting responses. There was one person who realised that they had possibly the worst manager in the industry, but many reported a good working relationship with someone who was struggling.

You have to have some pity for sales managers. The majority were successful salespeople suddenly thrust into a completely new role, with little or no training. If they are to be successful then they need to be managed effectively. Mostly, that means being managed by the people with whom they have most contact – their salespeople.

I have been conducting workshops with sales teams on the topic of how account managers can manage resources, and have been placing increased emphasis on how to manage your manager. The key points that have emerged are as follows.

**Treat them with respect.** They deserve it, and if they don't deserve it they believe that they deserve it.

**No surprises.** Unexpected news, such as changes to the forecast or other unexpected issues, are a big problem for sales managers. Not only will they disrupt a busy schedule, they need to be explained to his boss and he can potentially lose confidence that he is on top of the business (all surprises are bad news for a manager, but obviously good news is not so much of a problem as bad news).

**Be open and honest.** It is a waste of everyone's time otherwise. You may be able to pull the wool over their eyes for a short period, but eventually you will get found out, destroying all trust that you have built up.

**Don't treat them as being stupid.** Like all of us they will make silly decisions occasionally, but there is at least some good in them, otherwise they would not have got the job.

**Delegate upwards effectively.** Make sure that they are very clear about what you have asked them to do, by when, and that they have actually accepted the delegated task. You can take out one of two



insurance policies – do and tell, where they are going to do something and then tell you that they've done it; or ask and do, where they will prepare the ground but check with you before taking action.

**Give them feedback.** Without feedback everyone will stop doing things for you. Sales managers need feedback just like everyone else. Give them praise when they do something good for you (it's particularly welcome as they don't get much). Give them constructive negative feedback when they are not helping you. This is best done in a non-confrontational way, in private, normally by explaining the consequences of actions (or lack of actions).

**Understand what motivates them.** Just like you and your customers, different things motivate sales managers, and you should orient your discussions, particularly your feedback, around these areas. Typical motivators include the need for money, power, recognition, friendship, challenge, security, or even perhaps an easy life.

**Communicate.** When I get involved with managers and salespeople more often than not the problems stem from communication. You must be very clear with your manager about what is expected from both of you, what your boundaries of freedom are, and when you should refer back to them. Ideally your manager will make this happen, but it is also in your best interests to ensure that you are both very clear.

**If they ask you to do something, do it. Within reason.** Your manager knows that you want to do everything to make yourself successful, and that is what they want. They will have spent inordinate amounts of time figuring out who should be handling which accounts and who should be responsible for different aspects of the business. The last thing that they want is for you to refuse or kick up a fuss. You will not make any friends in management if you are the one to destroy their carefully made and intricate plans.

**Be adult.** If you act like a spoiled child, then don't be surprised if your manager starts acting like an authoritative parent. They can't ground you, but they can make your life very difficult. **SF**

*Steve Hoyle is chairman of ProAct Business Development, specialising in turning theory into practice with sales behavioural change programmes. See [www.proactbd.com](http://www.proactbd.com)*

## The special problems of the new manager

Recently appointed managers present a particular challenge for salespeople to manage, are deserving of much sympathy, and represent a great opportunity to develop a relationship which positions you very beneficially.

The vast majority of new sales managers spend about six months learning how to complete new tasks they are not equipped to deal with, and worrying about their management style. Should they be authoritarian or liberal, should they be one of the team or do they need to keep some distance? Do they encourage debate or lead with their own ideas? It is a very difficult time, and one that the intelligent salesperson can exploit for mutual benefit.

The best guidance for salespeople is to be supportive, expect unpredictable behaviour and for a few mistakes to be made, and mostly to be a trusted friend who can be relied on to give high quality and constructive feedback, not create any problems and not demand too much. Acting as a trusted confidant will help you and your manager now and in the future.