

Your VP of Sales Must Be Your Team's Hero

The VP has two key functions: leading people and getting results. Score A in these two vital areas and you'll be the hero. And every organization needs one. To get superior results, the VP must lead his people (not manage) to become the superior sales team in the industry. The challenge is that over 90 percent of VPs don't fall in the superior category themselves—and most CEOs let them be average, or worse, by not investing in a mentor. It's crucial to invest in the VP as s/he will learn what a great, servant leader acts like. People will grow and follow and business relationships will multiply by leaps and bounds. When s/he stalls at being average, s/he will learn how amazing s/he can be, providing the right person is in place to teach. Most just don't know what they don't know.

Let me share some areas that need to be improved by the majority of VPs internationally:

- Check their egos at the door as most haven't earned the right to have one yet. *An example:* A VP of international sales arranged for me to speak to 2,300 attendees. He asked for us to meet in advance as he wanted to learn more about my consulting services. At the conference, a very well-known comedian preceded me. After I finished speaking, only two people approached the comedian to chat (the VP and his wife), while I was approached by about 500 attendees. The Marketing Manager escorted me to the limo and said: "You can forget about consulting with him." I was stunned and asked why not, to which she replied: "His ego won't allow it." Almost a year later, they made newspaper headlines about laying off 700+ people, followed by more shortly after that. The CEO also got an F. As I left, he said: "I look forward to seeing you real soon." He let a VP dedicated to being average (or a Mr. know-it-all) stay the same as he had been. The lesson to remember is: *As the VP goes, so go the salespeople.*

- Be great at recruiting and selecting the right people for the right job. Many failures come from hiring someone because "I really like that lady." You should probably be familiar with DISC profiles. Most that were hired because of being liked by the VP are High-I (Influencer) people. They are great at talking, laughing, entertaining and often fun to be with. They like to be friends but the problem is that most High-I people don't get great results. You should be looking for more High-D people (Driver or Dominant), as they are usually the volume leaders. And, if a VP is not a High-D individual, he needs a mentor beginning next week. I have often found a High-D person when I didn't need a salesperson. I interact with them on multiple occasions and sometimes advise them to stay where they are for six months and then contact me. During this period, I watch for a thank-you note regarding dinner and an "I'm very interested in meeting with you again" note or something cut out and mailed to me, as well as similar actions. If I get nothing, I call and ask why, then listen and watch for corrective action. *Message:* Hire slow and fire fast. Almost every organization I've worked with found out quickly that they made a hiring mistake, but they hadn't taken action. I often visit with the slacker to find out if s/he is the problem or if it's a manager or the VP. Quite often, they can be turned around

By Bill Blades

if properly educated on how to be better and setting new performance goals with deadline dates. After I monitor their next five to 30 days I'll then know if they're a keeper or not. But sometimes I let them go on the spot because the VP should have already done it, but didn't. Stop the drift! Remember, the only thing worse than turnover is when there should be some and there is none.

- Evaluations or reviews are more often than not, horrible. Assuming you have great position descriptions and measurement devices in place (a very bad assumption), evaluations should never be an annual event. Rather, they are ongoing. Formalized quarterly reviews are mandatory, but with certain individuals they are monthly with or without the aforementioned documents. Some steps for a great outcome include:

- You must be a great communicator (rare).
- You must be prepared (rare).
- You must tell the truth (rare).
- You must be a great listener (rare).
- You must use both hard and soft skills (rare).
- You must agree on the required improvements (rare).
- You must follow up fast and regularly (rare).
- You must offer your specific assistance (rare).
- At the end of the meeting, I want to hear "I will..."

I facilitate many one-on-one sessions but I don't assist the VP in preparing for the first one. I want to see how effective he is and I make notes for how I can help him improve. He'll learn quickly that change is inevitable, except with vending machines.

Recruitment and selection

Recruiting and selecting top assistants is every bit as important as salespeople, as they can proactively tackle tasks that don't need a great VP's attention. I was new to a VP of sales and marketing position in the deep South where I met several CEOs who attempted to get employees to convert to a certain religion. When I asked why we didn't have any females in management and sales positions, one of his replies was: "I don't want them on the road, as you know what they will do." I just responded: "And who will they do that with?"

Working around him, our first female manager was in customer service, which was part of my team. I didn't suggest the promotion to the CEO—I just did it. I assigned her one of our top three accounts and she became our first flying female. It was a strategic decision to not just promote our first female manager, but to match a great client with a great manager. It added millions of dollars to our revenue. I then needed to upgrade my administrative assistant because I shared an average assistant with the CEO. I wound up hiring a young employee away from Delta Airlines. Their VP of Sales called to congratulate me for stealing his assistant, saying: "She has the highest score of all administrative assistants in the history of Delta and since I had to lose her, I'm glad it was to you." I now had my two key support personnel to help our salespeople, our clients and with the details. A recent survey conducted by *burning-glass.com* that focused on executive assistants revealed 65 percent of new job postings called for a

Bachelor's Degree, but only 19 percent already in the position had one. Is it time for you to upgrade to a more qualified assistant?

Investing crucial time educating the customer service manager and raising the bar for my new administrative assistant allowed me to be more effective; I was able to invest more time with target accounts and with salespeople needing more coaching. *Message:* Those two people were key to increasing revenue. Don't be cheap when hiring and promoting for these two positions. In most organizations, five percent of staff can have great influence with the other 95 percent in getting buying into your culture change and with upgrading others with their skills and attitude. They made us money. A great VP of sales takes care of his/her people and is a leader, not a follower.

Take notice that many mid-sized companies often tend to hire HR managers for the clerical and legal issues and not as leaders because they are not often thought of as being on the leadership team. If true, it means that HR managers are not bringing enough value. This can be corrected by the massive upgrade of necessary skill sets.

Bettering communications skills

Communication is almost always ranked in the top three for individual and corporate weaknesses and it is often in the number 1 position. If the CEO doesn't possess great communication skills, coupled with people skills, the VP of sales is almost always the logical choice to be the leader at company meetings. CEOs with finance and engineering backgrounds often communicate with logical or left-brain thinking. It's best to have a master communicator who uses both left and right brain skills. Then, it will usually come with high-energy and dosages of humor. And changes. I'm sure you've noticed that the evening news starts with "Good evening" and then they proceed to tell you why it isn't. It's very similar to a CEO giving a presentation that is full of data and short on enthusiasm and "What's in it for me?" In most cases, it's not what is spoken, but how it is said and received.

I write just as I speak and consult. I move from one sub-topic to the next instead of banging away on one specific topic. That way, almost any reader or audience member can pick up on at least one idea. The one thing I don't want to be is boring. You want to invoke a funny line once in a while, whether at a company event

or when communicating with a client. You can often pick up those lines by reading quotes on delivery trucks. A septic tank truck can be a crappy business, but I saw one truck that put a different smell on their company with their message: "Yesterday's Meals on Wheels." Not hilarious, but a right touch, again, beats boring. Even the vast majority of emails can be improved quite easily.

- Remember that you are sending an electronic letter and it should be written as such.
- Most start with "Bill, instead of "Hi Bill" or "Dear Bill." Some don't have either. The former is blunt and lacks in business acumen. Most readers are more open to a warm greeting.
- Most emails don't end with "Thanks, Bill," more often nothing. They typically end with "Joe Jones, ABC Company" leaving a mundane taste in the reader's mind that is often "I don't think I'll like this person" or "This doesn't even deserve a response."

A few decades ago, someone started this trend and now millions have followed suit. Your letters and emails should be interesting, beneficial and fun to read. *Message:* Don't follow the pack. Do what the top two percent do. If you speak with charisma, include it in your emails. If you lack charisma, you can develop it by securing a specialist in this area. Unfortunately, many people don't take the time to improve their communication skills and their upward mobility suffers because of it. Everything you say and write is a representation of you as a person. And the VP should master every salesperson's writing skills. It's also imperative that customer service staff receive the same coaching, as an irate client can become an even better client, or a lost client, based on the written response. Your hero ensures that everyone is improving, forever.

AMA Enterprise reported results of a survey of the top five most important skills training provided that put communication in the top spot. And since part of communication is brevity, I'll stop here and continue, with more meat, when we meet again.

About the author

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