



STEPS
TO SUCCESS FOR
SALES
MANAGERS

A STRATEGIC GUIDE TO CREATING A WINNING
SALES TEAM THROUGH COLLABORATION

M A X C A T E S

SEVEN STEPS TO SUCCESS
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SALES MANAGERS

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SALES MANAGERS

A Strategic Guide to
Creating a Winning Sales Team
Through Collaboration

Max Cates

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Contents

	Introduction	1
Chapter 1	First Step: Manage Yourself	9
	Self-Management Question Number One: Are You a Trusted Leader?	16
	Self-Management, the Rest of the Story	21
	Fourteen Aids to Self-Manage Successfully	50
Chapter 2	Second Step: High-Performance Teams Begin with Hiring	69
	First Goal: Hire Those You Know	70
	Recruitment: The First Step to Success	71
	The Science of Selection	76
	Don'ts of Hiring	84
	Hire for Traits, Not Skills	87
	Who's Your Best Candidate—Extrovert, Introvert, or Ambivert?	88
	Personality Analysis: Leave It to the Pros	91
	The Big Five as It Applies to Salespeople	91
	Which Traits Make the Best Salespeople?	93
	The Sixth Dimension	97
	The Best Predictors of Sales Success in Rank Order	99
	Body Language Helps Identify Success Traits	101
	Seven Tiebreakers	106
	Red Flags to Consider	117
Chapter 3	Third Step: Building a Winning Team	121
	Teamwork Begins with Partnership	122
	Filling the Wheelbarrow	123
	Teamwork Becomes More Important with Millennials	129
	The Unseen Team Will Make You or Break You	131
	What Makes an Effective Team Leader?	134
	Five Ways to Set the Stage for Team Building	137
	Building Team Momentum	146

Values Help Create a Successful Sales Culture	148
Creating a Learning Environment	148
Best Practices Emphasized.	149
Teamwork Expected	152
Finally, Set Ground Rules.	153
Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing.	154
Your First Meeting	155
Understanding Team Dynamics	158
Tips for Team Building.	161
Three Ways Sales Teams Enhance Managers' Success	163
Things to Expect from a High-Performing Team.	164
The By-Product of Teamwork Is Better Sales	165
Care and Feeding of the Sales Team.	167

**Chapter 4 Fourth Step: Becoming a Successful
Servant Leader 213**

Custom-Made Team Building.	215
The Inverted Pyramid.	216
Ethics and Servant Leadership	216
Top Leaders Have High Expectations	218
Leading with Grace Under Fire.	218
The Servant Leader as a Problem Solver	221
Communication Is Vital to Servant Leaders' Effectiveness.	222
Servant Leaders Create Flow	223
Servant Leadership Improves Productivity.	226
Servant Leaders Improve Sales Retention Rates and Customer Engagement	227

**Chapter 5 Fifth Step: Sales Empowerment,
Beginning with Ownership 229**

Step One: Give Control to Get Control.	229
Step Two: Develop Buy-In	237
Step Three: Empowering Your Team to Success	243
The Benefits of Empowerment	247
Empowerment Means Better Decision Making	250
Fundamentals of Developing a Self-Managed Sales Team	251
How Teamwork Facilitates Self-Managed Salespeople	256

Chapter 6	Sixth Step: Success Through Performance Measurement	257
	Daily Measures to Prevent Micromanagement	258
	First Priority, This Is a People Thing	262
	Types of Key Performance Metrics	262
	Using the Numbers—Aha versus Gotcha	265
	Stretch Your Objectives, but Don't Overstretch	266
	Selling Smart with Sales Opportunity Metrics	270
	Red-Flagging Your Database	275
	Sales Segmentation Is a Team Effort	276
Chapter 7	Seventh Step: Continuous Improvement, Maintaining Success	277
	Achieving Success with Six Sigma	278
	Using the Deming Cycle for Improved Sales	281
	Sales Excellence Is the Core Value of Continuous Improvement	284
	Tips for Implementing Continuous Improvement	286
	Conclusion	289
	References	293
	Index	303

About the Author

Max Cates received a bachelor of science from Missouri State University and a master of arts from the University of Missouri School of Journalism. He began his professional career with United Telecommunications (America's third-largest telecommunications company at the time) as Advertising Coordinator. After three years, he joined AT&T and served for 10 years in progressively responsible corporate leadership positions in advertising, corporate communications, and marketing management.

Cates's next leadership position was with Associated Electric Cooperative, a \$2 billion electric power utility. After two promotions there, he became the youngest Division Director in its history, reporting to the CEO. His responsibilities included leading marketing, advertising, and corporate communications, as well as directing consumer sales strategy. During his tenure at Associated, he also completed Executive Development at the Wharton School of Business, University of Pennsylvania.

After 11 years with Associated and a number of national awards, Cates returned to AT&T, serving in sales and sales management positions, progressing from Internet Sales Manager to Telemarketing Sales Manager, to Area Sales Manager. Following an award-winning career with AT&T, which included the prestigious CEO Club Award, Cates joined Access Media, where he managed the sales force. He also served as a sales management professor at Webster University.

Introduction

Think back over your sales career and count the number of really good managers you've had. You know, the ones who brought out the best in you. The ones who made your sales job exciting, challenging, and rewarding. The ones you could trust. Have you gotten past five fingers yet? Probably not. The Big Irony of sales is this: The ones who are most likely to become sales managers—salespeople—are usually the ones least prepared for the job. Couple that phenomenon with a lack of management training, and you have sales-fails waiting to happen. Ill prepared and under pressure to deliver results, many managers seek shortcuts, giving in to management fads and cookie-cutter approaches to sales management. Many fall prey to metrics addiction, which takes them further away from the basics. We sometimes forget that selling is a uniquely personal process composed of one person relating to another in a way that produces a sale.

Sales management's primary job is really pretty simple. It's not reaching sales goals. And it's not improving sales productivity or increasing company profitability. It is sales rep development, pure and simple. Everything else—goal attainment, sales productivity, and profitability—follows reps who are well prepared. Doing so requires the sales manager to embrace the complexities of human behavior from the rep's viewpoint and the customer's. There are simply no shortcuts. There's no app for that. But we keep looking, and often we keep getting further and further away from our salespeople and our customers.

It's a sad truth that a huge number of sales managers are either ineffective at best or, at worst, outright counterproductive. The impact of unproductive sales managers is huge, especially considering that more

than 10% of the American workforce is in sales. We're talking billions of dollars of inefficiency.

Having spent half of my career in sales, and the other half in nonsales leadership roles (primarily in marketing and corporate communications for Fortune 500 companies on the "buyer" side of sales transactions), I've seen various management styles and personas. And my personal observation is that the biggest problem in sales management is an emphasis on "sales" rather than "management." The result is an inordinately large number of self-absorbed and domineering sales managers who seem to reserve their people skills for customers, not their sales reps. I've seen many, many good sales managers, but the bad ones are so bad that they really stand out in your memory.

Unfortunately, old-school sales management is still alive and well in corporate America in companies big and small. Many organizations—in spite of being technologically advanced and strategically sophisticated—are still embracing sales management tactics from the 1950s. And even though it has evolved from the boiler room boss to the coach mentality, the same manager-centric approach remains, which circumvents the power of sales team synergy.

The problem is not necessarily poor management, it's a lack of leadership. The interesting thing is that, paradoxically, it's easier to be a good leader than a poor manager. In the long run, it actually takes much less time and effort to effectively lead people than to ineffectively manage them. That's because good leaders are able to get the most out of their people, creating a team cohesiveness that drives sales with efficiency and effectiveness. They operate with maximal focus and minimal wasted effort.

This book shows how leaders create high-performance sales teams using team building, sales rep involvement, empowerment, and continuous improvement. All of these processes are key components of Total Quality Management (TQM), which is described in subsequent chapters. TQM has played a significant role in my 36 years of sales and marketing experience, primarily with AT&T, but also including United Telecommunications and two smaller firms. I've seen it applied successfully in sales teams of both large and small organizations. And I can tell you it's not just another sales management fad, but has stood the test of time.



The biggest challenge in sales management is not commissions, sales funnels, pricing, or prospecting strategies. The single-biggest problem is getting your people to sell at maximal capacity. I found the solution to be TQM.

Strip away the management jargon and *Seven Steps* is simply a book about getting better, about looking for ways to cultivate the joy of selling and improving sales performance. It's about the differences between leading and misleading, inspiring versus intimidating, and invigorating rather than deflating. It's a story of two kinds of leadership: Aha vs. Gotcha. One that creates a rich selling environment by leading reps to self-revealing "eureka" moments, the other that inhibits selling and personal growth by the constant scrutiny of a Gotcha manager.

All corporations have their share of effective sales managers—the ones who are comfortable enough with themselves to manage from a base of self-confidence, integrity, and empathy. And there are the weaker ones—the narcissists, the control freaks, the get-it-done-at-all-costs managers. It's the yin and yang you find in any group of professionals—accounting, engineering, human resources, or advertising, for example. In sales, however, everything is magnified because employee performance, or sales results, is measured every day. Commissioned salespeople don't have the luxury of their pay based on annual performance assessments. And the pressure to sell is unrelenting because sales is the cash flow of most organizations. It's a high-stakes game full of what T. S. Eliot called "decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse." You can bet on two things: Sales is a continuously changing landscape due to competitive pressures, marketplace changes, and product enhancements, and someone is watching the sales numbers every hour of every day to make sure that everyone is producing. This mercurial, pressure-packed environment has a way of twisting and derailing the best-laid plans. It has turned many an ordinary manager into a terrible manager. On the other hand, it has served as a furnace to forge a mediocre manager into a real leader.

The aim of *Seven Steps* is to provide direction and encouragement for those who want to be more than managers, those who aspire to be leaders.

Working in both large and medium-sized firms, I have observed and experienced a wide variety of styles ranging from traditional command/control to employee empowerment programs. I have been part of successful sales groups with established leaders who built their success on sales rep involvement, insisting on excellence and considering their salespeople as partners in success. These leaders realized that sales success begins by treating their sales reps with respect, as professionals who play a vital role in developing plans and procedures. Year in, year out, many of these leaders produce exceptional sales results because their people feel they have a stake in the business, that they are cared for and listened to.

I've seen underperforming sales groups absolutely electrified by a non-descript, low-key leader whose claim to fame was simply asking for sales reps' opinions, thereby building a high-performance team with mutual trust and loyalty. The exceptional leaders I've known have proven one thing: Personality has little to do with success. You don't have to be witty, gregarious, engaging, or charismatic. You *do* need integrity, a modicum of selflessness, and the ability to ask for input and act on your team's suggestions. And above all, you need to be able to simply connect to your people, to understand them and their needs.

Miracles do happen in sales groups, and complete turnarounds are possible. I've witnessed it time and time again. It starts with leaders who take care of and involve their people. These are the leaders you remember, the people you imitate. These are the ones who, years later, you recall and ask yourself, "Now, what would they have done in this situation?"

On the other hand, as a salesperson, I've also experienced being on the wrong side of an autocratic management system, an "I'm the boss" place characterized by overcontrol, micromanagement, and daily punitive measures. I know how it feels to be among the disenfranchised masses of salespeople who had no input or inkling of what was going to happen next. The pay and benefits were great but there was a price that came with the big money. You find your loyalty flagging, your enthusiasm dimming as the autocracy creates in you traces of distrust, frustration, and even recalcitrance.

Being at the bottom of this food chain is unsettling, like being a marionette controlled by tactics such as daily (even hourly) reports,

late-afternoon “briefing” sessions, job threats, and other punitive measures—all sapping the strength, vitality, energy, and passion from the sales force. The tougher things get—missed objectives, worsening economy, and increasing competition—the tighter the reins are drawn, with more reports required and more threats. Even more surprising, management is so busy directing sales reps that they are failing to harness the knowledge and experience of the sales force to shape sales programs.

Experiencing a myriad of management styles as a manager and as a sales rep, I have found that sales managers create a sales team whether or not they know it. There are two extreme versions of sales teams. One type is the team that comes together on its own, independent of its manager. This team is characterized by dysfunctional, uncooperative sales reps, whose only cohesiveness is a contempt of and resistance to management. In many cases, the manager doesn’t know what is going on behind the scenes, oblivious to the apathy or anger festering among the sales reps. The other extreme team that I experienced is one shaped by the manager as a partnership, emphasizing collaboration and success sharing among team members. Even in this case, I witnessed bickering and backbiting, but the difference was that the manager was aware of the problems and could address them in a constructive way.

In reality, most sales teams fall between the two extremes, led by managers with varying degrees of influence. When the influence is too weak, there are times when sales reps are better without a manager. Having known manufacturers reps and commission-only sales reps—who operate with minimal or no supervision—I’ve come to the conclusion that it’s better to have no manager at all than to have a weak manager. That’s because ineffective, overcontrolling managers get in the way by creating roadblocks, as well as superfluous rules and reports. Salespeople will sell their product—with or without a manager—because that’s what they do for a living. The sales manager determines how *well* they sell and how much time and focus they spend on selling.

Many argue that the times are ripe for self-managed sales teams, that salespeople are more effective with minimal supervision and maximal empowerment. This concept, explored in Chapter 5, “Fifth Step: Sales Empowerment, Beginning with Ownership,” is open to debate. But one thing is for sure, elements of the self-managed team process can be used

in any organization to any degree. It takes sales leaders who are willing to reevaluate how they do things in order to reach their goals.

The successful leaders I've known are the ones with a firm foundation of values and beliefs who constantly seek better ways to do things. They are secure enough to experiment, adapt, and keep moving forward. For those leaders committed to self-improvement, fortunately, there are hundreds of books and blogs on sales management to provide a continuous stream of new concepts. In addition, but not as obvious, are hundreds of research projects on sales management being done each year at well-known universities. I've cited a number of studies to provide a sampling of the huge amount of data being generated about sales management that can be another valuable source of advice for sales leaders.

Also included are real-life case studies from a variety of industries that highlight how the basic principles are put to use by actual sales managers.

As you progress through this book, keep in mind, it is not a panacea. It is not a textbook either; you won't find chapter summaries or questions to answer. You won't find a packaged, formulized answer to successful sales management. There is no such thing. We all pick and choose from the management tools, tactics, and strategies available to us, incorporating a piece here, a piece there that fits our personality and skill set. Command/control tactics are a viable part of any management tool set, the important point being that they are only a piece of the puzzle. Today's sales manager faces too many complexities and pressures to rely on one simple, formulized managerial style.

The seven steps are laid out in sequential order beginning with self-management. After all, how can you manage people without first being able to manage yourself? Successful leaders have a high degree of self-awareness, self-control, self-determination, and self-development. If you're waiting for your company to develop you, you've already missed the train.

After considering your own development, the next step is hiring the right people to achieve your goals. With the right people onboard, the next five steps begin: team building, servant leadership, job ownership and empowerment, performance measurement, and continuous improvement.

Seven Steps is like a grocery aisle of ideas, some you'll put in your grocery cart, some you'll ignore, and some you might keep in mind until the time is right. Irrespective of your shopping disposition, I hope you find some good ideas to take home and use.

—Max Cates

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First Step: Manage Yourself

Here you are in the middle. Whoever said it's lonely at the top never sat in a sales manager's chair. It's a maddening, lonely process—trying to activate your people and satisfy the boss. The objectives, the people, the paperwork, the procedures.... The challenges are legendary, your control over them limited.

In the past decade, huge shifts in corporate America have exposed sales managers to a dizzying rate of change. Customers have become more demanding and price sensitive due to the proliferation of online competitive information. If they don't like your price, they'll find a better deal online. Combine global competitive pressures and shaky economic conditions, and you have companies cutting costs at unprecedented levels. On top of cutbacks, you have baby boomers phasing out of the work world and being replaced by millennials who present a new set of managerial challenges. This volatile mix of economic, technological, and sociological issues presents a host of perplexities for sales managers:

- Rep-per-manager ratios are steadily increasing every year, consistently expanding managers' scope of supervision while multiplying their workload.
- Training and administrative support for sales managers are decreasing because of increasing budget constraints.
- Pressures on managers to produce sales results are rising exponentially.
- New management techniques are required for the new generation of salespeople coming into the workplace.

It is the paradox of our times: At a point when sales managers are being asked to do more and more, they have less and less to work with. No wonder many studies of sales personnel are showing decreasing trust for sales managers' ability to effectively lead sales teams.

Chances are you were a good sales rep, or you wouldn't have been elevated to this exalted managerial position. But nobody cares. No matter how long you've been on the job, the expectations are the same: All your people want to know is that you're going to take care of them. All your boss wants to know is that you're going to deliver good numbers. The fact that you were a good sales rep might even be working against you. In fact, it is estimated that 85% of sales superstars fail as sales managers.

Here are a few reasons why salespeople don't succeed as managers:

- **Loss of Freedom**—A good sales rep has the freedom to set a daily schedule, come and go, be in the office when necessary, and his sole responsibility is making sales. When he morphs from a sales rep to a manager, freedom is replaced with responsibility—the manager takes on the burdens of sales reps and bosses. A manager is shackled by paperwork, team objectives, deadlines, and company directives. Reps who yearned to be the boss, to set the agenda and make the rules, quickly discover that they have significantly less autonomy than they did as a salesperson.
- **Inability to teach**—Frequently, we assume that sales reps know how to sell, and therefore they can teach it when they become managers. Not necessarily. The biggest part of teaching is not knowing the topic but knowing how to get your “students” to learn. Much of sales is intuitive behavior—reading people, timing, body language—that is difficult to teach. The bottom line is that salespeople are doers, not teachers. It takes a huge amount of self-discipline, energy, and patience to analyze one's steps to success and convey them effectively to subordinates.
- **Deferred gratification**—A sales rep works hard to make a sale and sees the outcome immediately. The sales manager sees outcomes over weeks, maybe months. Management takes a huge amount of patience, a virtue in short supply among salespeople.

- **Unrealistic expectations**—You were successful as a rep so you expect the same from your people. As a sales rep, you had an “I can do it” approach to challenges. You did, in fact, do it, and achieved success. Your success gave you expectations for your performance as a salesperson that consistently led to success. Unfortunately, the set of conditions that made you successful as a salesperson do not exist in sales management. You can’t expect your people to be like you or as successful as you. If your expectations don’t change, disappointment quickly sets in.
- **Tendency to do it yourself**—As a sales rep, if you don’t do it, it doesn’t get done. Sometimes, this thinking leads managers to micromanage, even to the point of selling for their reps. The result is chaos. For the manager, it means less time managing. For the sales reps, it means frustration and fewer opportunities to become effective salespeople. In sales management you simply can’t do it yourself. You have to do virtually everything through your people, and that can be frustrating.
- **Failing to change your viewing lens from microscopic to panoramic, from pixels to landscapes**—The nature of sales requires concentrating on one customer at a time to make the sale. The nature of sales management requires a panoramic view of the sales team, the customer base, the market, and dozens of other components.
- **Independent nature of salespeople versus managers’ dependence on salespeople to reach goals**—As a sales manager, you’re no longer the gunslinger who’s six-shootin’ his way to success. You’re more like a four-star general in the war room coordinating troop movements. Your success is dependent on your people.
- **Propensity to “sell” instead of facilitate**—There is a tendency for new managers to come onboard with a dozen preconceived concepts and begin selling them to their new “customers”—their sales team and their bosses. Essentially, they are continuing the sales process that made them successful. Unfortunately, the conditions and dynamics of managing a sales team are totally different. Now, it’s more important to become a facilitator instead of a salesperson—that is, to utilize the energy and

talent at your disposal. The manager is no longer the lone wolf who has to come up with the Big Idea and sell it, but rather the person who extracts Big Ideas from the sales team and helps them sell it. This requires a change in mind-set from the knee-jerk reaction of continuously selling to one of coordinating.

The good news is this simple fact: Your people want to be led. They want to believe in you. They want to be part of a winning team. They want to follow your example. Many want to give their full commitment to a boss and company they respect and trust. Remember when you were a rep, the enthusiasm and hope you felt in getting a new manager? And remember, in many cases, how quickly the honeymoon ended? Hope is hardwired into salespeople's psyche. The manager's job is to turn their innate hope into enthusiasm and commitment.

The goal of this book is to help you develop a successful sales team by using Total Quality Management (TQM) practices that have been proven effective over the years. The techniques include such things as continuous improvement, rep/manager collaboration, empowerment, team building, and shared learning. TQM is a powerful way to transform teams and individuals into champions, but it takes a strong leader to start the process.

The first step is addressing the one thing you can most influence: yourself. You wouldn't think of starting a sales campaign without goals, objectives, procedures, ground rules, and training. The same applies to self-management. Manage yourself so that you can manage your people and therefore manage your success and your career. Self-management entails an honest inventory of your strengths and weaknesses. More importantly, it requires the discipline to build on strengths and improve weaknesses. Strong leaders have a high degree of self-awareness; they know their strengths and what complementary strengths they need from others. They avoid being surrounded by people like themselves. Similarly, strong leaders are self-developers who seek information, training, and feedback on ways to be a better leader. They don't wait for a company-sponsored training program but proactively seek self-improvement.

As Dr. Wayne Dyer said in *Excuses Begone*, "Never underestimate your power to change yourself. Never overestimate your ability to change

others.” As sales managers, we all are faced with continuous change to the way we do things—change prompted by the marketplace, technology, and social trends. This is the easy stuff. We tweak commissions and bonuses, we revise sales pitches, we create product discounts. These are all *reactive* changes. Making *proactive* changes, elective changes to ourselves, is tough and arduous. Proactivity involves freedom of choice, willpower, and self-discipline. It is hard work but it’s necessary. But no matter how difficult self-change is to you as a manager, it is the first—and easiest—step in the continuous-improvement process. The next step, changing others, will require twice the effort of self-change, so be sure to guard your expectations.

Case Study #1: Self-management in the Software Business

Jane had been sales manager at an educational software company for five years. She managed a team of eight sales reps who targeted high-school administrators in a three-state area in the Midwest.

Her first two years were marked by annual sales increases of 4% the first year and 2% the second. Then the recession hit and sales tumbled to a 1% increase the third year compared to a 6% goal, 1% the fourth year with a 5% objective, and -1% the fifth year on a 4% goal. As her boss pointed out, an aggregate 1% sales increase over the past three years was unacceptable. “Look, Jane,” he had said. “I know you work long hours and I know you’re addressing the problem, but another year of declining sales, and I can’t guarantee you’ll have a job. We need to get this thing turned around.”

Following the first year’s sales decline, Jane wasn’t sure what had to be done, but she did know she had to do something to let her boss know she was working toward a solution. She carefully went over the numbers and created a metrics system that pinpointed weak spots in sales. That year the primary component of the sales decline was decreased new business and stagnant increased sales to existing business. She sponsored new business training seminars for the reps and began “New Business Mondays” to focus reps’ attention on acquiring new business on a consistent basis. Her efforts did not slow the sales decline but at least she had addressed the problem. She made sure her boss knew the extent of her efforts.

Following the second year of sales declines, with increasing trepidation, Jane developed an enhanced Sales Funnel. The new reporting system was devised to keep her alerted to what her reps were doing day by day, even hour by hour. If they weren't selling, she wanted to know why. She reviewed the sales funnel results with her reps twice a week, reviewing their signed contracts and questioning them on their lack of sales. Essentially, she was losing confidence in her reps. It was a recession, but the reps' job was to sell through it, no excuses. After all, she thought, she was doing her job in setting up new metrics and reporting systems. Now it was time the reps did their job.

It didn't work. Following another year of sales declines, Jane was running out of solutions. She made a full-court press to get the reps energized. She told her boss it was time to get rid of the low producers and get the producers to produce. New standards were established to place reps on suspension for failure to meet benchmarks. Too many suspensions and the rep was terminated. She also instituted "Catch Up Fridays" for reps whose results were below objective—a full day in the office to focus on reps' particular weak points. If they had not set adequate appointments for the previous week, they were required to spend a whole day to work on appointment setting. The same held true for failure to meet other metrics such as new-business generation and number of closes.

She told her boss, "The reps just aren't selling. We're going to see more turnover but we'll also see the weak people gone, and the ones left are going to know we won't put up with low production." Despite the increased measurements and disciplinary actions, the numbers continued to drop and Jane's frustration grew.

The turnaround came one day when Jane overheard two of her salespeople talking about seeking new jobs. The pay and benefits were fine, they said, but they were tired of the pressure-packed environment and Jane's micromanaging. They were spending more time reporting their numbers than selling. For many, the sales week had been reduced to three days, with two days replaced by "New Business Mondays" and "Catch Up Fridays." Above all, one told the other, they weren't respected or trusted as professionals.

To her face, neither rep had ever mentioned having a problem. In fact, both were always pleasant and compliant with Jane's work rules. Jane's initial reaction was anger and a sense of betrayal. In fact, it took a week

to get over the anger and think logically about the reps' points. After some soul-searching honesty, Jane realized she had become the kind of demanding boss she had always hated. She had failed, first to make objectives, and then, making things even worse, she had exacerbated the problem by alienating her sales force. She faced the harsh reality that she was about to lose her job. Ironically, she had recently read a newspaper article about drug addicts who had to "bottom out" to get better. This, she thought, was her bottoming out. Nobody was going to bail her out but herself.

Her first step in climbing out of the quagmire was fact finding. Jane decided to sit down individually with the two reps and probe. After all, she thought, nothing else seemed to be working, so why not ask them why they were so unhappy? Her first sit-down was with Josh, a third-year salesman who was a top-seller in the group. Jane, trying to avoid the fact that she was eavesdropping, started the conversation with, "I understand you're looking for a new job, and I was wondering if you're displeased with the company or anything else."

"No," Josh responded. "I'm always on the lookout for more money."

"So you're just looking for a better job, no problems here?"

"No, there aren't any problems," Josh responded. Jane knew he wasn't being honest; after all, she had heard him being openly critical of the sales environment. It dawned on her that he was afraid of reprisal from her, so she changed her approach.

"I'm glad to hear that," she said. "But I did want to ask for your advice. You know we haven't made objective in three years now, and I'm trying to figure out why. What do you think? Any ideas?"

"Well, I know there are some reps who might be a little demoralized. Of course, I'm fine with everything but some are feeling that there's just too much pressure and paperwork, and not enough time to sell...."

By asking for input, Jane got Josh to open up in a way that was safe from retaliation. Following the discussion, Jane decided to talk individually with each rep. It was painful but enlightening. The reps reiterated, politely, not only that morale was at an all-time low, but that there were so many rules, sales reviews, and meetings that the reps had little time or focus for selling. For some reps, it had become solely a metrics game.

Everyone's focus was more on trying to keep their job than on making sales.

After getting over the initial shock, Jane did more self-assessment. She realized that when sales began faltering, she might have overreacted and started pushing too hard, which alienated the reps. It was time to change—not the sales team, but Jane had to change. She had become a tyrant, having lost sight of her people's needs in the pursuit of numbers. The result was a continuing cycle of poor sales and, now, the prospect of successful reps abandoning a sinking ship. In an effort to right the ship, first, she sat down with each rep to get his or her input on ways to improve the sales climate.

Next, she did something she hadn't done since she was a new manager: She began reading articles, books, and blogs, as well as attending sales management seminars and webinars. It was time to study how other managers were succeeding in a down economy. All in all, this is not an overnight success story—it took months to undo the damage—but her efforts were respected and appreciated by the reps. The reps were impressed that Jane had the discipline to assess herself, the strength to admit her failures, and the tenacity to make amends to be successful. The reps knew that, in reality, she didn't really *have* to do anything at all. She was the boss. She could have labeled the two reps as malcontents, let them go, and hired people who would fit in better. Instead, she took the hard way and improved herself as well as the sales organization. She gained their trust.

Self-Management Question Number One: Are You a Trusted Leader?

The business world has changed dramatically in the past 20 years due to technology, global marketing, and social/demographic trends. At the same time, the leadership paradigm has been turned upside down and inside out, from vertical and personality-driven to horizontal and trust-driven. The charismatic, hard-charging leaders of the past are being replaced with team players who have ample collaboration and negotiating skills.

A recent *Forbes* magazine article, “Why Trust Is the New Core of Leadership,” states, “Leaders can no longer trust in power; instead they rely on the power of trust.” In addition, the article says:

- They [leaders] themselves will be skilled at trusting, because trusting and trustworthiness enhance each other.
- They will be good at collaboration and the tools of influence.
- They will operate from a clear set of values and principles, because opportunistic or selfish motives are clearly seen and rejected.
- They are likely to be more intrinsically than extrinsically motivated and more likely to use intrinsic motivations with others.

The article touches on the most important single element of your management job, which is *establishing trust*. Do your people trust you? No matter how competent and talented you are, your people won't follow you if they don't trust you. The three components of trust are care, integrity, and competence.

Care Is a Vital Part of Trust

Do you care about your people? They know whether you do or don't. You simply can't fake it. If most of your efforts are tied to your own best interests, your devotees will be scarce. On the other hand, if you exhibit a modicum of selflessness, if you are willing to occasionally fall on your sword for your people, you'll have loyal followers. Do you care about what they care about? Reps' main interests are (in this order) security, respect, and pay. Are you aligned with your salespeople in these areas? Do your decisions take into account the interests of your people as well as yourself and the organization? Even more importantly, are you aware of your people's interests?

Successful leaders fight for their employees. When it comes to pay, promotions, and working conditions, a leader is the sales rep's champion—defending his reps even when it's not popular with colleagues or bosses. Every time a sales leader goes to bat for a subordinate, that sends a resounding message to the team. Oddly enough, even when it means clashing with the boss, the boss will most likely respect your intentions and your principles.

Research shows that employees do want a personal touch from their manager. They want you to know them as people and know about their lives. But they do not want you to be their friend or confidant. It's likely they don't rely on you for emotional support. They rely on co-workers and friends for that.

The litmus test for caring is a single word: sacrifice. It's easy to hand out spiffs and gift cards to your people. Those types of gifts don't really require anything from you. The real gifts of caring are those that demand you take the time to go the extra mile, for example, to help a rep get a promotion. Or take a chance of failure to support an initiative from your sales team. Your people know you care when you have some skin in the game, when you're willing to take a risk for them, fight for them, and protect them. That requires getting a little bruised occasionally and perhaps irritating your colleagues or boss.

Sales leaders who really take care of their people are likely to be confident and self-assured. These are the leaders who know they are good enough to take risks, to take chances of offending people. They know they can recover from failure and overcome difficulties in the quest to support their people. And they know that the payoff—trust—is greater than the risk.

Integrity Provides the Foundation for Trust

Tell the truth. Always. In *The Little Book of Coaching*, Ken Blanchard and Don Shula said, "Champion coaches operate out of unquestionable integrity. They call it the way they see it. They do not have hidden agendas. They do not say one thing but mean another. They do not manipulate people. They are genuine and sincere."

From a practical perspective, irrespective of your moral or religious beliefs, honesty makes sense because few of us have a good enough memory to lie successfully, and your salespeople are pretty good at sensing untruths and manipulation. It's just too easy to get caught and the potential gain is never worth the damage to one's reputation.

Research at Bowling Green State University included a study of 193 salespeople from ten U.S. companies suggesting a strong, positive relationship between the integrity of a manager and sales force productivity/

job satisfaction. In effect, the study supports the concept that trusted managers create better relationships with their sales team, which leads to job satisfaction and ultimately better sales results. The element of trust was measured by such statements as “My manager would never try to gain an advantage by deceiving workers,” “I have complete faith in the integrity of my manager,” and “I feel quite confident that my manager will always treat me fairly.” Results showed that managers who were role models of integrity, ethics, and fairness created a trusting relationship with subordinates, “which subsequently results in greater job satisfaction and overall job performance by salespeople.”

Competency Fortifies Trusting Relationships

Do you know everything your reps are required to know, such as pricing, product details, procedures, and paperwork? We all know managers who don't waste time on the “details” as if those were beneath their lofty station as manager. Actually, it's often a throwback to their sales days when it was more important to persuade customers than to inform them. These managers are the ones who expertly avoid and deflect questions on new products and pricing, for instance, referring reps to the appropriate Web site or binder. What they don't realize is that everyone—their boss and their subordinates—notices their lack of knowledge.

An ill-prepared manager is viewed as incompetent and rarely commands the credibility needed to be effective. Managers need to know everything reps are expected to know. And it helps to know even more. For example, are you keeping up with the latest trends in selling techniques and technology? Do you know your industry and your competitors' pricing and products? Here's a key competency question: Could you lead a training session on any of your sales team's major issues, including pricing, products, competition, and sales techniques?

Taking it one step further, are you going beyond basic competency and finding creative ways to apply your knowledge that your reps might not have considered? For example, look for ways to combine your product knowledge to develop creative sales applications for specific industries or types of customers. Use your acumen of competitors' market positioning to develop selling strategies for your people. For example, if

your major competitor is emphasizing product affordability, you can differentiate your selling strategy with a focus on product quality and durability.

Be the go-to person for your reps and you become the go-to person for your boss—a surefire way to advance one's career. And, more importantly, it creates the foundation of trusting relationships.

What's the Most Important Trust Factor?

Very simply, it is *care*. That's the single most important factor in establishing trust. You can make mistakes in judgment. You can make factual errors. You can even have an integrity problem. But as long as your people know you care about their welfare, it's all okay. Your people don't expect you to be perfect all the time. They know you will occasionally be forgetful, inattentive, or preoccupied. They know you will take your eye off the ball at times. But knowing that your heart is in the right place—that you will protect and support them—makes the biggest screwups bearable.

On the other hand, if they see as you as self-absorbed and oblivious to their best interests, your team will continuously add your every mistake to their list of items that make you a bad manager. In fact, even the good things that you do will be marginalized and ignored by your people; they won't want you to be successful because you don't care about their success. Essentially, if your salespeople think you don't care about them, there's no amount of competency or integrity that matters.

All in all, the element of trust allows your team to be innovative and aggressively seek new ways of doing things and tackling problems. It allows your team to reach peak performance by being “in the zone.” Athletes describe it as moments when they play their best, free of distractions and self-consciousness while feeling confident and in control. Effective sales leaders enable peak performance through support and encouragement, letting team members know that the manager “has their back.” The reps know that management isn't lying in wait for a “gotcha” moment. Without the distractions of fear or intimidation—but being held accountable—reps can relax and do their jobs productively.

David Novak, CEO of Yum Brands, which operates KFC, Taco Bell, and Pizza Hut, saw profits nearly double in three years. In *Fortune* magazine, he said, “What really made the difference was the idea that if we trusted each other, we could work together to make something happen that was bigger than our individual capabilities.”

Self-Management, the Rest of the Story

Self-management requires self-analysis. Chances are you’re not getting much real feedback from your subordinates and maybe not from your boss. If you are, that’s great. But, as for many of us, a good deal of self-analysis is needed to complement what little feedback we get from others. Take time to do a self-inventory of some important issues that determine your ultimate success in sales management.

Following are 15 questions essential for effectively managing yourself.

1. Are You Advancing or Retreating?

Successful leaders and companies constantly adapt to succeed. It’s an either/or situation: Either you’re gaining ground or you’re losing it. General George S. Patton, legendary leader who led key World War II campaigns, said, “I don’t want any messages saying ‘I am holding my position.’ We are not holding a...thing. Our basic plan of operation is to advance and keep on advancing regardless of whether we have to go under, over, or through the enemy.”

If you, as a sales manager, are holding your ground, staying the same, you can bet the train has already left you at the station. Sales managers are like sharks who breathe by continually moving forward. When sales managers stop forward movement, they don’t simply stagnate, they retreat. That’s the law of the sales jungle, the brutal truth of sales leadership.

The only thing predictable about sales management is continual change. Markets can change overnight. Customers’ needs vary by the day. Competitors switch to new tactics faster than the eye can see. New threats and opportunities pop up like whack-a-moles. Technology, well, you know that story. The rate of change is daunting, even disorienting if you’re not advancing and adjusting.

At the heart of a manager's growth are learning and self-development. This means seeking (and teaching) the latest in technology, sales techniques, market intelligence, and product applications. That's the easy part. The hard part is self-development, which requires self-awareness and fine-tuning your inner dynamics, such as patience, listening, and impulse control. The big challenge is that sales managers don't have a lot of help in developing their skills.

Only half of the top 25 business schools in America offer sales management courses, according to *U.S. News & World Report*. Many, if not a majority of, sales managers are former salespeople promoted into management with little training or organizational support. Researchers at Drexel University and the University of Florida studied 286 sales managers from a wide cross section of U.S. companies, stating that 57% had no training after being named sales manager.

For those of us who aren't natural born leaders (which is the vast majority of us), sales manager training has become a do-it-yourself program. Of course, it has always been like that since most training budgets have traditionally been aimed at the sales force itself, pretty much leaving managers to fend for themselves. In reality, the lack of company-sponsored training has had little impact on the success of top sales managers. That's because successful managers take the initiative to train themselves. Successful leaders have an insatiable appetite for learning. They continuously seek and gather information that makes them better leaders and gives their teams a competitive advantage. They realize that leaders are made, not born. You might have inherited traits such as intelligence or verbal ability, but two-thirds of leadership is learned. Regardless of genetics, many sales leaders have developed themselves into people of power and influence through continuous learning.

2. Are You Stuck in a Rut?

Some say that leadership is a matter of perpetually redeveloping or reinventing oneself. "Unlike past generations that could rely on a consistent set of core skills and a clear career path, today we all must constantly revisit our skills, reinvestigate our aspirations, and reconstitute our careers," said Samuel Bacharach, author of *Get Them on Your Side*. "This is often difficult because we're trapped in routine, avoid risk and

simply like being comfortable. But we must reinvent ourselves because of the turbulence around us. Technological disruptions, shifting organizational structures and unpredictable markets demand that we pivot and take unexpected directions. The very core knowledge around us, the very organizations in which we work, the very markets that demand our attention, are changing at such a rapid pace that skills, insights and observations that were true at one point are no longer true or at best, are no longer accurate.”

The Mills Study, conducted by the University of California at Berkeley, tracked subjects over 50 years of age, showing that it’s never too late to reinvent oneself. “Even at 60 years old, people can resolve to make themselves more the people they would like to become,” said study director Ravenna Helson in a *Psychology Today* article. The trick for sales managers is to start earlier, and to take the time to become your ideal self. Too many times, we’re just too busy to make progress in self-development. We get caught up in the daily demand of sales management and fail to take the time to make ourselves better managers. In fact, high achievers are more likely to neglect their long-term goals and personal improvement because they are focused on solving today’s problems.

Reinventing oneself, or becoming the manager you want to be, is a three-step process. First is an honest self-assessment of your strengths, weaknesses, and passions. You need to know the areas in which you need improvement. Observe successful managers around you. What do they have that you need? Consider taking a self-assessment survey; they’re affordable and plentiful online. Listen to others’ assessments of you, even if they’re saying things you don’t like to hear about yourself. A good self-assessment helps you to target your educational efforts, setting priorities for training and especially aiming to strengthen weaknesses that might be holding back your long-term potential. For example, do you have a short-fuse temper that hampers your relationships with peers and subordinates? Are you impatient to the point of being abrupt and abrasive? Do you delegate effectively? Do you need more polish in speaking to large groups? Do you need a better understanding of financials and the economy? There is something hampering your progress. Find it and address it.

Second, determine long-term goals in terms of career path and personal characteristics. Career-wise, do you want to be a vice president in two years? Do you want the CEO job in five years? Do you hunger to run your own company? What do these people do to reach these positions? What are the core skills needed? How do these people walk and talk and conduct themselves? Envision yourself in that position—what kind of person do you need to be to get and hold the job? Picture your ideal self, and then develop a program to become that person. In setting your goals, keep this in mind: Numerous studies suggest that people who are intrinsically motivated—working toward things they find personally fulfilling—are more satisfied with their lives than those who are extrinsically motivated, driven by money and status. Intrinsic motivation in sales management is loving the job and the people more than the pay and perks. The most successful sales managers are those who are fulfilled by developing their people and making a contribution to the organization's success. It's no coincidence that higher levels of intrinsic motivation lead to higher levels of extrinsic reward. On the other hand, if your goal setting is extrinsically motivated, chances are you might reach your ideal self but not be happy with what you find.

Third, just do it. Educate yourself to become who you want to be. Be a student of people management. Read books. Go to seminars. Attend webinars. Subscribe to newsletters and professional blogs. If you're not growing and learning, you're slipping behind. And that's a great disservice to your people and your organization. If, today, you are managing the same way you managed two years ago, you're stagnating. No matter how good your results are, it's delusional to think you can't get better. Continuous learning is the key to improving your skills and your results. Company-sponsored management training can be effective, but don't wait to be trained. Learn on your own, take the initiative to know the latest trends and practices of people management.

In addition, be a student of the sales profession and stay abreast of the latest technological and strategic developments in selling. Researchers and consultants offer a continuous stream of information on ways to improve your team's sales effectiveness. Much of it is free, with online convenience. Join sales groups on LinkedIn or other sales Web sites and blogs to get daily updates at no cost. For a small cost, you can subscribe

to online newsletters and magazines that offer valuable sales tips and techniques.

Take it a step further—keep in tune with your industry trends. Subscribe to trade magazines and industry blogs. Be it telecommunications or office products or insurance, everything you know about your business can be translated to sales. The intelligence gained from industry trends helps your sales team adapt to product applications, pricing, and competition.

In addition, constantly monitor yourself and ask why you react in certain ways to situations. Take an online personality assessment to help evaluate your personality type and aptitudes. Self-knowledge will help you relate to your team and help you refine your interpersonal skills. At the same time, evaluate your goals and make sure you're making progress to that ideal self that you envision becoming. It will take reinventing yourself more than once, but that's something leaders do on a regular basis—that is to constantly evaluate themselves and their objectives to become the best they can be.

3. Are You Really Using Your Brain?

You could say that our brains want us to be better sales managers. The brain is wired to accommodate self-improvement and adaptive behavior. With the advent of MRI and other advanced research technology, researchers have found a fascinating function of the brain: Our thoughts can change the structure and function of the brain. The phenomenon is called neuroplasticity. According to Alvaro Fernandez, co-author of *The SharpBrains Guide to Brain Fitness*, neuroplasticity is “the brain’s lifelong capacity to change and rewire itself in response to the stimulation of learning and experience. This includes both the lifelong ability to create new neurons—neurogenesis—and to create new connections between neurons—synaptogenesis.... A consequence of the brain’s plasticity is that the brain may change with every experience, thought and emotion, from which it follows that you yourself have the potential power to change your brain with everything that you think, do and feel. So brain fitness and optimization are about much more than crossword puzzles and blueberries; they are about cultivating a new mindset and mastering a new toolkit that allows us to appreciate and take full advantage of our brain’s incredible properties.”

Contrary to scientific thought of just a few decades ago, the brain is not fixed and unchanging. It is amazingly flexible and can be shaped by positive thinking. We are capable of becoming our ideal selves. We can reinvent ourselves, adapt to change and bounce back from failure. Using the brain's powerful potential, managers can become stronger leaders by building skills and habits ranging from impulse control to mental toughness. It takes specific techniques such as visualization and positive self-talk, but more important is the awareness of our brain's powerful potential.

Neuroplasticity is like having four-wheel drive. The simple fact that you know you have it gives you confidence. When you know how to activate and use it, four-wheel drive will take you places others can't go. As Buddha once said, "We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts, we make the world."

4. Speaking of Adaptability, Are You an Adaptive Leader?

Many good sales managers have learned to maintain momentum by using adaptive leadership. The U.S. Army War College has an acronym for battle situations that applies to everyday sales activities: VUCA, which stands for volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. Similar to military leaders, adaptive sales leaders learn to live with unpredictability, anticipate changes, take risks, make decisions, learn from events, and adjust plans accordingly.

According to leadership researcher and author Warren Bennis, "The critical quality of a leader...is adaptive capacity. Adaptive capacity allows leaders to respond quickly and intelligently to constant change. It is the ability to identify and seize opportunities. It allows leaders to act and then evaluate results instead of attempting to collect and analyze all the data before acting."

The starting point is a foundation of core values that drive their actions and reactions. Such guiding beliefs as honesty, achievement, competitiveness, fairness, and compassion serve as a compass that guides their actions. Three skills—mostly learned on the job—create successful adaptive leaders:

Vigilance means constantly being alert to opportunities and threats. The adaptive sales leader hungers for market intelligence, craves technology advancements, and seeks new sales techniques, as well as product innovation and uses. This goes beyond simple alertness. It includes seeking, learning, and applying information in a way to give the sales team a competitive advantage. The adaptive leader has a network of intelligence sources—including blogs, magazines, colleagues, customers, competitors, and subordinates—that constantly provide usable information. This allows the sales leader to recognize changes in the market and identify ways to capitalize on them.

Agility refers to the predisposition of the sales manager to consider a variety of options in problem solving, to move quickly from unsuccessful alternatives toward viable solutions. This skill promotes innovative responses to challenges rather than considering only a few options and stubbornly trying to make them work. Vigilance feeds agility by providing a huge database that the manager can draw from, providing a seemingly inexhaustible source of potential options. The adaptive leader is able to design a plan and then make midcourse corrections when needed.

Synthesis is the ability to bring together a variety of people, tasks, resources, and data to achieve objectives. It's the capacity to recognize the challenge and assimilate available resources quickly and potently. From a people perspective, it's the knack of knowing the right people to involve and understanding how to best motivate them. It means knowing that you, as the sales manager, cannot overcome challenges by yourself but your sales team can. This essentially is a penchant for executing the plan in a way that empowers and inspires the people around you while optimally using available resources. Like a professional athlete, the sales manager quickly processes hundreds of details, using field position and teammates' skills to marginalize the opponent and make the play.

5. Are You Aware Enough to Be Self-Aware?

Self-awareness is vital to successful leadership for many reasons. (The sad irony is that if you're not a self-aware person, you don't know you lack self-awareness.) Self-awareness means that you know your strengths and weaknesses, motives, values, and personality traits. It allows you to deal with people honestly and provides self-regulation that enhances your credibility and rapport with others.

A study, "When It Comes to Business Leadership, Nice Guys Finish First," conducted by Cornell University and Green Peak Partners, indicates that self-awareness is a key component of management success. "Interestingly, a high self-awareness score was the strongest predictor of executive success," states the study. "This is not altogether surprising as executives who are aware of their weaknesses are often better able to hire subordinates who perform well in categories in which the leader lacks acumen. These leaders are also more able to entertain the idea that someone on their team might have an idea that is even better than their own."

In addition, self-awareness allows leaders to understand how they come across to others and how they are perceived. This helps them self-regulate characteristics—such as forcefulness, authority, and decisiveness—to promote effective communications with subordinates and avoid alienation. Self-awareness is a vital part of self-control. After all, how can you control negative impulses like anger and impatience if you can't recognize them? This self-recognition requires you to examine your moods and emotions. If you're able to recognize, for example, that you feel angry after a spat with your spouse, you can address the anger and control it so as not to let it spill into the workplace.

6. Are You Mentally Tough Enough?

Sales management can be an unforgiving, even brutal profession. It requires more than a little mental toughness. Management researchers have found that success in many professions has less to do with intelligence and skill than grit and persistence—also known as mental toughness. Perseverance might be the key indicator of leadership success, according to recent research in which an incoming class of cadets at West Point was studied to determine why some dropped out and others

succeeded. Researchers found that the ones who survived the rigorous training were simply grittier. Their persistence was more important than IQ, athleticism, or other skills in determining their staying power. Successful leaders work through adversity and confront challenge. They just don't quit.

What is mental toughness? Very simply, it is the ability to activate certain emotional and cognitive skills to excel under pressure. Ironically, many of the attributes that we associate with mental toughness are actually just the opposite. A mentally tough manager is not a fist-banging, uncompromisingly stern taskmaster barking orders to underlings. In fact, this kind of leader shows more signs of mental weakness and insecurity than a truly mentally tough manager. Many times, we find fear masquerading as toughness.

Here are the key factors of mental toughness:

- **Self-control**—In the middle of a crisis, the genuinely tough manager controls emotions such as anger, fear, and impatience to remain composed while maintaining rapport with superiors and subordinates. There's no striking out or striking back in anger, only a resolve to solve the problem at hand. This enables the manager to function effectively, even when superiors are overly critical or subordinates are obviously inept.
- **Confidence**—Tough leaders maintain a poised, positive attitude despite adversity. They have the ability to avoid choking under pressure. This is the self-knowledge that triumph is possible, even probable, despite the circumstances. Confidence is functional optimism—the belief that things are going to work out if one concentrates on the goal and not the obstacles.
- **Focus**—Being able to deal with distractions without disrupting progress is another trait of mentally tough leaders. In addition to maintaining a laser focus on the issue at hand, it involves addressing important priorities first, while deferring other issues. Concentration plus prioritization equals focus.
- **Persistence**—Top sales leaders continue to pursue goals even when the going gets tough and problems seem insurmountable. This means having the tenacity to endure discomfort and

hardship to pursue the objective. At the heart of persistence is the patience that their efforts will lead to accomplishing the mission.

- **Resilience**—Mental toughness means bouncing back from failures, setbacks, and disappointments. It's being able to smile in the face of adversity. Resilient people expect setbacks and know that they will get knocked to their knees, but they use adversity as a springboard to better prepare them for success. They learn from hardships. In fact, they are energized by difficulties. Rather than being embittered by defeat, they become stronger and smarter.
- **Flexibility**—The last component of mental toughness is having the ability to create innovative solutions by using a variety of ideas, concepts, and feedback from others. As opposed to rigidly clinging to traditional thinking, this includes solving problems by using novel, nontraditional approaches that might involve paradigm shifts to conventional thought.

Mental toughness is not something you are born with. It is not a personality trait, but rather a learned response that develops over time. Like a muscle, it has to be strengthened to remain powerful. Hundreds of sales coaches and consultants offer training programs in mental toughness. They might differ greatly, but many address a few core competencies. One is visualization, sometimes called guided mental imagery.

The goal of visualization, which originated in sports psychology, is to program your subconscious mind to achieve peak performance through mental rehearsal. For example, say you're running a major sales kick-off. Everyone will be there—your sales reps, your boss, all company executives, and support staff. Using visualization techniques, you create a movie in your head. You visualize the sights, smells, sounds, and feelings as you effectively speak to the group. You hear your voice as powerful, crisp, and clear. You feel your thoughts flow effortlessly, being received enthusiastically by your audience. You see people concentrating on your words and taking notes. You visualize your PowerPoint presentation and how well it supplements your speech with colorful subtopics. You take questions from the group and answer them quickly and precisely, no matter how difficult. You envision roadblocks such as objections, and overcome them without hesitation. At the end, you hear

the audience applaud and see your people beaming with pride at your masterful oration.

Essentially, you have done what many professional athletes do. They play the game in their heads, creating mental pathways that assist in peak performance. They envision every touchdown or home run before they even touch the field. In addition, they imagine encountering possible setbacks and overcoming them. They do it daily and use positive images, sounds, and sensations. They even create their own mental highlights film focusing on their outstanding victories of the past. In this sense, many feel that visualization contributes to optimal athletic performance. The ostensible result for sales managers is more relaxed, confident, and focused job performance.

Positive self-talk is another way to build mental toughness. Proponents say that this technique improves self-confidence and goal-oriented thinking. The first step is to limit negative thinking. We all are nagged by varying degrees of negative mental chatter such as “I can’t handle this” or “This can’t be done.” By being aware of these self-limiting thoughts, you can change them to “Why can’t I?” and then to “I can.” The trick to it is to monitor your self-defeating thoughts and eliminate them before they affect your performance, changing them into positive actionable thoughts. In other words, change problem-based thinking (“Why me? Why now?”) to solution-based thinking (“Here’s how we solve this”). Positive self-talk helps neutralize the fear arising from setbacks. For example, instead of retreating in dread at the loss of a major account, the effective sales leader is telling himself, “This is my time to shine, the chance to turn catastrophe into victory.”

Positive affirmations are also a key part of this process. Repeating phrases such as “I am a high-performing sales manager” programs the subconscious to reach that heightened state of functioning. You can apply positive affirmations to a particular objective such as “I am going to lead my team to reach 100 units this week” or a longer-term goal such as “As a distinguished sales manager, I plan to be the next Regional Vice President.” In addition, positive affirmations can be used for short-term setbacks or crises. These are such affirmations as “I’ve handled worse situations than this and will manage through it successfully.”

Another technique to strengthen mental toughness is to challenge yourself, to practice anxiety control. We all feel anxiety in stressful situations, but controlling anxiety increases the likelihood of success. It helps to occasionally step outside your comfort zone, to experience anxiety and thereby learn to control it. For example, if speaking in front of groups frightens you, make an effort to put yourself in that situation. Try speaking out in small groups and move incrementally to larger groups. Learn to master the discomfort, small steps at a time. These situations teach us relaxation and stress management techniques that not only build self-confidence but also prepare us for unexpected crises. By doing something you don't want to, you are building willpower, or willing yourself to perform even when you really think you can't. Any way you can increase self-control strengthens mental toughness and, hopefully, improves impulse control, patience, and resilience. Challenging yourself to new and different situations also builds critical thinking and adaptive skills that can be used in crises on the job.

Sharpening mental toughness can be achieved through a variety of procedures including meditation and relaxation techniques. It's not easy to sort through all the methods to find the ones that work for us, but the important thing is to stay open to options and practice a variety of things until you find the ones that work. The ultimate goal for a sales manager is to be mentally and emotionally prepared for the daily difficulties and challenges presented by a host of external sources, including salespeople, customers, bosses, and competitors. You'll never be able to anticipate the type or volume of problems, but you can control how you react to them. Your reaction will determine your ultimate success.

7. Do You Have Bad-Boss Characteristics?

According to a *USA Today* article, Robert Hogan, a well-known business psychologist, noted that 75% of working adults said the worst and most stressful aspect of their job was their boss. Findings from two studies by Badbossology.com showed that 48% of employees surveyed would fire their boss and 71% of those looking for a new job attribute their job search to a bad boss. With all the daily challenges a sales rep faces (competition, problem customers, pressure to achieve objectives), the last thing she needs is additional stress from an overbearing boss.

We all have a few bad-boss traits but too many of them might mean you have the “bad boss” label (and might not even know it). Refer to the following items and ask yourself honestly whether you need to improve in certain areas. Better yet, ask peers, subordinates, and others to give you a realistic picture of yourself.

- **Poor communication skills with your team**—You communicate too infrequently, inaccurately, or manipulatively to keep your team well informed. You expect your people to read your mind, and you get frustrated when they can’t.
- **Inflexibility**—You treat every person and situation similarly without regard to individual differences. This also includes clinging stubbornly to positions even when reasonable options are available.
- **Lack of follow-through**—You have a tendency to let projects get sidetracked because you did not continue to monitor progress.
- **Inaction**—You wait for situations to change rather than taking charge and changing the situation to control the outcomes. Inaction is closely akin to indecisiveness.
- **Not invested in your team members**—You have no interest in your people’s careers, income, and well-being. This also includes the inability to see how your career goals are dependent on your sales team’s welfare.
- **Uncaring**—You don’t know your people, their interests, personalities, goals, and motivation. Your decisions are based on your personal career ambitions, not those of your subordinates.
- **Not accountable**—You blame others for failures and problems.
- **Intimidation**—You condition your people to be afraid of you. Your subordinates follow directions out of fear, not loyalty.
- **Resistant to change**—You don’t seek feedback to improve yourself. You are slow to adapt to changes in technology and market conditions.
- **Egotistical**—You’re a know-it-all and you don’t need training, instruction, or advice. You rarely admit being wrong, and only then when you have to.

- **Lack of impulse control**—You have a proclivity to talk over others, display anger quickly, or make inappropriate comments. In stressful situations, you tend to be impatient and strike out at others.
- **Ingratiating behavior**—You “suck up” to superiors to ingratiate yourself to them. Your attitude toward your subordinates is the opposite, except when superiors are in the room.
- **Maintaining dominance**—You hire ordinary people who won’t outshine you in the eyes of your superiors. You discourage employee initiatives that might surpass your ability. Likewise, you also discourage your people from stepping outside their job duties with statements like “I’ll take care of managing. You take care of selling.”
- **Referring to past errors**—You like to keep people in their place by reminding them of their past mistakes and failures.
- **Playing favorites**—You give preferential treatment to your favorite reps, and fail to apply rules fairly and equitably among your sales team.
- **Duplicity**—You say one thing to one person, then something totally different to another; for example, you might tell an underperforming rep that you’re trying to save his job and then tell someone else that the rep is worthless and needs to be fired.

We’ve all had our share of bosses who have some or all of the bad-boss characteristics. And, in all cases of ineffective leaders, there’s this irony: It takes a lot more time and energy to be a bad boss than to be a successful leader. That’s because the traditional bad boss spends an inordinate amount of time devising rules and regulations to control his horde of unruly reps. In addition, it takes a lot of effort to monitor and enforce the edicts. Notwithstanding the great deal of creativity that goes into devising these instruments of torture for the reps, the end result is poor results. That’s because reps hate to be controlled. Herein lies the paradox of control: The more control exerted, the less control achieved by the boss. When you tighten the reins, you increase the chance of losing your grip. Salespeople will rebel, developing their own underground resistance against tyrannical managers.

At the heart of “bad-bossology” is an element of cynicism and pessimism. Bad bosses, in general, doubt the ability of their charges to be responsible. Their lack of trust creates a need to micromanage.

Much of this is learned. Bad bosses frequently learn to manage from their own bad bosses. On the other hand, many times the elements of bad-bossology arise from personal insecurities—that is, these bosses have to believe in others’ ineptitude to shore up their own value. Many feel obsessed to prove that they’re better than their subordinates. If not, they might think, why would the sales manager be needed?

All-star sales leaders have learned to overcome personal insecurities. They have “unlearned” counterproductive lessons from the past. And they have discovered the power of working with, rather than lording over, their salespeople.

8. Are You a Sales Narcissist?

There’s a difference between bad bosses and narcissists. Not all bad bosses are narcissists. Some are insecure, others obsessive-compulsive, and some are just plain incompetent. On the other hand, *all* narcissists are bad bosses.

Are your management efforts doomed by narcissistic tendencies? True narcissism is a clinically diagnosed form of psychosis, but many of us in sales have shades of it in varying degrees. The sales profession attracts those with narcissistic traits because sales is a manipulative process that rewards those who are independent, self-sufficient, and persuasive, and who love to be the center of attention. What true narcissist isn’t lured by the prospect of being The Boss, The Teacher, The Coach, the one who’s now ready to captivate the sales team with his or her many talents?

The truth is the narcissist has little hope for success in sales management. Sales management requires collaboration, coordination, the ability to thrive in the shadow of others, and a penchant for giving others credit. No matter how difficult it is to admit, the sales manager is dispensable. The process goes on, whether or not the sales manager is there. This is simply not an environment for the narcissist.

Charles H. Green, founder of Trusted Advisor Associates, further describes the narcissistic manager: “The narcissist...is wounded and

insecure. He seeks praise and/or followers to reassure and shore up his shaky self-regard. But he also tends to use these people and even hold them in some self-contempt because, not really believing in his goodness or rightness, he believes he has manipulated and even fooled others into becoming his devotees and sycophants. He tends to shore up his own self-regard by devaluing others. He also is...sensitive to—and some times explosively reactive to—criticism.”

Those with narcissistic tendencies are eager to talk about themselves, but not so eager to hear about you. They tend to focus conversations on their accomplishments and idealize their lives. Some are highly skilled and intelligent enough to mask their self-absorption, knowing that it can build resentment from others. In fact, you can find many who are generous and giving—as long as it doesn’t impose a hardship on them. There’s always an ulterior motive for their “good acts.” There has to be public adulation or a business advantage from which to benefit. The key word to distinguish a narcissist from others is “sacrifice.” Will they help you even if they have to make a sacrifice? It’s very doubtful a narcissist will.

When it comes to protecting their career, narcissists will throw subordinates under the bus. They will lie, cheat, and steal to protect themselves, especially if they think they can get away with it. And even though they refuse to play by the rules, they are likely to establish a litany of rules to control their subordinates. By the way, there are many narcissists who don’t try to hide their proclivities. In fact, many will openly tell you, “This is all about me.” They revel in being viewed as a maverick, a kind of accomplished corporate outlaw who can get things done by operating on the periphery of boundaries and rules.

Similarly, other professions attract narcissistic types: attorneys, doctors, dentists, pilots, and others. The common denominators are that all these are skill-driven positions that place the incumbent front and center, in control of the process. This is the perfect arena for the narcissist. For example, even though a surgeon has a support staff, if the surgeon is not there, nothing gets done. The support staff is just that, support only. The surgeon—like a salesperson—makes it all happen, driving the process nearly completely. He or she is in the driver’s seat with others along for the ride and requires little assistance or support. If necessary,

these skill-driven professionals could do it all alone. Therefore, there is a sense of control because the support people ascribe and abdicate total authority to the principal, be it the salesperson, attorney, or surgeon. Support staff certainly can't do the job and probably wouldn't want to. The professional is the one receiving the adulation, adoration, and credit for the process. Narcissistic salespeople have ample social graces and charm but are usually loners at heart, sometimes lacking in empathy and rarely team players.

The self-centeredness of most narcissists is readily apparent to almost everyone but themselves. Essentially, a narcissist uses charm and the appearance of caring for others as a mask for manipulating them for the narcissist's benefit.

Following is a checklist of narcissistic characteristics outlined by Sue Barrett of the Barrett Sales Blog:

- Self-absorption and attention seeking
- Deception and rule breaking
- Arrogance and superiority
- Sense of entitlement and aggression
- Deflection of blame and exploitation
- Lack of empathy or remorse
- Lack of insight and self-awareness

You'll also find sales narcissists to be micromanaging managers who intimidate subordinates and have few long-term or deep relationships.

Although we all show some of these characteristics from time to time, if you have five or more on a consistent basis, you might have narcissistic tendencies. It's not something you overcome instantly, but by being aware of the traits, you can address them in a way that makes you a stronger leader.

In fact, many sales leaders have "adaptive narcissism," which is characterized by extroversion, drive, self-assurance, risk taking, persuasiveness, and initiative. They have learned to avoid the dysfunctional narcissistic qualities of intimidation, deception, arrogance, deflection, and lack of

empathy. Effective leaders are bound to have some narcissistic traits. The leaders who are able to purge the dysfunctional characteristics are the ones who succeed.

9. Have You Put Your Ego on Hold?

Whether you're a narcissist or not, one of the largest obstacles for sales managers is the failure to check their egos at the door.

"I believe the biggest addiction problem in the workplace today is the human ego," said Ken Blanchard in the article "I'm OK, You're Not—It's All About EGO." He states, "When people operate from their ego, their behavior tends to be based on fear rather than trust. When people behave out of fear, they have a high need to control others and their environment and they have a win-lose orientation towards everything. Even when discussing the weather they want to make sure you know that *they* know more about weather than you do.... I became fascinated by people's perceptions of bad bosses, so I started asking people around the country to describe the worst boss they ever worked for. The primary description I heard was that of a high ego-driven person. The worst managers were described as poor listeners who were reluctant to share credit and always wanted to be in the limelight. While a lot of people would think people with a big ego had high self-esteem, I found the opposite to be true: Individuals who operate from their ego are usually covering up 'not okay' feelings about themselves."

As a salesperson, ego gratification is consistent and immediate. You make a sale, you get the praise individually and immediately. The sales manager who expects the same is doomed to failure. If you're in it for adulation and a quick ego fix, you'll continually be disappointed. Good sales managers become invisible at times, letting their people take the plaudits. The best managers get ego gratification from seeing their team succeed. Signs of an overactive ego include these:

- Acting as if you're better/smarter than everyone else
- Seeking praise and taking credit for achievements
- Winning arguments rather than seeking truth; having to be right all the time
- Boasting of accomplishments

- Denigrating the achievements of others
- Exaggerating one's role in projects
- Displaying arrogance, an inability to listen to others' advice

The reality is that you might really be a better salesperson than your people. It's likely that you were promoted to be a manager because you had superior sales and organizational skills. The key is to use your knowledge and skills to support and teach your people. When you come off as superior and arrogant, you will lose support and credibility.

10. Can You Empathize?

Empathy is understanding another person's feelings from his or her perspective. It's having the ability to disassociate one's personal perspective and walk in another's shoes. It's different from sympathy, which is only feeling sorry for someone. Rather it means going deeper to try to identify with a person's feelings while understanding the person's point of view. This is a monumental selling tool, and even more importantly, a vital managing technique. Empathy strengthens your decision making because it allows you to identify roadblocks and unintended consequences. It helps you develop loyalty from your people because they feel understood and respected. It heightens your level of credibility by helping you make decisions that are fair and equitable and that are backed by personal selflessness. Following are three ways to develop your power of empathy:

1. **Imagine**—Put yourself in the place of your subordinate, no matter how difficult the discussion might be. If you were that person in that situation, how would you feel? What would your needs and motivations be? What outcomes would you want?
2. **Defer**—Momentarily set aside your personal beliefs and agendas to fully understand the other person. Even if it's a stretch. For example, say you have a rep who refuses to sell a particular product. You don't and can't understand it—you've never experienced anything like this in 20 years of managing. The key is to defer judgment (and outrage). Probe to see what's behind the rep's thinking, assuming there's a good reason. You might find a legitimate ethical, moral, or business rationale behind the rep's

behavior. The secret is this: Don't jump to conclusions until you know the whole story.

- 3. Identify**—Remember situations, feelings, and thoughts that you've had in the past that can create a link to your subordinate. Summon feelings of frustration, fear, anger, or elation to help you identify. Try to put those feelings into words, for example, "If I were in your shoes, I'd be mad too." A simple statement like that not only builds rapport but actually helps you really identify with the person.

11. Do You Have EQ? Are You Teaching It?

If you have empathy, self-awareness, and ego control, you have some of the major components of EQ—emotional quotient or emotional intelligence. EQ—which can be learned to some extent—is a natural remedy for bad-boss characteristics and sales narcissism.

Recent management studies have shown that EQ is even more important than IQ in management success. According to Travis Bradberry, co-author of *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, EQ helped explain a peculiar research finding from the 1990s: Businesspeople with average IQs outperformed those with the highest IQs 70% of the time. Although IQ, for many years, had been the primary identifier of business success, EQ has been found to be a more potent characteristic of high managerial performance. Bradberry found 90% of top performers to be high in EQ but found only 20% of bottom performers to be high in EQ. Furthermore, those with high EQs earn an average of \$29,000 more per year than those with low EQs.

EQ is composed of internal skills (the ways we manage ourselves) and external skills (how we interact with others).

Internal EQ Skills

Managing ourselves begins with self-awareness, previously described as the ability to understand one's strengths, weaknesses, motivations, and behavior. It allows us to recognize when our behavior is appropriate to the situation and how we affect others. People who are self-aware know when to talk and when to listen. They have an inner filter that helps them say the right thing at the right time or, more importantly, prevents

them from saying the wrong thing. This inner gyroscope keeps them aligned with people and in sync with situations. This self-monitoring allows a manager to recognize whether he or she is, for example, coming on too strong and intimidating a subordinate. In this way, it helps the sales manager adapt behavior to effectively reach the sales rep in a nonthreatening way.

Self-regulation is the next phase of EQ internal skills. This is simply the ability to manage emotions. Sales management can be an emotionally charged activity, especially considering the mercurial nature of salespeople. Clearly, it's important to control our anger, disappointment, and frustration in order to maintain effective communications with our people. By omitting counterproductive emotions—and staying cool, calm, and collected—we're able to focus on mutually agreeable problem solving while maintaining good working relations.

Self-initiative is the third part of internal skills. Sales managers with high EQs usually have above-average levels of initiative. They are motivated internally without outside incentives. Their inner drive enables them to set high goals and develop strategies to achieve them.

External EQ Skills

Empathy, as outlined earlier, is the first element of EQ. This allows the sales manager to understand and try to connect to others' opinions and emotions. By putting themselves in others' situations, managers are more able to develop their salespeople by listening and giving constructive feedback. In many cases, the high-EQ manager is able to link others' expressions to their own experience, which further helps the manager identify with subordinates and provide appropriate responses.

The second external EQ factor is social perception, an aptitude for reading facial expressions, body language, and verbal cues. It takes focused concentration, but it helps the sales manager adapt to others' needs and target communications effectively. For example, if a subordinate's facial expressions show confusion about a new pricing program, the manager is able to change coaching tactics, perhaps using examples or anecdotes to make it clearer. Moreover, high-EQ managers are able to not only recognize but help others express their feelings through such statements

as “I think I understand how frustrated you feel about this new product. It just doesn’t seem to offer the benefits our customers expect.”

Assertiveness is another EQ factor that successful managers (and salespeople) exhibit on a regular basis. In essence, they are able to communicate authoritatively without being authoritarian. They can guide and direct subordinates without micromanaging. They resolve conflicts firmly but amiably, leaving everyone feeling respected. In addition, they are able to facilitate change aggressively without alienating the troops.

Developing Your EQ and Teaching It

Many of us in sales constantly battle self-defeating behavior such as lack of impulse control and self-absorption. That goes with the territory when your livelihood is based primarily on your singular efforts to persuade people to buy. It’s you against the vagaries of market conditions, resistant customers, and demanding bosses. In fact, it’s a miracle if you don’t develop some narcissistic tendencies that will work against you in sales management. You might never erase counterproductive behavioral traits but you can ameliorate them by developing your EQ. Here are a few ways to build your EQ and, equally important, to teach it to your sales force:

- Think about what you’re thinking. Make a mental note, even keep a journal of your thoughts and feelings—especially those you experience in tense situations. Develop an awareness of how you feel and why. This self-monitoring will help you control your actions when needed.
- Take a pregnant pause. When you experience strong emotions such as anger or fear, pause before you act. Think through your options and the possible consequences of what you say and do. In the same vein, if you have time, sleep on it—you’ll be surprised by the number of solutions that present themselves when you let problems gestate overnight.
- Calm yourself. A pregnant pause will give you time to control your emotions, to soothe yourself through positive self-talk, deep breathing, or other techniques that work for you. Instead of shouting a response, you have the chance to collect yourself

and react in a logical way that maintains relationships with those around you.

- Be accountable. Don't blame others, no matter how tempting it is, for your mistakes. Admit your mistakes and assume the consequences. This element of self-regulation will not only prevent guilt feelings in you but also develop respect from others.
- Recognize your values. Identify and adhere to your value and belief system. A clear understanding of your ethics will facilitate your responses and behavior when you face tough decisions.
- Walk a mile in others' shoes. Imagine yourself in others' situation. How would you feel? What would you think? Changing *your* perspective to *theirs* helps develop empathy and understanding.
- Be a body-language detective. To help you empathize with others, watch their body language and facial expressions, and pay attention to verbal cues that might telegraph how they are feeling and what they are thinking. Even if you misread these signals, at least you're benefiting from the exercise of getting outside yourself and making the attempt at interpreting others. When you can't read someone's gestures or expressions, don't hesitate to ask the person what she's thinking or feeling at the time.
- Affirm others' feelings. Try to identify with others' feelings with statements like "I would be angry about it too" or "I know how frustrating that is." Doing so will force you to develop your empathic skills. At the same time, it's a certain way to develop rapport with your people.
- Practice assertiveness. Exercise the art of taking positions and making directives in a way that asserts your authority without threatening others. Focus on "we" rather than "I" statements to assure your people that you're acting in the team's best interests. Show empathy through statements such as "I hear what you're saying..." or "I know how you feel..." or "You have a good point. My opinion is..." The key to assertiveness is to get your point across in an amiable, caring, and respectful manner. This works in developing your sales reps and it works in their relations with customers.

- **Boost your motivation.** This is a tough one. Most sales managers and salespeople are internally driven by a variety of innate and external forces. Often, either you're self-motivated or you're not. But there are ways to reexamine and enhance one's self-initiative. What made you get into sales or sales management? Remembering those reasons, and looking at the less attractive options of other careers, can reenergize you. Do you still look forward to waking up and doing your job? If so, count the reasons why. If not, identify the obstacles and summon your problem-solving resources to reactivate your motivation. Build your optimism by looking for the good in people and in situations (read about "learned optimism" in Chapter 3, "Third Step: Building a Winning Team"). There is good, even in bad situations. Looking for the positive not only hones your motivation, but also keeps the darkness of pessimism from creeping into your thoughts and actions.

For additional information on EQ, hundreds of consultants, self-assessments, and tutorials are available online. Some are free, some are affordably priced, and others are more expensive, depending on your requirements and scope of work.

12. Are You Intoxicated by Power?

Researchers have found that power can create or increase a number of bad behaviors in leaders, including impulsivity and lack of empathy. In experiments, people given power are likely to rely on stereotypes when judging others, which creates questionable decisions. Similarly, they are more likely to engage in a type of emotional, verbal, or even physical bullying.

Even more surprising, Berkeley psychologist Dacher Keltner has found a "wealth of evidence that having power makes people more likely to act like sociopaths." In an article titled "The Power of Kindness," Keltner states, "High-power individuals are more likely to interrupt others, speak out of turn, and fail to look at others who are speaking. They are also more likely to tease friends and colleagues in hostile, humiliating ways. Surveys of organizations find that most rude behaviors—shouting, profanities, bald critiques—emanate from the offices and cubicles

of individuals in positions of power. My own research has found that people with power tend to behave like patients who have damaged their brain's orbitofrontal cortex (the region of the frontal lobe right above and behind the eye sockets), a condition that seems to cause overly impulsive and insensitive behavior.... This leaves us with a power paradox. Power is given to those individuals, groups, or nations who advance the interests of the greater good in socially intelligent fashion. Yet, having power renders many individuals as poorly attuned to others as your garden-variety frontal lobe patient. What people want from leaders—social intelligence—is what is damaged by the experience of power.”

The irony of power is that the more you have, the less effective you become at using it constructively. Successful leaders are ones who use self-awareness to monitor their impact on colleagues and subordinates, to share power or at least to use it judiciously. When used effectively, a leader's power can electrify a sales team by including others in decision making and building the team's confidence and self-esteem. Uncontrolled, abusive power will alienate your team and devastate sales productivity.

13. Are You the Smartest Person in the Room?

If your answer is “yes,” you need to take some time to reassess your management style and your hiring practices. Top managers surround themselves with people who are better than they are. Of course, we all consciously or subconsciously fear that we're going to be outshone by those with superior skills. It's common to have the fleeting thought, “This guy is good enough to have my job.” If that thought crosses your mind, consider it a good omen, not a threat. In fact, some make it a habit to hire only people who are good enough to be the boss. Quality people raise the bar for the team, provide a role model, and help the manager achieve stretch goals. For comparison's sake, look at the obverse of hiring good people—that is, hiring sales reps not as good as you. It might give you a sense of emotional security, being at the top of your team, but it's likely you won't have anyone other than yourself to help push results. And that is a lonely feeling. The practice of hiring people you can dominate creates stagnant sales teams and lazy managers. On the other hand, remember that managers are assessed on how well they hire

and develop their people. Hiring people smarter than you is one of the best ways to build your career and generate upward mobility.

14. Have You Found Your Style?

Divest yourself not only from how you were managed, but also from how your peers manage. We all are tempted to succumb to institutional pressure. That is, we often have the illusion that if a company has been successful for years managing a certain way, then it must be good. The truth is that even the best can get better, and market conditions change every year, thus creating a need to change management strategies. Use your strengths to manage in a way that's you. Read professional literature, explore innovations, constantly seek new ideas. By all means, don't try to fit yourself to a management style simply because your peers are managing that way. In addition, a lot of bosses will tell you how to manage based on how they manage. That is simply wrong. We all bring different personalities and expertise to the management arena, and need to use all our strengths to our advantage.

Case Study #2: Finding Your Style in Spite of the Pressure

Alan had managed an office products sales team for three years, showing moderate but steady year-to-year improvement. His nine-rep team focused on businesses primarily in the Houston metro area. The sales team showed strengths in up-selling and new business, and cross-selling and overall customer retention were slightly below average. The group's aggregate net increase was 2% the first year, followed by 3% and 4% in the second and third years; the objective for each year was 4%, which placed Alan within the midrange of other managers' results.

Alan was an amiable personality, considerate and courteous, who got along well with his reps. Though he hadn't had any formal management training, he managed the way he would want to be managed—in a polite and organized fashion. He gave his reps plenty of support and encouragement. And even though he didn't completely trust all his reps, he didn't have time to bird-dog their sales activity. His focus was an aggressively offensive strategy, continuously searching for new sales opportunities. He kept meetings to a minimum, which the reps had requested

for the sake of more selling time. Essentially, Alan spent most of his time responding to reps' support needs and keeping up with technology applications for the reps' sales pitches.

Contrary to many of his colleagues, Alan avoided confrontation and gave his reps flexibility to sell. He used a well-organized sales funnel to carefully track reps' results, offering coaching when needed.

When his former boss retired, a new vice president was appointed; he had a reputation as a hard-charging, take-no-prisoners sales leader. His first advice to Alan was to conduct "Daily Accountability" meetings with the reps to review every contract, every customer contact, and each day's schedule to keep them honest. "Now, I'm not telling you how to do your job," he told Alan. "But you're not showing much year-to-year progress. The reps have to know you're on top of their work. They have to know that you're going to ask them about every sale and why it succeeded or didn't succeed. Try getting more hands-on. It's worked for me. I've been around for 16 years, and a lot of my former managers have moved up through the ranks this way."

This was a new approach, a more in-your-face tactic that Alan had seen others use but never really felt comfortable with. However, the key thing now was to establish himself with the new boss, especially since his results were steady but not spectacular. And this guy did not seem to be the kind of person to take "no" easily.

"Maybe he's right," Alan had thought. "After all, my numbers are okay but nothing to brag about. They're definitely never going to get me promoted to the vice president level. Maybe he's right. He's got the experience and success to know what he's talking about. And all I have is three years' experience with no formal training at all."

Alan began a series of one-on-one meetings with each rep every morning, every day. Though he started off each day with the best of intentions, after reviewing the 15th or so customer contract, his brain went numb and all he could think about was getting it over with. He wasn't cut out for this kind of detail, and the whole thing made him feel like an interrogator. The checking and double-checking was irritating and time-consuming. Even worse, he just didn't have the kind of personality to do it effectively. Even though he handled the sales rep meetings with tact and diplomacy, the continuous questions he asked his reps created a sense of distrust that disturbed Alan. Honestly, Alan saw the benefits

in the daily sessions in that it gave him insight into the reps' sales styles. And it made them accountable on a daily basis for their sales. It even forced him to learn to be more assertive and handle confrontation better. He saw how it could work effectively for someone who was more brash and analytical. Unfortunately, that was not Alan's nature and he was floundering.

The sales team went along with the change in procedure, accepting it as part of having a new VP. In fact, they initially tried to see the humor in the new process, referring to the reviews as "trips to the woodshed" and asking Alan whether waterboarding was the next step. But, truth be told, many saw Alan as weak and acquiescent, being a "yes" man to the new boss. They didn't like taking time for the sales reviews, and they felt an element of skepticism from Alan where they had previously felt he trusted them. Now their every move was being watched, and they felt a slight sense of betrayal from Alan.

The sales team was beginning to grumble to each other, some openly to Alan. An additional problem was that sales were stagnating, not necessarily dropping but staying about the same. Sensing the discontent from his people and his personal discomfiture—in addition to flat sales results—Alan realized it was time to take a stand.

Going into the meeting with his boss, Alan was nervous and had no idea how the guy was going to react. "I just wanted to give you an update on sales and make a proposal," Alan began. "For the past couple of months, I've used your accountability approach. And I've got to say, I've learned a lot. But I also have to say, I just can't quite get used to it. I'm not that detail-oriented. And I'm afraid the way I'm implementing this just isn't having much of a bottom-line impact on sales. If it sounds alright with you, I'd like to change the strategy to incorporate parts of Daily Accountability in a way that gives us more time to sell and seek new market opportunities."

Alan then laid out a plan that incorporated components of Daily Accountability in a way in which Alan felt comfortable. In a nutshell, the final plan was to continue accountability meetings on a weekly, instead of daily, basis. Rather than going over every contract, Alan would address the major sales and review highlights of the reps' weekly schedule. This approach would give Alan more time to explore sales opportunities and provide support to the sales team.

They agreed to try this custom-tailored accountability plan. It did not result in exploding sales, but they did regain momentum, a steady improvement over time. More importantly, Alan regained his standing with the sales team, and gained respect from the boss for standing up for his beliefs. In essence, Alan had taken Daily Accountability and changed it in a way that met the needs of his boss while adjusting it to his personal style.

15. Do You Have a Black Bass Strategy?

Okay, you have your sales goals and measurement metrics set to go. Your salespeople are trained. Your commission structure is fair. Your CRM is impeccable and your sales funnel is flawless. Now, take another look at all the components and ask yourself: Does it all fit together under a targeted, unified strategy? Or do you have a tactical plan without a strategy?

Salespeople focus on tactics—the daily activities that drive them to goal attainment, which includes such things as overcoming objections, closing the sale, pipeline metrics, and sales cycles. It's only natural that these tactical considerations carry over with the salesperson who moves into a managerial position. It's much more common to see sales managers having a tactical focus rather than a strategic vision. Unfortunately, you cannot lead a sales team with tactics. Doing so leaves the manager with a patchwork of activities that are likely to be driven by trial and error and susceptible to flavor-of-the-day management fads. It takes a well-defined strategy to provide forward and steady momentum by employing an integrated game plan rather than a “let's see if this works” attitude.

The complexity of a strong sales strategy is keeping it simple. It's easy to get overwhelmed with strategic considerations such as pricing, product, and competitive strategies.

In fact, all you need is one sales strategy: *customer segmentation*. That's because a strong segmentation strategy subordinates and coordinates all other considerations, making them tactics under the segmentation umbrella. Segmentation provides the spadework and direction to determine everything from competitive positioning to product applications

and discounts. The essence of a segmentation strategy is simply targeting the right customers.

Have you identified your high-potential customers, the ones who will yield the highest sales return? A finely honed sales strategy maximizes the efforts of your sales force by putting them in front of high-potential customers. At the same time, it helps them avoid low-yield customers who drain time and energy. In many cases, a small, unprofitable customer takes the same amount of time to handle as a large, lucrative customer. In addition, an effective strategy tells you where your new business opportunities exist—you can bet that your existing top-drawer customer segment is only the tip of the iceberg of similar prospects who are not yet your customers. For instance, say your most lucrative segment is pediatric physicians. The pediatric physicians you serve constitute about 10% of those in your market, which leaves 90% of a valuable segment to target, allowing you to use what you already know about them to enhance sales. The beauty of discovering these clusters of high-yield customers is that the commonality they share—such as buying habits and price sensitivity—allows you to better prepare for each one individually.

Your sales strategy should guide your team like a heat-seeking missile to a target-rich environment. Accurate customer segmentation makes everything else much easier. It's like fishing. Without knowing what you're fishing for, you take various baits and lures and troll aimlessly around the lake until you get a bite. The fisherman who knows it's time for black bass to be feeding knows what bait to use, where to find the bass, and how to catch them. He has a specific target, knows what motivates them, knows where and when to find them, and knows how to catch them. It's done with an economy of effort that maximizes the yield and doubles the return on investment. (See Chapter 6, "Sixth Step: Success Through Performance Measurement," for additional details on sales strategy and customer segmentation.)

Fourteen Aids to Self-Manage Successfully

Today's sales environment is tough and unforgiving. The confluence of technology, market demands, and financial pressures provides unheralded challenges to the sales manager. This is a time to do more than

think outside the box; you have to discard boxlike thinking and change the paradigms of traditional sales management thinking. Here are 14 essentials to consider as part of your personal management paradigm shift.

1. Reverse Appraisals Make Smarter Leaders

Do reverse assessments regularly. Give your people the chance to review *your* performance. Give them an assessment form of your critical skills and performance, including communications, responsiveness, technical knowledge, organization skills, vision, and overall leadership effectiveness. Insure anonymity so that your people will respond honestly. Reverse appraisals will show you areas for improvement but also gives your people a strong message that you care about them and the quality of their supervision. Be prepared to be disappointed. The glowing assessments you expect might not appear. That's because behind every smiling face, there lies some resentment, frustration, or even hostility that might emerge in the reverse assessment. Naturally, the boss is always the first person to blame. So be prepared for unfair criticism while realizing that this process provides some real opportunities to improve your team if you take a tough-skinned, problem-solving approach.

Many managers benefit from 360-degree appraisals, which include feedback from reports, peers, and bosses. However, these are more complicated to implement and assess than simple reverse appraisals.

2. Manage Your Expectations

Stress is the gap between what you expect and what you get. To some extent, you can manage your stress by managing your expectations. Reps are not going to be as good as you. Otherwise, they would be the boss. Expect excellence and inspect results but don't think your people will be as good as you. Nevertheless, don't give up on trying to get them to that level. Be realistic in your expectations, assuming that improvement is always a difficult challenge and it takes time. You're not going to turn around your team or individuals overnight.

Examine your expectations. Are you comparing yourself to your people? Don't. It's human nature to think, "I could have closed that sale in two weeks. Why did he take a month?" or "I could have easily overcome that

objection.” This type of self-righteousness creates many problems in the workplace. First, it can create a subtle—and unfair—contempt of others and their abilities. This not only builds walls between you and your team, but also provides the manager with a dangerously handy “hook” on which to lay blame. After all, if the rep is just not good enough, what’s the point in analyzing and developing the rep? When managers use themselves as a comparison point, it’s simply taking the easy way out.

Second, it sets up the manager for constant disappointment and frustration. It’s doubtful that anyone is going to live up to your litmus test—yourself. Right or wrong, many of us in sales have an overinflated view of our own abilities, and—competitive creatures that we are—it’s hard to admit that someone is as good or better.

Third, it blinds us to our own inadequacies, which prevents us from growing into a better leader. Finding faults in others—through self-comparison—keeps us from examining our own failures or weaknesses in management. In essence, it makes us less accountable and more likely to point fingers.

To effectively manage your expectations, you have to enumerate them. That is, put your expectations in writing, quantify them where possible, and share them with your team. Discuss them, get team feedback, and ensure that everyone understands the rationale and specifics behind them. Your expectations will include sales objectives but might go well beyond the run-of-the-mill numerical scores we use on a daily basis. For example, if you expect your reps to make post-purchase contacts with customers, tell them how many and how frequently. If you expect new business leads to be worked promptly, provide a specific time requirement, such as 24 hours. Likewise, clearly communicate your criteria to ensure rep integrity, such as customer signature guidelines and pricing honesty. Your expectations might include a wide range of issues important to you, such as sales meeting attendance, professional behavior standards, and sales cycle recommendations. After those have been listed and discussed, you should require compliance with these clearly stated, mutually agreeable expectations of your sales team.

After that, expect the best and prepare for the worst.

Long term, we all want to inspire and motivate our people to achieve team success. In reality, we might inspire our people but not reach team

objectives. Or we might reach objectives without really inspiring our people. It goes without saying, sales is a battlefield of best-laid plans, derailed missions, distractions, recalculations, and adjustments. As with sales, we have to shoot for the moon but prepare for a cancelled launch. It takes time. Don't expect too much too fast. If your people are meeting your daily expectations, you are getting closer and closer to your long-term expectations. By simply articulating your expectations, you are helping create the sales culture that will lead to success. In essence, you have created boundaries for your people that help them function effectively. No matter how much we talk about the independent nature of salespeople, they do need structure to be successful.

By the way, expectations work both ways. Ask your team to list expectations they have for you. Not only will that help you lead effectively and sharpen your empathy, but it also will let your people know you care about their opinions. That is a great way to build trust and communication.

3. Best Practices Help Stimulate Success

For self-management purposes, a well-organized Best Practices program will help expand your knowledge base and your sales management capabilities. Not only does it help drive successful sales techniques and processes, but it also keeps you and your team up to date on the latest sales and technology trends. The most effective best-practices program encourages participation from everyone on the sales team, from reps to managers to support staff. To emphasize its importance, include it as part of every job description that has anything to do with sales. The manager should always be on the outlook for best practices through close observation of and discussions with your salespeople. In addition, all team members should be encouraged to identify practices within and outside the company, and share them. Best Practices is everyone's job, not just the manager's. The manager should, however, facilitate the cataloging and coaching of best practices to make sure that everyone has access to the practices. Best Practices is a formal, orderly process. At the same time, it should be an informal, ongoing activity between salespeople sharing ideas and practices with each other. (See Chapter 3 for additional details on Best Practices.)

4. It Takes More Than Money to Motivate

Study after study indicates that today's workers are in it for more than money. Arthur Brooks, author of *Gross National Happiness*, says that higher income does little to raise people's happiness, after basic needs are met. Even more importantly, beyond the basics, satisfying work matters more than money. "Like nations, once individuals reach subsistence, they get little or no extra happiness as they get richer—even massively richer." Brooks says the real value of money is to mark our success and measure the value we are creating.

Yes, your people are interested, very interested, in making money. That's why we get up early every morning and rev our engines. But simply making money is an empty, meaningless pursuit. There's much more than money that motivates today's salespeople. They want to feel valued, respected, successful, and involved.

The new generation of salespeople—millennials—especially seem to be less money driven than their baby boomer predecessors.

5. Get Out of the Way and Let It Flow

Provide training and support, set high standards, and then get out of the way and let your people *sell*. That's what salespeople do best. Closely monitor results, provide daily tracking reports, and let your people know that you're staying close to the action. But give them room to be the salespeople they aspire to be. Flow is what you want (see Chapter 4, "Fourth Step: Becoming a Successful Servant Leader")—that is, helping your people get in "the zone." They won't get there with you standing in the way. Few salespeople wake up in the morning and say, "I'm going to do a really crappy job today and see whether I can decrease my commission." On the contrary, 99% of your people come to work hoping for—maybe even expecting—that big sale. They want to do well. They need the money. And they crave respect. Your job is to help them marshal their resources to get there, to remove roadblocks and speed them on their way.

6. Grab the Tool Kit; a Hammer Just Won't Do

Ineffective managers embrace the old saying "If a hammer is your only tool, then everything looks like a nail." You know them, the managers

who give directives and then sit back, hammer in hand, waiting for their orders to be carried out. They measure their own magnanimity, not by how much grace they extend to their people but by how much punishment they withhold. They are likely to pat themselves on the back for telling a salesperson, “I’m not going to beat you down this time, but don’t let it happen again.” It’s like the man who says he’s a good husband because he doesn’t beat his wife very often. Even worse is the sales boss who threatens and intimidates reps to achieve sales results. Subtly or overtly, they push their reps with a results-at-any-cost approach. Many times, they’ll try to minimize the coercion, masking it behind humor such as the manager who jokes, “If you don’t produce, I’ve got a shotgun, a shovel, and an alibi.” In other words, there’s no hesitation to kill careers and dash dreams in the pursuit of a quota.

The truth is that a sales unit is an intricate mechanism of nails, screws, nuts, bolts, and even circuit boards and memory chips. It takes a lot more than a hammer to fine-tune it.

Getting hammered occasionally as a salesperson—deservedly or not—goes with the territory. But managers don’t always realize the impact of negativity on sales reps’ job performance and health. When it goes too far, it’s called workplace bullying. In fact, 20 states have introduced legislation since 2003 against bullying in the workplace. The Workplace Bullying Institute says that 35% of the U.S. workforce report being bullied at work. The Institute’s definition of bullying includes “Verbal abuse, offensive conduct/behaviors (including non-verbal) which are threatening, humiliating or intimidating.”

Here’s one way to look at the issue: Do you treat your subordinates with the same respect and courtesy as your boss? Realistically, few of us do. But think about it. Your sales force is going to have more impact on your career than your boss. Your salespeople, not your boss, produce sales that get you promoted. Your boss might steer your career path, but your subordinates provide the horsepower to drive the process. If your people aren’t receiving your best attention (patience, courtesy, and respect), you’re probably not receiving their best. You can bet that if your lack of civility morphs into bullying—no matter how subtle and surreptitious it might be—it will work against you.

From a practical standpoint, intimidation simply doesn't work with salespeople. Of all professions in the world, salespeople are savants in handling intimidation. They face it every day from customers. A boss who tries to intimidate is more likely to *inflame* the sales force. And the only result is distraction from selling.

Unfortunately, the narcissism that drives intimidation also prevents managers from learning and growing into real leaders. As noted earlier, numerous studies have shown that leaders with narcissistic tendencies frequently are failures as managers. They gradually lose support from subordinates, which creates morale problems, which, in turn, create loss of support from superiors. Their sense of entitlement leads to breaking the rules and other integrity violations that can sidetrack their careers.

New managers frequently take this "I'm the boss and that's all that matters" approach. After all, they've excelled in their previous role as a salesperson and they are ready to teach and lead. What they don't always understand is that their people are not instantly ready to learn and follow. Getting people to follow your lead requires trust and credibility that could take months to establish. Showing up, touting your credentials, and giving orders just doesn't work. It doesn't take long for most young managers to learn this lesson, but some never learn. Some can't learn because they are not able to forgo their self-interest for the good of the group: Meet the I-Manager, the manager who has learned to spell "team" with an "I." This manager is largely Inconsequential because the primary management tool he or she has to work with is Intimidation. This kind of manager emphasizes not so much *what* is right but *who* is right. For the I-Manager, it's more important to win the debate than to do what's best for the company and its people.

Everywhere you go, you hear sales managers referring to their "teams." Teammates, team members, team leaders—the words have become common usage in the business world to the point where they have lost their meaning. Some of the most autocratic, dictatorial managers refer to their subordinates as a "team" when the only teamwork existing is the shared resentment they feel for their boss.

Max DePree, in *Leadership is an Art*, said, "Abandoning oneself to the strengths of others" is the leadership approach that has made Herman Miller Inc. a leader in the furniture industry. DePree, president

of Herman Miller, explained that the company's leadership depends on employees' suggestions and input to improve productivity, and that every employee has the "right and duty to influence decision making.... Around here, employees act as if they own the place." This kind of teamwork has led the company to be repeat performers on *Fortune* magazine's list of "Ten Most Admired Companies."

7. Stop Selling, Start Managing

Studies have shown that many sales managers spend as much as 25% to 35% of their time selling (doing customer presentations and closing sales). Granted, some jobs—such as "hybrid sales managers"—are shaped for sales managers to also sell (especially in smaller organizations). But pure sales managers need to manage and not sell. It's the manager's job to make sure each salesperson is fully capable of selling alone. Don't get the reputation of being "The Closer." And don't be the person who goes out on every possible account loss. There's not enough time in the day. And, that's not your job. Your responsibility is to make sure that reps can handle every phase of selling as well as you can. Yes, it's important to ride with your salespeople to observe and train. In the training capacity, it's good for them to learn your techniques, to see you sell, but selling for them is doing a huge disservice to them and you.

If you are a "hybrid" manager, it's important to maintain focus on your reps, on their coaching and training. Look at it statistically. Your sales, as a manager, are probably less than 20% of total sales volume. Are you spending a proportionate amount of time, 80% that is, managing your people? As we all know, sales is a seductive passion. But as a manager, "hybrid" or not, we can't afford to be lured into selling more than managing. Even the best-selling sales manager can't come close to producing what the sales team can produce as a whole. You can catch fish for your sales team or you can teach them to fish, and multiply your efforts exponentially.

8. Don't Try to Sell a Salesperson

Remember, you are not a salesperson, you are a leader. We all are guilty, to some extent, of "selling" our ideas and directives to our people. Many times it is necessary. But if "selling" is your primary or exclusive

technique, you're overlooking the power of your sales force's involvement and ideas. Look at it mathematically. A good sales conversion rate is 50%. Even if you're very good at selling your ideas to your people, at best you're going to have half of them committed and the other half either indifferent or opposed to your program. Your sales machine will only cough and sputter on half its rated horsepower. Granted, you'll never have 100% support from your reps, but engaging them in decision making rather than "selling" them to follow your decisions should raise your conversion rate to well over 50%.

9. Develop an Effective Sales Culture

What is a sales culture? You might not be able to describe it, but you can feel it. It's the general attitudes that sales reps have about the company, their place in it, their enthusiasm, and their beliefs and values related to selling. Do they speak well of the company and its management? Are they excited about selling? Do they believe in the product line? Are they seeking excellence in selling? Are they proud of their individual reputations as well as the company's?

A sales culture can be characterized as who we are, what we do, how we do it, and how we feel about doing it. For better or worse, a sales culture is, first, a reflection of the sales manager. Second, it should be a reflection of the vision and mission of the company.

Within six months, most sales forces will become a likeness of the sales manager. Don't underestimate your influence. But you need to carefully analyze what kind of sales force you are shaping. Are your salespeople picking up your best qualities, such as enthusiasm, integrity, product belief, and commitment to customers? Conversely, are they picking up any ineffective characteristics, such as tardiness, sloppy paperwork, failure to follow up, or indecisiveness? Look at your own weaknesses and you'll probably find them embedded in your sales force. Analyze, and then address your weaknesses and reinforce your strengths to make sure your salespeople are receiving the correct signals to build a productive sales environment.

More importantly, are you actively planning and shaping your sales culture? Other than the attitudes and values your reps observe in you,

are you consciously developing your culture on a daily basis based on your company's vision and mission?

A productive sales culture is developed top-down. It's up to you, the sales manager, to shape your sales ecosystem. If you don't actively create it, your culture is likely to be dysfunctional and counterproductive, shaped by chance. In the absence of values and beliefs, reps shape their own culture. For example, if you have never clearly stated the need for integrity, your reps might know the difference between right and wrong but might take a "who cares?" attitude when it comes to deceptive sales practices. It's the manager's job to clearly state who cares and why. Managers have to establish operating philosophies in words and actions.

Imagine your ideal sales culture, tie it to the company's mission/vision, and articulate it. If you can't communicate it, it won't happen. Describe in writing the sales culture you want to develop. Following is a sample sales culture profile of a fictional restaurant supply sales force:

Who We Are

- We are the ten-person, professional sales force of Burns Restaurant Supply, Ohio's second-largest restaurant supply company. Our mission is to lead the company to become the number one company in our category with sales topping \$10 million.

What We Do

- Specializing in full-service restaurants, we have the responsibility to effectively market a full line of restaurant equipment, supplies, utensils, and furniture to the state's 13,000 restaurants.

How We Do It

- Our first priority is to proactively protect and expand our sales to existing restaurants.
- We will aggressively seek new business.
- Every salesperson will actively build and maintain customer relations through regular one-on-one contact and through industry trade shows and meetings.
- We will diligently promote our reputation with customers for honesty, integrity, and fairness.

- Our sales team will work with each other collaboratively to share information and provide in-house support for each other.
- We will stay up to date on the latest industry developments as well as selling techniques through extensive training and learning from each other.

How We Feel About Ourselves

- We thrive on competition and work hard to find new sales opportunities that will lead us to the number one position in Ohio.
- We are technically competent to solve customer problems and overcome objections.
- We feel energized by an atmosphere that encourages aggressive selling and continual improvement.
- We are proud of the company's reputation for integrity.
- Each of us feels valued as an integral part of the company's success.
- We feel empowered with the flexibility to take reasonable risks and make decisions in the best interests of protecting and expanding sales.
- We feel accountable for our results and have control of our destiny.
- Sales reps and managers feel secure in their mutual esteem for and trust of each other.

Describing your ideal sales culture not only fixes it in your mind, but also helps your team envision it and move toward your goal. Developing a sales culture profile is different from sales objectives, mission statements, and vision statements. It enunciates your team's values and beliefs. More than statistical goals, your culture profile is the soul and conscience of your organization. It sets the standards from which you measure right and wrong, good and bad. It is, for example, the foundation from which you develop code-of-conduct specifics. It is the way you describe your sales organization to job applicants and other outsiders. And, finally, it provides the conceptual framework that serves as

a behavioral lighthouse for your salespeople. In advertising lingo, it is your product personality.

Simply stating a value or belief provides clarity for your sales team. The opposite is also true. Be careful of what you omit. That's not to say that you need a laundry list of everything that might be important now or in the future. Include only the things vital to team success, never more than ten items. Put them in order of priority to sharpen your team's focus.

When developing the profile, envision the kind of people you want to be surrounded by. After all, your people are the embodiment of your sales culture. What are their principles and sales ideologies? List these characteristics and make them part of your profile and your hiring practices. They might include such traits as these:

- Aggressive and competitive
- Honest and fair
- Loyal and trustworthy
- Technically proficient
- Customer service oriented
- Unafraid to take risks
- Hardworking and resilient
- Engaging and polished

Next, compare your ideal sales characteristics with your company's mission and vision statement to ensure a good match. Look for disconnects. For example, if your company values employees over customers, obviously a customer service orientation is of secondary importance.

Of course, the obverse is true if your company takes a strong customer-first orientation.

Finally, share your profile with your sales team for their input and discussion. The sales team will help you refine and amplify your thoughts. In addition, it will increase the chances of their owning the outcomes since they participated in the process.

10. If You Want Followers, Lead by Example

To develop an effective sales culture, you have to lead by example. If your people are required to be in the office at 8 a.m. every day, be sure you are there every day at 8 a.m. If you ask for quick response time from your people, it's your responsibility to give them quick responses. Dr. John C. Maxwell, author and speaker, said, "If you want your team members to be dedicated, then you must show them your commitment. If they should be willing to put the team first, then you should be willing to make sacrifices. If you want them to care for each other, then you must demonstrate your love for them. There's no substitute for *showing* them what you expect from them." Think about the autocratic bosses you've had in the past—chances are the more despotic they are, the less of an example they set. They are usually the ones who come in late, who respond slowly to their subordinates. Wherever you see this sense of arrogant entitlement by managers (who think they deserve special treatment because they are the boss), you will see resentment and resistance from subordinates. It is not possible to passionately follow someone you don't believe in, someone who doesn't walk the talk.

11. Knowing Your Reps Builds Understanding

Take the time to know your people—what motivates them, how they respond to authority and peers, their strengths and aptitudes. It takes time, close observation, and dialogue to analyze a salesperson. Rocket science and brain surgery pale by comparison. It means you have to understand your people individually. Managing successful sales teams occurs one salesperson at a time. Put yourself in their place, analyze their psyche and motives. Forget what you've learned about personality types. Labeling people with arbitrary tags—such as introverts, extroverts, type A, and analyticals—without a professional's help is dangerous because it oversimplifies the complexities of human personality. Though these typologies can be useful for general understanding, especially in hiring—when you need a quick assessment of candidates over a short period—they are not a substitute for careful study of your people's unique psyches. General typologies can provide an easy, but misleading, explanation for people's actions and for their potential. Take this statement, for example: "He's an analytical; therefore, he won't be able to take the lead in this project." The truth is, in a day's time he will morph

from an “analytical” to a “visionary” to an “initiator” depending on the situation. He has components of all the typologies that rotate from occasion to occasion. No one fits into any one “type”—we are all products of our genetics, our experience, and our environment. It’s easy to describe people with bumper-sticker clichés and simplistic caricatures. However, not only can that be misleading, but it also can condition us to think of people in one-dimensional terms, overlooking the richness of people’s sensibilities. We’re truly a weird mix of all the typologies, and each of us defies easy analysis. It’s hard enough to understand ourselves, much less subordinates with whom we might spend only a few hours a week. The trick is to make those hours count. Observe, really observe, what makes your people tick. Ask questions and take notes, but above all resist the convenience of fitting them into a “type.”

Along the same lines, examine your top salespeople. What are they doing to be successful? Identify their best practices and replicate them for others. Novartis, the pharmaceutical company, developed an entire sales training program based on skills, style, and procedures of their top salespeople.

On the group level, take time to analyze your team’s dynamics. Know the leaders and followers. The leaders, when cultivated carefully, can help support and reinforce your objectives, adding momentum and credibility to your efforts. How do you cultivate them? Have frequent, informal one-on-one meetings to ask them what they think about new ideas and existing programs. Let them know you depend on their input as a leader of the group and how much you appreciate their involvement. Conversely, take care not to neglect your group’s followers. They are your foot soldiers, and need to feel part of the process. With proper attention and grooming, some followers will become group leaders.

12. Understand Your Customers’ Needs

Most customers don’t need to be sold. They need to be informed. They need solutions, not presentations. There are exceptions, but customers really don’t want to be manipulated, controlled, cajoled, directed, or interrogated. They don’t want their objections to be overcome—they simply want to be heard. They don’t have time for lengthy presentations. They detest being the unwitting victim of a six-step sales process, and they object to being “closed” after the recommendation.

In many ways, the millions of dollars we spend to train salespeople work against effective selling. That's because we target our efforts at wooden stereotypes we call "prospects" and sometimes forget our real target, which is *human beings*. We spend so much time focusing on sales that we ignore the buyers and their many needs. As top salespeople have proven time and time again, product knowledge and the ability to listen trumps any amount of sales technique we can teach. Good salespeople understand that the way to stand out is be the one who doesn't play the sales games, the one who can sit down and have a normal conversation with customers, having their best interests in mind.

Customers humor us and our sales spiels. They play the game, sometimes just to get us out the door. But, in reality, what they want is a conversation with a knowledgeable person to help them make a buying decision. Customers' expectations are highlighted in a recent *Harvard Business Review* article titled "What B2B Customers Really Expect." A study of 200 customers from a cross-section of U.S. firms showed that the top attributes they preferred in sales reps were first "Subject matter and solution expertise" followed by "Understanding of customer's business and industry" and then "Professionalism" (flexibility, responsiveness, respectfulness, and integrity). In addition, 39% of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their reps' level of "Understanding of customer's business and industry."

The same study showed a huge contrast between what customers want and how salespeople are hired. These customers' vendors were asked what criteria they considered most important in hiring sales reps who would call on the customers. Ironically, they said "Professionalism" was the first attribute. "Subject matter and solution expertise" (the first-ranked trait preferred by customers) ranked third in hiring criteria.

The research suggests that we, as sales managers, have a tendency to emphasize sales skills over customer needs. Perhaps in all the hustle and bustle to achieve objectives, we overlook the most important part of the equation: the customer. And the customer wants honest information first and foremost. This indicates the need for strong product and technical training for reps in addition to consultative sales techniques in order to ask questions that identify customers' real problems and challenges rather than merely symptoms.

In addition to being informed, many customers expect (either consciously or subconsciously) a sales appointment to be a “buyer’s moment”—a stress-free experience that they control and even enjoy. Put yourself in the buyer’s shoes. Whether the customer is a business owner or midlevel manager, a sales appointment is one of the few times of the day when he’s not being controlled or manipulated. It’s a moment when he’s not confronted by demanding employees, scrutinized by bosses, buffeted by competitors, and scathed by unrelenting financial pressures. By the time a customer meets with a salesperson, he’s probably frazzled by the demands of the day. This, finally, is a moment when he is the supreme decision maker, one to be respected and revered. It’s a time when he can talk about anything he wants to discuss—family, politics, the economy, religion—and be listened to and acknowledged. (Or, if short on time, he may elect to get directly to the point, make a decision and move on to the next meeting.) This could be the only time of the day that he controls, and a moment when someone (the salesperson) expresses any interest in him. The last thing a customer wants is to have a sales rep take control of the moment and press to a close. Managers who understand this dynamic help their reps take advantage of the “buyer’s moment”—to facilitate buyers to buy instead of making it a unilateral selling endeavor. These managers ensure that their training regimen includes the “soft” skills of sales—such as listening and empathy—in addition to product and technical training.

13. Shhhh...Are You Listening?

As managers, we’re proud of what we’ve accomplished and what we’ve learned. That means we’re always eager to let others know what we know—sometimes too eager. Often, we’re too busy telling salespeople what we want, and not listening to what they need in order to deliver what we want. If you listen, and ask the right questions, your sales reps will tell you how to reach goals and even throw in the details of how to get there.

Your salespeople want to be heard, and they won’t be fooled as you nod your head and make eye contact while all the time formulating your next comment as they are talking. Listen, really listen. Put away your smartphone and pay attention to what your reps have to say. One of the best

ways to show you're listening is to take notes. Don't offer a quick answer and don't interrupt. Just make sure they are done, and then summarize what they said and respond. You might get some valuable input, maybe not, but the important thing is that your reps will feel that you have listened. That alone is worth a lot because the information you receive will help you manage the team and will help your people feel as though they are an important part of the organization.

14. Make Yourself Promotable

We all know that the single best way to get promoted is to make your objectives. However, it's really a little more complicated than that. First, are you making your numbers the right way—on budget with low turnover? Do you have profitability metrics in place that measure your cost of sales including product discounts, sales commissions and bonuses, training, and costs associated with sales employee turnover? You can make your numbers day in and day out, but if the cost of reaching your objective is disproportionately high, the result is as bad as missing your numbers. That's a surefire way to derail one's promotability.

In addition, how do you distinguish yourself from the other sales managers who are also making their numbers? Bosses love the *No Excuse Management* style and hold its proponents in high regard for promotions. Simply put, the No Excuse manager assumes responsibility and accountability, focusing on solutions to problems rather than explanations, and taking the responsibility to seize opportunities as they emerge rather than waiting for directives to do so. These are the kind of managers who effectively execute their assigned responsibilities and all other responsibilities not specifically denied them. It's a bit risky and takes a lot of self-confidence. But remember, those who risk nothing do nothing. In the end, bosses admire and reward the No Excuse leader. Here are the major components of No Excuse Management:

Accountability—Assume full responsibility for your duties. We, as sales managers, can't control the economy, the market, or the competition. But we can control our reaction to them. If we don't adjust according to the elements, there's no one to blame but ourselves, certainly not the reps. Finger-pointing is a quick way

to lose the respect of your boss. It also sends a signal that you're at the mercy of market conditions and lack the control needed to make positive change. Your boss wants a winner, a doer, a fixer—not a victim or a whiner.

Responsibility—Take on all responsibilities of your job description, and ask for more. Seek new opportunities, especially those that match your skill set, which might take pressure off your boss. For example, develop sales training for use by other managers or create an analytics program that goes beyond your scope of supervision. Volunteer for projects that other managers don't want to do or can't do.

Proactivity—Take the initiative to identify and address problems and opportunities without being told to do so. Proactive managers are willing to take risks because they are self-assured, having a certain intuitive feel when and how to act with no supervision. They have the ability to launch the boat quickly, making mid-course corrections as they go. They have a “speed to market” mentality that provides a distinct competitive advantage.

Knowledge—Bosses want go-to guys, people who know their market plan, rates, procedures, and paperwork. They want a manager who knows everything the reps should know, and more. They want managers who learn, on their own, everything from the latest management techniques to economic trends.

Flexibility—The best sales leaders are nimble, able to function effectively in ambiguous situations in which there are no instructions or precedents. These situations are tests of a manager's judgment and creativity under fire. Weak managers get stuck. They stubbornly insist on plowing through situations rather than having the flexibility to seek alternatives. The No Excuse manager realizes, first, that no one else is going to fix the problem, and therefore goes about a complete work-through that includes as many options and variations as needed.

Complimentary Skills—Promotable people think two levels above. What skills are lacking in your boss and your boss' boss? Help them where they are weak or time-deprived. If they are

strong on people skills but weak with numbers, your strength in analytics will give you an advantage when the next job opens up. Look for ways to highlight your strengths up the line. For example, develop a new sales tracking program and share the analysis with your superiors. Let them know subtly that you have the skill set for that position when it opens.

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A

“ABCDE” techniques (fostering optimism), 172-173
accountability
 of bad bosses, 33
 in empowerment, 243-244
 in intrapreneurship, 241
 mutual accountability, 142
 in No Excuse management, 66
Achor, Shawn, 183
Act phase (Deming Cycle), 284
action-awareness merging in flow, 224
actions, consistency in, 141
active involvement in team building, 189
Activity Measures, 263-265
adaptability in managing millennials, 130
adaptive leadership, 26-27
advancing, retreating versus, 21-22
agility in adaptive leadership, 27
agreeableness
 antagonism versus, 92
 gauging via body language, 104
 as result of teamwork, 166
 in sales reps, 95
ambitious vision, creating, 139-140
ambiverts, characteristics of, 88-91
analysis in first team meeting, 157
Analyze stage (Six Sigma), 279-280
antagonism, agreeableness versus, 92
anxiety control, 31-32
appointments (as metric), 264
Archer, Luke, 219
Aristotle, 284
art, sales as, 194
The Art of Supportive Leadership (Walters), 148, 259
Ashton, Michael C., 97
asking questions
 in continuous improvement process, 285-286
 importance of, 290
 in interviews, 83-84
 in team building, 168-170
assertiveness, 42
 in ambiverts, 90
 in extroverts, 89

 gauging via body language, 102
 as result of teamwork, 166
assessments in team building, 189
attention seeking
 in ambiverts, 90
 in extroverts, 89
authority in intrapreneurship, 241
autotelic experience in flow, 225

B

Bacharach, Samuel, 23
banks, finding recruitment prospects, 74
Barra, Mary, 133, 259
Barrett, Sue, 37
Bartkus, Kenneth, 135
basic employee needs, providing, 182-183
Beilock, Sean L., 195
Being the Boss: The 3 Imperatives for Becoming a Great Leader (Hill and Lineback), 236
Bennis, Warren, 26
best practices programs, 53
 implementing, 149-152
“Big Five” personality traits
 described, 91-93
 what to look for in sales reps, 93-97
Blanchard, Ken, 18, 38, 206, 217, 243, 290
body language
 to gauge honesty, 78-79
 as indicator of personality traits, 101-105
boredom, role in burnout, 177
bosses, envisioning sales candidates as, 116-117
Bradberry, Travis, 40
brain usage, 25-26
Brooks, Arthur, 54
Building the High-Performance Sales Force (Petroni), 251
bullying in the workplace, 54-57
Burlingham, Bo, 237
burnout, preventing, 176-179
“buyer’s moment,” 64-65
buy-in, developing, 237-243

C

care for employees
by bad bosses, 33
role in trust, 17-18, 20-21

Carr, Thomas H., 195

Carrison, Dan, 207

Cartland, Doug, 167

case studies
empowerment, 244-247
finding management style, 46-49
performance measurement, 267-269
self-management, 13-16
servant leadership, 219-221
team building, 142-146
teamwork, 209-212

celebrating success, 202-203

challenge-skills balance in flow, 224

challenging goals. *See* goal-setting

challenging oneself, 31-32

Check phase (Deming Cycle), 283-284

Clark, Vern, 227

closes (as metric), 264

cockiness, 171-174

cognitive dissonance, 248-249

cold calls (as metric), 264

collaboration. *See* teamwork

Collins, James, 173

command/control sales hierarchies, 125

commitment, increasing, 197

communication skills
of bad bosses, 33
of servant leaders, 222-223

competency, role in trust, 19-20

competitiveness
gauging via body language, 103
teamwork versus, 134-136

complimentary skills in No Excuse management, 67

concentration in flow, 225

confidence
building, 138-139
in mental toughness, 29

conscientiousness
lack of direction versus, 92-93
as result of teamwork, 166
in sales reps, 94-95

consideration as TQM principle, 128

consistency in actions, 141

continuous improvement
with Deming Cycle, 281-284
performance measurement versus, 277-278

sales excellence as goal, 284-286
with Six Sigma, 278-281
tips for, 286-288
as TQM principle, 128

control
sharing, 229-237
in Six Sigma, 280-281

criticism in team building, 192

cross-selling (as metric), 264

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, 224, 226

customer engagement in servant leadership, 227-228

customer exchange/return desks, finding recruitment prospects, 74

customer segmentation, 49-50, 270-276

customers, understanding needs of, 63-65

custom-made team building, 215-216

D

daily contacts as recruitment prospects, 72-75

decision making, empowerment and, 250-251

deference in empathy development, 39

deferred gratification, 10

Define stage (Six Sigma), 279

delegation skills, lack of, 11

Deming, Edward, 125, 232, 281

Deming Cycle, 281-284

dependency on others, 11

DePree, Max, 57

Do phase (Deming Cycle), 283

dominance by bad bosses, 34

dominators (in group dynamics), 159

Drucker, Peter, 232

duplicity of bad bosses, 34

Dutton, Kevin, 127

Dyer, Wayne, 12

E

effective leadership, obstacles to, 134-137

ego affirmation, 174-176

egotistical actions by bad bosses, 33, 38-39

Eisenhower, Dwight, 215

emotional stability
neuroticism versus, 93
in sales reps, 97

empathy, 39-41
gauging via body language, 103
as result of teamwork, 166

employee opinions, *seeking*, 188
empowerment

- benefits of, 247-250
- case study, 244-247
- decision making and, 250-251
- described, 243-244
- fostering ownership, 237-243
- self-managed sales teams
 - developing*, 251-255
 - teamwork benefits of*, 256
- sharing control, 229-237
- as TQM principle, 128

engagement

- in ambiverts, 90
- in team building, 167-168

enthusiasm

- in ambiverts, 90
- in extroverts, 89

EQ (emotional quotient) skills

- in sales managers, 40-44
- in sales reps, 108-110

ethics, servant leadership and, 216-217

excitability. *See* enthusiasm

Excuses Begone (Dyer), 12

expectation management, 51-53
expectations

- in servant leadership, 218
- of teamwork, 152-153

external EQ skills, 41-42

extrinsic motivation, intrinsic
motivation versus, 24, 229-230

extroverts

- characteristics of, 88-91
- gauging via body language, 105
- introverts versus, 92
- as sales reps, 95-96

F

facilitation skills, lack of, 11-12

failure, handling, 205-207

“fake good” answers in interviews,
81-82

favoritism by bad bosses, 34

feedback in flow, 224

Fernandez, Alvaro, 25

finding management style, 46-49

first team meeting, outline of, 155-158

Flaherty, Karen, 249

flexibility

- in managing millennials, 130
- in mental toughness, 30
- in No Excuse management, 67

Flow

- components of, 223-226
- providing, 54

focus in mental toughness, 29

follow-through, lack of, 33

forming, defined, 155

“forming, storming, norming,
performing,” 154-155

freedom

- loss of, 10
- for salespeople, 54

friend, sales management as, 236-237

frustration, role in burnout, 176

G

Gerstner, Lou, 260

Gioia, Joyce, 238

goal-setting

- in flow, 224
- for oneself, 22-25
- in team building, 170-171

Good to Great (Collins), 173

graciousness in servant leadership,
218-220

Grant, Adam, 88

gratitude in team building, 183-184

Green, Charles H., 36

Greenleaf, Robert, 213

Gretzky, Wayne, 289

ground rules in team building, 153-154

group dynamics

- in team building, 158-161
- understanding, 63

groupthink, 158-159

H

Helson, Ravenna, 23

Hess, Edward, 214

high expectations in servant leadership,
218

high-traffic purchase points, finding
recruitment prospects, 75

Hill, Linda, 236

hiring practices, 45-46, 69-70

- avoiding unknowns, 70-71
- personality types

analysis of, 91

“Big Five” personality traits, 91-93

body language as indicator of,
101-105

*characteristics of extroverts/
introverts/ambiverts*, 88-91

honesty-humility factor, 97-99

predictors of sales success, 99-101
red flags, 117-119
tiebreaker traits, 106-117
what to look for, 93-97
recruitment stage, 71-76
daily contacts as prospects, 72-75
networking, 75-76
selection stage, 76-84
traits versus skills, 87-88
what not to do, 84-87

Hogan, Robert, 32

Holtz, Lou, 134

honesty. *See also* integrity

gauging via body language, 78-79,
101-102

honesty-humility factor in hiring
sales reps, 97-99

positivity versus, 188

hotels, finding recruitment
prospects, 74

humor. *See* sense of humor

Hunter, Larry, 196

Hurson, Kathleen, 125

I

identification in empathy
development, 40

imagination in empathy
development, 39

I-Manager, 56

Improve stage (Six Sigma), 280

impulse control, lack of, 34

inaction of bad bosses, 33

incentives, unintended consequences
of, 203-204

inertia, overcoming, 136

inflexibility of bad bosses, 33

information sharing with sales reps,
234-235

ingratiating behavior by bad bosses, 34

initial team meeting, outline of,
155-158

institutional distrust, 136

integrity. *See also* honesty

role in trust, 18-19

in servant leadership, 216-217

internal EQ skills, 40-41

interviewing potential hires, 76-84

intimidation

by bad bosses, 33

teamwork versus, 54-57

*Intrapreneuring in Action: A Handbook
for Business Innovation* (Pinchot), 238

intrapreneurship, 237-243

intrinsic motivation, extrinsic
motivation versus, 24, 229-230

introverts

characteristics of, 88-91

extroverts versus, 92

inverted pyramid of service
leadership, 216

investment in team, lack of, 33

itemization in first team meeting,
156-157

J-K

Kaizen, 125

Keenan, Jim, 205

Kelleher, Herb, 226

Keltner, Dacher, 44

Kennedy, John F., 139

Kerns, Charles D., 148

key performance metrics. *See*

performance measurement

knowledge in No Excuse

management, 67

L

lack of direction, conscientiousness
versus, 92-93

Lao Tzu, 139, 216

law of opposite results, 191-192

Law of Reciprocity, 141, 231, 291

Lawler, Edward, 236

Lead Like Jesus (Blanchard), 217

Leadership and the One Minute

Manager (Blanchard and

Zigarmi), 290

Leadership Gold (Maxwell), 206

leading by example, 62

Leading People (Rosen), 261

Leading Teams (Zenger, et al.), 125

Learned Optimism (Seligman), 172

learning as TQM principle, 128

learning environment in team building,
148-149

Lee, Kibeom, 97

legacy of sales manager, 209

Lineback, Kent, 236

listening

in ambiverts, 90

in hiring process, 82-83

importance of, 65-66

in team building, 169-170

for verbal omissions, 192-193

to "war stories" of sales reps, 205

The Little Book of Coaching (Blanchard
and Shula), 18

Loh, John Michael, 261
lone wolves as sales reps, 114-115
love of sales, determining in
interviews, 84

M

management style, finding, 46-49
managing, selling versus, 57-58. *See also* sales management
Marmot, Michael, 232
Marquet, L. David, 250
Martin, Steve W., 96, 266
Maxwell, John C., 62, 206
Measure stage (Six Sigma), 279
measurement. *See* performance measurement
medical offices, finding recruitment prospects, 75
meetings, sharing control, 235
Meltzer, Michael, 230
mental toughness, 28-32
mentor programs in team building, 186-188
Meseda, Mike, 195
metrics. *See also* performance measurement
for best practices programs, 151
types of, 262-263
Activity Measures, 263-265
Output Measures, 263
micromanagement, performance measurement versus, 258-261
millennials, teamwork with, 129-131
Mischkind, Louis, 230
mobilization in first team meeting, 157-158
momentum in team building, 143-147
money as motivation, 54
motivation sources, 54
Musselwhite, Ed, 125
mutual accountability, 142

N

narcissism
in sales managers, 35-38
in sales reps, 119
natural-born salespeople, 117-118
negative reinforcement in team building, 199-200
negotiation as result of teamwork, 166
networking for recruitment prospects, 75-76
neuroplasticity, 25-26

neuroticism
emotional stability versus, 93
in sales reps, 97
No Excuse managers, 66-68
norming, defined, 155
Novak, David, 21
nurturing, pruning versus, 208-209

O

objectives, sharing control, 233
office hours, sharing control, 235
Open Book Management (OBM), 234-235
openness to experience
gauging via body language, 105
resistance to change versus, 93
as result of teamwork, 166
in sales reps, 96-97
optimism, fostering, 171-174
outbound phone calls (as metric), 264
Output Measures, 262-263
ownership
fostering via intrapreneurship, 237-243
self-managed sales teams
developing, 251-255
teamwork benefits of, 256
sharing control, 229-237
in team building, 124-125

P

Padhi, Nayantara, 216
Pankau, Jason, 226
past errors, reminders of, 34
pay structure, sharing control, 234
perfectionists, 118
performance measurement, 257
case study, 267-269
continuous improvement versus, 277-278
customer segmentation as team effort, 276
micromanagement versus, 258-261
people as priority in, 262
proper use of, 265-266
red flags in database, 275-276
sales opportunity metrics, 270-274
in Six Sigma, 279
stretch goals, creating, 266-267
types of metrics, 262-263
Activity Measures, 263-265
Output Measures, 263

performing, defined, 155
Perrin, Craig, 125
persistence in mental toughness, 29
personality types
 analysis of, 91
 “Big Five” personality traits
 described, 91-93
 what to look for in sales reps,
 93-97
 body language as indicator of,
 101-105
 characteristics of extroverts/
 introverts/ambiverts, 88-91
 honesty-humility factor, 97-99
 predictors of sales success, 99-101
 red flags in hiring process, 117-119
 in team building, 126-128
 tiebreaker traits in hiring process,
 106-117
Petroni, Joe, 251
Pinchot, Gifford III, 238
Plan phase (Deming Cycle), 281-283
Plotkin, Harris, 98
policy and planning, sharing control,
 233-234
positive reinforcement in team
 building, 199-202
positive self-talk, 31
positivity, honesty versus, 188
Powell, Colin, 169
power, actions caused by, 44-45
power players, resistance from, 137
pressure. *See* stress tolerance
pricing, sharing control, 234
prioritization
 in first team meeting, 157
 on sales, 189-191
privacy in introverts, 89
private criticism in team building, 192
proactivity in No Excuse
 management, 67
problem solving
 in servant leadership, 221-222
 in team building, 188-189
productivity improvement in servant
 leadership, 226-227
profiles of ideal sales reps, 77
promotability, 66-68
pruning, nurturing versus, 208-209
psychopaths, 127
public criticism, avoiding, 192

Q

Quality Circles, 232
questions, asking
 in continuous improvement process,
 285-286
 importance of, 290
 in interviews, 83-84
 in team building, 168-170

R

Reagan, Ronald, 214
reciprocity, 141, 231, 291
recruitment stage (hiring sales reps),
 71-76
 daily contacts as prospects, 72-75
 networking, 75-76
red flags
 in hiring process, 117-119
 in performance metrics database,
 275-276
references, checking during hiring
 process, 80-81
reinventing oneself, 22-25
reports, sharing control, 235
reservation in introverts, 89
resilience in mental toughness, 30
resistance to change, 33, 136
 openness to experience versus, 93
 from power players, 137
 from sales managers, 137
respect in team building, 167
responsibility
 in intrapreneurship, 240
 in No Excuse management, 67
restaurants, finding recruitment
 prospects, 74
retention guidelines in team building,
 208-209
retention rates in servant leadership,
 227-228
retreating, advancing versus, 21-22
reverse appraisals, 51
role-playing exercises in hiring process,
 79-80
root cause analysis, 286
Rosen, Robert H., 261

S

sales culture development, 58-61
sales cycle (as metric), 264
sales empowerment. *See* empowerment
sales excellence as goal in continuous
 improvement, 284-286

- sales management**
 - changes in, 9-10
 - envisioning sales candidates as, 116-117
 - as friend, 236-237
 - legacy of, 209
 - preferred attributes of, 222-223
 - reasons for failure, 10-12
 - resistance to change, 137
 - sales teams' effect on success, 163
- sales opportunity metrics, 270-274**
- sales reps**
 - critical needs of, 290
 - freedom for, 54
 - hiring, 69-70
 - avoiding unknowns*, 70-71
 - "Big Five" personality traits*, 91-93
 - body language as indicator of personality traits*, 101-105
 - extroverts, introverts, ambiverts*, 88-91
 - honesty-humility factor*, 97-99
 - personality analysis*, 91
 - personality traits to look for*, 93-97
 - predictors of sales success*, 99-101
 - recruitment stage*, 71-76
 - red flags*, 117-119
 - selection stage*, 76-84
 - tiebreaker personality traits*, 106-117
 - traits versus skills*, 87-88
 - what not to do*, 84-87
 - independent nature of, 136-137
 - information sharing with, 234-235
 - knowing individually, 184
 - listening to, 65-66
 - preferred attributes of sales managers, 222-223
 - as priority in performance metrics, 262
 - reasons for failure as managers, 10-12
 - seeking opinions of, 188
 - shielding from heat, 191
 - understanding, 62-63
 - "war stories," listening to, 205
- sales teams. *See also* teamwork**
 - building, 123-128
 - ambitious vision, creating*, 139-140
 - case study*, 142-146
 - confidence priming*, 138-139
 - consistency in actions*, 141
 - disparate personalities and experience*, 126-128
 - effect on sales managers' success*, 163
 - expectations of teamwork*, 152-153
 - first team meeting*, 155-158
 - "forming, storming, norming, performing,"* 154-155
 - ground rules*, 153-154
 - group dynamics*, 158-161
 - implementing best practices*, 149-152
 - learning environment*, 148-149
 - momentum*, 143-147
 - mutual accountability*, 142
 - obstacles to effective leadership*, 134-137
 - results of teamwork*, 165-167
 - selflessness*, 140-141
 - sense of ownership*, 124-125
 - shared vision*, 124
 - tips for*, 161-162
 - Total Quality Management (TQM)*, 125-126, 128
 - trust, importance of*, 123
 - Unseen Team*, 131-134
 - values*, 148
 - what to expect from team*, 164-165
 - maintaining, 167-209
 - active involvement*, 189
 - asking questions*, 168-170
 - assessments*, 189
 - basic employee needs*, 182-183
 - case study*, 209-212
 - celebrating success*, 202-203
 - ego affirmation*, 174-176
 - employee opinions*, 188
 - engagement*, 167-168
 - goal-setting*, 170-171
 - gratitude*, 183-184
 - handling failure*, 205-207
 - honesty versus positivity*, 188
 - knowing sales reps individually*, 184
 - law of opposite results*, 191-192
 - legacy of sales manager*, 209
 - mentor programs*, 186-188
 - optimism*, 171-174
 - positive reinforcement*, 199-202

- preventing burnout, 176-179
- priority on sales, 189-191
- private criticism, 192
- problem solving, 188-189
- respect, 167
- retention guidelines, 208-209
- sales as art and science, 194
- sense of humor, 179-182
- shielding sales reps from heat, 191
- soft skills training, 185
- spousal support, 182
- stress-related effects, 194-199
- teaching moments, 184-185
- turnover, 204-205
- unintended consequences, 203-204
- verbal omissions, 192-193
- “war stories” of sales reps, 205
- self-management
 - developing, 251-255
 - teamwork benefits of, 256
 - sports teams versus, 215-216
- sales to objective gap (as metric), 264
- Schulman, Peter, 171
- science, sales as, 194
- scoping best practices programs, 151
- segmentation. *See* customer segmentation
- selection stage (hiring sales reps), 76-84
- self-assessment, 22-25
- self-awareness, 28, 40-41
 - as result of teamwork, 166
- self-centeredness, 35-38
- self-consciousness, lack of, 225
- self-control in mental toughness, 29
- self-discipline, gauging via body language, 103-104
- self-esteem, building, 174-176
- self-focus in introverts, 89
- self-initiative, 41
- selflessness, 140-141
- self-managed sales teams
 - developing, 251-255
 - teamwork benefits of, 256
- self-management
 - case studies
 - finding management style*, 46-49
 - software sales manager case study*, 13-16
 - defined, 12-13
 - self-analysis questions, 21
 - adaptive leadership?*, 26-27
 - advancing or retreating?*, 21-22
 - bad-boss characteristics*, 32-35
 - brain usage?*, 25-26
 - ego gratification?*, 38-39
 - empathy?*, 39-40
 - EQ (emotional quotient) skills?*, 40-44
 - hiring practices?*, 45-46
 - management style?*, 46-49
 - mental toughness?*, 28-32
 - narcissistic?*, 35-38
 - power-hungry behavior?*, 44-45
 - self-awareness?*, 28
 - strategy implementation?*, 49-50
 - stuck in rut?*, 22-25
 - tips for, 50-51
 - best practices programs*, 53
 - expectation management*, 51-53
 - freedom for salespeople*, 54
 - knowing your salespeople*, 62-63
 - leading by example*, 62
 - listening*, 65-66
 - motivation sources*, 54
 - promotability*, 66-68
 - reverse appraisals*, 51
 - sales culture development*, 58-61
 - selling versus managing*, 57-58
 - teamwork versus intimidation*, 54-57
 - understanding customer needs*, 63-65
 - trust within leadership, 16-17
 - care for employees*, 17-18, 20-21
 - competency*, 19-20
 - integrity*, 18-19
- self-regulation, 41
- Seligman, Martin, 172
- selling, managing versus, 57-58
- Semper Fi: Business Leadership the Marine Corps Way* (Carrison and Walsh), 207
- sense of control in flow, 225
- sense of humor
 - in sales reps, 115-116
 - in team building, 179-182
- sense of ownership. *See* ownership
- servant leadership, 213-215
 - case study, 219-221
 - communication skills, 222-223
 - custom-made team building, 215-216
 - ethics and, 216-217
 - flow creation, 223-226
 - graciousness, 218-220

- high expectations, 218
- inverted pyramid, 216
- problem solving, 221-222
- productivity improvement, 226-227
- retention rates and customer engagement, 227-228
- shared vision in team building, 124
- sharing control, 229-237
- Shively, Carol, 195
- Shula, Don, 18
- Sirota, David, 230
- Situational Leadership, 290
- Six Sigma, 278-281
- skills, traits versus, 87-88
- small talk avoidance in introverts, 90
- smiling as stress reducer, 173
- sociability in extroverts, 88
- social perception, 41-42
- soft skills training in team building, 185
- software sales manager case study (self-management), 13-16
- sports background in sales reps, 110
- sports teams, sales teams versus, 215-216
- spousal support in team building, 182
- Stack, Jack, 237
- stagnant organizations, 125
- A Stake in the Outcome* (Stack and Burlingham), 237
- Stallard, Michael Lee, 226-227
- Stein, Dave, 257
- Stockdale, Jim, 173-174
- storming, defined, 155
- strategy, importance of, 49-50
- stress tolerance, 106-108
 - in team building, 194-199
- stretch goals, creating, 266-267
- stuck organizations, 125
- success, celebrating, 202-203
- Sugars, Bradley J., 188
- supportive leadership, 133, 148
- synthesis in adaptive leadership, 27

T

- talkativeness in extroverts, 89
- teaching ability, lack of, 10
- teaching moments in team building, 184-185
- team building, 123-128
 - ambitious vision, creating, 139-140
 - case study, 142-146
 - confidence priming, 138-139
 - consistency in actions, 141

- disparate personalities and experience, 126-128
- effect on sales managers' success, 163
- expectations of teamwork, 152-153
- first team meeting, 155-158
- "forming, storming, norming, performing," 154-155
- ground rules, 153-154
- group dynamics, 158-161
- implementing best practices, 149-152
- learning environment, 148-149
- momentum, 143-147
- mutual accountability, 142
- obstacles to effective leadership, 134-137
- results of teamwork, 165-167
- selflessness, 140-141
- sense of ownership, 124-125
- shared vision, 124
- tips for, 161-162
- Total Quality Management (TQM), 125-126, 128
- trust, importance of, 123
- Unseen Team, 131-134
- values, 148
 - what to expect from team, 164-165
- team-player traits in sales reps, 110-114
- teamwork. *See also* sales teams
 - benefits of, 122-123
 - for self-managed teams, 256
 - competitiveness versus, 134-136
 - in customer segmentation, 276
 - custom-made team building, 215-216
 - in Deming Cycle, 281-282
 - expectations of, 152-153
 - group dynamics, 63
 - in hiring process, 77-78
 - intimidation versus, 54-57
 - maintaining, 167-209
 - active involvement, 189
 - asking questions, 168-170
 - assessments, 189
 - basic employee needs, 182-183
 - case study, 209-212
 - celebrating success, 202-203
 - ego affirmation, 174-176
 - employee opinions, 188
 - engagement, 167-168
 - goal-setting, 170-171
 - gratitude, 183-184
 - handling failure, 205-207

honesty versus positivity, 188
knowing sales reps individually, 184
law of opposite results, 191-192
legacy of sales manager, 209
mentor programs, 186-188
optimism, 171-174
positive reinforcement, 199-202
preventing burnout, 176-179
priority on sales, 189-191
private criticism, 192
problem solving, 188-189
respect, 167
retention guidelines, 208-209
sales as art and science, 194
sense of humor, 179-182
shielding sales reps from heat, 191
soft skills training, 185
spousal support, 182
stress-related effects, 194-199
teaching moments, 184-185
turnover, 204-205
unintended consequences, 203-204
verbal omissions, 192-193
“war stories” of sales reps, 205
with millennials, 129-131
results of, 165-167
as TQM principle, 128
Thatcher, Sherry, 196
The Three Keys to Empowerment (Blanchard), 243
tiebreaker personality traits in hiring process, 106-117
time transformation in flow, 225
Toffler, Alvin, 130
Total Quality Management (TQM), 2, 12, 125-126, 128
tourist attractions, finding recruitment prospects, 74
training
in best practices programs, 151
sharing control, 235
traits, skills versus, 87-88
transformation of time in flow, 225
trust within leadership, 16-17
benefit of empowerment, 249
care for employees, 17-18, 20-21
competency, 19-20
importance in team building, 123
integrity, 18-19
as TQM principle, 128

trying too hard, 191-192
Tuckman, Bruce, 154
Turn the Ship Around! (Marquet), 250
turnover, analyzing, 204-205

U

unintended consequences in team building, 203-204
unknowns, avoiding hiring, 70-71
unrealistic expectations, 11
unsaid things, listening for, 192-193
Unseen Team, 131-134
upper management support, lack of, 136
up-selling (as metric), 264

V

values in team building, 148
verbal aikido, 219
verbal omissions, listening for, 192-193
vigilance in adaptive leadership, 26-27
vision, creating ambitious vision, 139-140
visualization, 30-31
VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous), 26

W

Walsh, Rod, 207
Walters, J. Donald, 148, 259
“war stories” of sales reps, listening to, 205
Welch, Jack, 128, 230
Wolfskehl, David, 227

X-Y-Z

Zenger, John, 125
Zigarmi, Drea, 290
Zigarmi, Patricia, 290
Ziglar, Zig, 216
Zuckerberg, Mark, 116