Culture of Sales Excellence:
The Secret to Creating a High Performance Sales Team
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Why Do Many Sales Training Programs Not Work?

You know that a high performance sales team is vital to the revenue and success of your company. But many sales leaders fall into the trap of sending their team members to one sales training program after another and getting the same results—short-term rises in performance that quickly drop off as sales people drift back to their old habits and routines.

Why does this happen?

When sales are plateauing or declining, leaders immediately turn to sales skills training as the solution. However, the problem may not be in a lack of specific technical sales skills. Instead, your sales team may lack assertiveness, commitment or focus and have fears of rejection or confidence issues. Or, your team may be operating in a culture that is stifling, not positive or constructive.

These are problems that no amount of skills training can fix. In some cases, you may as well throw your training dollars out the window.

Does Your Sales Culture Support Excellence?

As a sales leader, you don’t head to work every day intending to achieve mediocre results. But you may be inadvertently setting mediocre expectations through your actions or focus. Do you find yourself constantly putting out fires, helping your low performing sales people, and trying to fix issues? If so, then you could be wasting a tremendous amount of time and money nurturing an outmoded culture focused on problem solving.

The key to moving your organization from the status quo to an expectation of excellence is your team culture. When you build a culture of sales excellence, you create the capacity and a structure that empowers, focuses and engages every member of your team. Instead of spending all your time solving problems, you equip your team with the right mindset and skills necessary to focus on creating the desired results.
What is a Culture of Sales Excellence?

1. You Have a Team Vision that is Communicated and Understood
More than just a stated team vision, every sales team member must understand not only the vision, but also know their own roles, responsibilities and the specific actions they need to take in order to help achieve this vision.

2. Clear Purpose and Meaning
In a culture of sales excellence, every team member feels that what they are working on is meaningful, significant, and purpose-based. Everyone concerned is highly inspired by the common purpose, which becomes the driving force behind everything that they do.

3. Mastery of Roles and Focus on High Performers
Most managers tend to concentrate on problem solving and end up rewarding mediocrity. In fact, many managers actually empower their low performers by focusing their time and energy on trying to solve their problems—while ignoring their high performers. Those high performers eventually leave because they aren’t being rewarded for their hard work. Sales teams with a culture of excellence set an expectation of high performance. Every sales team member is supported and encouraged to become a master in their role and area of expertise. High performers are nurtured, rewarded, mentored and recognized, and average performers are coached to move into the high performance category. In these cultures, there is no place for low performers, and they either move up or leave.

4. Resilience to Change and Challenges
In most sales teams, when change or challenges occur, employees become distracted and lose focus on the vision and goals. In a culture of sales excellence, your team develops the flexibility and resilience to deal with change, challenge and uncertainty. Even when there are obstacles and challenges that may seem impossible to overcome, the motivation to achieve the team vision is higher than the urge to avoid the discomfort. With that clarity of purpose and a strong desire to succeed, they push through the barriers and move forward toward their vision. Managers support their teams in staying focused and on track, despite difficulties and challenges.

5. Highly Collaborative Across Teams
Most of us have worked at companies where the silo mentality reigns. Teams closely guard their expertise, projects and knowledge. Collaboration across teams is nearly non-existent unless forced. In order to truly have a culture of sales excellence, there needs to be collaboration across teams, including marketing, product management and customer service.

6. Pioneer Mentality
Sales teams that achieve a culture of excellence do not settle for the status quo. Instead, they are focused on creating something that has never been created before, breaking records and achieving unprecedented results. From the outside, it may seem as if they are achieving the impossible. The resulting energy, excitement and drive, creates a certain positive tension that reverberates throughout the company. Employees and teams are encouraged to explore, nurture and co-create to achieve common goals.

A landmark 11 year study by Kotter and Heskett entitled “Corporate Culture and Performance” documented results for 207 large U.S. companies. They reported that companies that managed their cultures well saw revenue increases of 682% compared to 166% for the companies that did not manage their cultures well; and net income increases of 756% versus just 1% over that period.
How Does Culture Affect Sales Performance?

When the culture in your sales team, or even the corporation as a whole, is stifling, or not positive or constructive, people aren’t engaged or interested: they don’t care. So when you send your sales people to training programs (that cost a lot of money) they attend because they are told to be there, but they don’t take much in. Then when they go back to work, they still aren’t happy with their managers or they still have issues with team members because these core problems were never addressed.

What is the solution?
There is a direct correlation between the culture of your sales team and the skills and behaviours of the people. Skills training and development programs are ineffective without a positive culture in place.

When your sales team has a constructive or positive culture, people are more receptive because they are more engaged. And when they are more receptive and engaged and are sent to learn new skills, they want to be there. As a result, their level of learning increases significantly and so does your return on investment. When they return from development training programs, you see the results right away.

If you first concentrate on building the right sales culture and mindset, you will see higher levels of accountability, commitment and drive to achieve excellence. Your sales team will become more confident, assertive, and focused—and will be able to deal with the different challenges facing them.

The important thing to remember is that while technical and skills training are important, they should be seen as a second step to be taken only after a constructive sales culture has been established. Only this results in engaged employees who are ready to learn—and to apply what they have learned to achieve their goals. If this culture is not yet in place, your training and development programs will simply never produce the results you would hope for.
How to Get an Immediate Impact and Lasting Change from Your Sales Training and Development Programs

Two big-picture problems with sales training programs come up again and again:

1. Sales results need to turn around quickly, but the uptake from sales training programs is too slow
2. Sales results need to be sustainable, but typically a few months after the sales training, employees start drifting back to their old ways

To solve these two problems, two additional phases are required:

- Before sales skills training, an upfront phase is required that is designed to shift the mindset of every sales professional so they are engaged and aligned with the goals of the team, and prepared to learn and retain essential selling skills and strategies
- A final phase is needed following skills training that ensures that the proper leadership and sales coaching skills are in place to sustain this new standard of excellence over time.

Three Steps to Building a Sustainable High-Performance Sales Team

In order to get the immediate impact from your sales development program and ensure that your new changes are sustainable over the long term, a three-phase program is required that begins first with establishing a mindset for sales excellence; then, learning new, practical and powerful selling skills and techniques that deliver superior sales results; and finally, adding on a third phase to ensure that the new skills, mindset and results are sustained over the long term.

At the end of these three phases you will have a strong and resilient culture of sales excellence in place, where each member of your sales team has the right mindset to learn and embrace new skills, and your sales managers have the coaching and mentoring skills to drive and sustain your sales momentum.

Phase 1: Sales Excellence Mindset

While typical sales training programs focus on skills training alone, if your sales people don’t have the right mindset in place, no amount of skills training will ever make a significant difference.

Additionally, they may not be engaged or may lack the motivation and drive to achieve your organization’s goals. In fact, a Global Workforce study of 90,000 workers world-wide (including 5,000 in Canada) revealed that only 23% of employees consider themselves highly engaged.
However, if you first focus on building the right sales culture and mindset, many of the distractions that often cause less than optimal sales results will disappear, and your sales team will be engaged and ready to learn new tools, strategies, and tactics.

The goal during this phase is to provide each member of your sales team with a big-picture perspective of their potential, along with a heightened awareness of their own responsibility for achieving excellence and the choices and actions that will drive these results.

Every member of your sales team will become more confident, assertive, receptive and accountable—and will be able to deal with the challenges that come their way. They will be aligned to your organization’s vision, goals and values, which will, in turn, lead to higher levels of performance.

Some specific results you can expect to see at this stage include:

- Engaged sales people who are aligned, focused and committed to your company’s vision.
- Increased self-confidence with greater courage to innovate and take action.
- A more cohesive team, with highly committed and loyal team members.
- A stronger focus on service and quality.
- Improved communication and cooperation.
- A big-picture perspective, focused on continuous growth and positive development.
- Higher levels of engagement, satisfaction and fulfillment at work.

Phase 2: Sales Excellence Skills

It is important to remember that, while technical and skills training are important, they should be seen as a second step to be taken only after a culture of sales excellence has been established. By first taking the time in Phase 1 to establish a constructive and positive culture and mindset, your sales people will be more engaged and therefore receptive to learning new
sales skills. Because they want to be there, their level of learning increases significantly and so does your return on investment. When they return from training, you see the results right away because employees who are ready to learn will apply what they have learned to achieve their goals. If this culture is not yet in place, your training and development programs will simply not produce the results you expect.

Once the right sales excellence mindset has been established during Phase 1, your sales team members are now ready to move on to learning specific sales excellence skills in Phase 2. With the new mindset of excellence in place, your teams will be ready to focus on achieving their specific goals and plans for performance excellence. This phase is all about growth—building the skills and competencies required to grow the business.

**Different Sales Excellence Skills Needs for Different Sales Teams**
During Phase 2, you will focus your sales skills training on a program that best suits the needs of your sales teams. I typically recommend two main directions:

1. High-Performance Sales
2. Strategic Solutions Sales

**High-Performance Sales**
The High-Performance Sales program is designed specifically for sales people who need to excel in high-transaction sales type environments with short sales cycles and a diverse customer base. They typically face challenges, such as:

- Shorter sales cycles where you need to build trust and conclude the sale in a very short period of time.
- Selling to the general public, where you have to interact with a very diverse customer base.

**Strategic Solution Sales**
The Strategic Solutions Sales program is specifically designed for account managers and sales professionals selling complex, high-price, high-value solutions to businesses in a longer-term sales cycle. They typically face challenges such as:

- Longer sales cycles.
- The need to develop trust and long-term relationships with multiple stakeholders within an organization, including high-level executives.
- The sale of often complex products, solutions and services that require the sales team to interface with multiple resources within their own organization, including research, development, product management and customer service departments.

**Phase 3: Sustaining Sales Excellence**
When the first two phases are complete, you will have a strong collective mindset of excellence in place, alignment around sales performance goals and the skills and competencies required to deliver excellence. Now, it’s time to focus on developing strong sales leadership to ensure that the new mindset and performance skills learned are sustainable and simply become the way things are done. This is a critical step often missed in organizations— but is required to
ensure that your sales team doesn't revert back to old habits.

In this phase, your sales managers will learn how to effectively use different sales coaching models to improve the performance of their teams, and remove any distractions that could be getting in the way of maximizing sales performance.

Don’t Settle for Short Term Results

Don’t send your sales team and managers to skills training alone. While you may see some initial short-term results, they will drop off as your employees fall back into their old habits. You need to have a plan in place to ensure that all the work you’ve done on your sales team culture, engaging your employees and giving them strategies for success is sustainable over the long term.

The secret to sustaining excellence is equipping your sales managers with leadership and coaching for excellence skills. Once your sales leaders have become competent at using these different skills to improve the performance of their teams, they will be able to:

• Remove any distractions that could be getting in the way of maximizing performance.
• Effectively coach their team members to un-tap their potential.
• Motivate and improve the confidence of their team members.
• Increase the focus and performance of their team.
• Increase their team’s resilience and ability to deal with change and uncertainty.
• Enhance the creativity and innovation of their team members.
• Deliver excellence with their teams.
• Sustain your momentum over the long term.

Your sales leaders’ focus will move from solving small problems to high performance sales coaching, leading and motivating their teams to stay aligned with the goals and vision, and move the business forward toward excellence.
Does Your Sales Team Need a Sales Culture Health Check?

Often, it’s the companies that are already doing really well that realize what an impact culture has on their business. These companies invest continually in improving their cultures to support growth.

For most companies, however, there is a significant event or trigger that causes them to seek help. These triggers include:

- Mergers and acquisitions
- Moving from a private to a public company
- Privatization of a government or crown-type corporation
- Restructuring or new leadership
- Industry changes and increased competition
- Any significant change, including rapid growth.

Symptoms that Indicate You May Have a Sales Team Culture Challenge

There are a few telling symptoms that show that your sales team has a culture challenge:

1. **Distractions:** Your team is distracted, and your sales managers are spending a lot of time dealing with small issues and problems when they should be focusing on revenue goals.

2. **Silos and Conflict:** People are not working well together. Your sales department and other departments are guarding their own turf instead of working towards common goals. They mistakenly believe that this is the way to provide the results your company has promised the customers.

3. **Arrogance and Egos:** There are a lot of egos strutting around believing they already know it all and are above everyone else. This indicates that people are closed off and aren’t open to hearing ideas and suggestions that might be better than their own and that could improve the business.

4. **Lack of Accountability:** Your team members are not taking full responsibility for their goals and their role in the team. Instead of focusing on improvement, they make excuses for poor performance and missed revenue targets, and complain that their earnings aren’t high enough.

If any of the above scenarios sound familiar, you could have a sales team culture that is stuck on problem solving instead of focused on vision creating. These are two hugely different focuses—the one delivers excellence and the other wastes your time and resources.

Take the First Step to Building a Culture of Sales Excellence

www.dynamicachievement.com/culture-healthcheck
About the Author

Eitan Sharir is a corporate culture consultant, leadership coach, and President of Organizational Culture and Performance at Dynamic Achievement Group. For more than 18 years, Eitan has helped some of the world’s leading organizations, including London Drugs, TELUS, Mercedes Benz and Coca-Cola, connect their teams and culture success in the areas of corporate culture, leadership development, sales, customer service, operations and team building.

To enable organizations to achieve the real, and sustainable business results they are looking for, Dynamic Achievement Group has developed a unique three-phase approach. This three-phase approach is designed to change the mindset of employees at the core and prepare them to learn and retain essential skills, align every employee with the goals of the team or organization, and ensure the proper leadership and coaching skills are in place to sustain this new standard of excellence over time.

This three-phase process is reflected in Dynamic Achievement Group’s Vertical Organization Program:

- Vertical Business Strategy
- Vertical Culture
- Vertical Leadership
- Vertical Selling
- Vertical Customer Service
- Vertical Operational Effectiveness
- Vertical Organizational Capability

Eitan Sharir is the author of Activate Your Power. With real-life examples and practical exercises, Activate Your Power is a catalyst for change, both personal and professional. Eitan’s book contains a set of innovative tools and techniques that will help you to create a new dynamic in your life—one that guides you powerfully to greater levels of fulfillment and success.

Eitan Sharir and Andrew Lindesay head Dynamic Achievement Group, a corporate development firm comprised of highly talented leadership consultants, coaches and facilitators, each with their own area of expertise. By working Dynamic Achievement Group, you will have direct access to highly specialized professionals who will provide hands-on involvement, guidance and coordination in every aspect of our relationship with you.
Take the First Step to Building a Culture of Excellence Now

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