

Focus Experts' Briefing: Top 10 Things that Keep Sales Managers Up at Night

Focus Research
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Introduction

This brief was inspired by a question posed on Focus.com by Focus Expert and President/CEO of Partners In EXCELLENCE, [Dave Brock](#), who asked the community: “What are the 10 things sales managers should be most worried about in maximizing performance?” The response was overwhelming and thought-provoking. The question really resonated with a number of other Focus Experts, who chimed in with their laundry lists of concerns. The Content Team at Focus gathered its favorite responses — our ‘Top 10’ — to create this Experts’ Briefing, giving you the opportunity to see if you’re losing sleep over the same things as other sales professionals.

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1

It's All about Attitude

Attitudes were always a concern for me. Bad attitudes destroy individual and team performance that great process cannot overcome. When attitudes are positive, team alignment, process education and execution, and performance follow, IMHO.

1. **Confidence perpetuates success.** Lack of confidence breeds insecurity, anxiety and uncertainty.
2. **Passion.** If a sales pro is passionless about their offering, how will the buyer react?
3. **Optimism drives salespeople.** Keeping overly optimistic salespeople in check is easier than creating optimism.
4. **Enthusiasm.** It's powerful, invigorating and contagious.
5. **Determination.** The solid, purposeful ambition to achieve goals.
6. **Persistence.** The lack of which leads to quitting. Salespeople need stick-to-itiveness. As Calvin Coolidge said, "Determination and persistence alone are omnipotent."
7. **Humility.** Know-it-alls cannot learn and they present faulty info. The hunger for knowledge builds experts who deliver valuable, trust-building information.
8. **Comfort level.** A relaxed sales pro eliminates tensions and breeds confidence and trust.
9. **Humor.** Not a joke-teller, but a personality who can thin out the thick air.
10. **Compassion & empathy.** They are building blocks for customer and internal team relationships.

— [Gary Hart](#), *Focus expert and President, Sales Du Jour*

Read the full conversation:

<http://www.focus.com/questions/sales/what-are-10-things-sales-managers-should-be-most-worried/>

2 Follow the Leader

1. **Am I worth following?:** Am I someone whom my salespeople should follow and allow to lead them? Am I the example and embodiment of our belief system, our culture? Do my salespeople know that I care deeply about them and their success in a way that makes returning that deep caring for our company and clients inevitable? Am I developing my own skills in sales, management and leadership, or simply doing my job? Am I someone I would want leading me?
2. **Beliefs, Culture, and Meaning:** Have I provided a culture and belief system about what it means to be part of this organization? Have I identified the actions that we take as a result of what it means to be who we are? Have I clearly demonstrated how the results we generate are directly tied to the actions we take because we believe what we believe?
3. **Process:** Are we using a process that helps us to predictably repeat what we do so we can compete and win? Do we have a model that leads to successfully winning deals? Does our process encourage our salespeople to exercise their resourcefulness and their initiative to move opportunities forward when the process offers no guidance?
4. **Coaching:** Am I taking every opportunity to coach and develop my salespeople instead of trying to manage them?
5. **Opportunity Acquisition:** Are we focusing enough of our time and attention on prospecting and opening relationships? Are we too focused on closing metrics and not focused enough on opening metrics? Are we mercilessly disqualifying poor opportunities and putting our energy where it counts?
6. **Differentiation:** Have I armed my team with everything they need to be able to effectively differentiate themselves and our offering in a crowded marketplace? Have we provided them with what they need to be able to leverage our differences in a way that makes a difference to our dream clients?
7. **Business Acumen:** Am I doing all that I can to grow and improve my salespeople's business acumen? Am I working to help my salespeople understand that success in sales today is as much a result of their general business skills and understanding as it their sales skills?
8. **Consultative Approach:** Have I enabled my team to create value for our dream clients in a way that helps them to shift the conversation from price to cost? Have I given them what they need in the way of tools, training and technologies to allow them to prove how we provide a return on our client's investment in the way of reduced costs, increased revenues and overall improvements in profitability?
9. **Accountability:** I am holding my salespeople accountable for their results and to their commitments? Am I holding them accountable for being aligned with our beliefs, our culture and our meaning? Am I holding them accountable for delivering for their clients and dream clients?
10. **Selling Inside:** Do I remove the internal roadblocks to my salespeople's success? Am I doing all that I can to sell internally to ensure that the "Sales Prevention Team" and the "Vice President of We Can't" don't diminish my salespeople's efforts?

— [S. Anthony Iannarino](#), Focus expert and Managing Director, B2B Sales Coach & Consultancy

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3 Build an Effective Machine

While they may not be the 10 'most worrisome' items, hopefully they contribute to the conversation.

1. **Do the reps have a sales process?** Which one may be irrelevant, but for now do they have one?
2. **Are they qualifying toward a sweet spot?** I'm concerned if they're chasing anything that moves. This implies qualifying skills, knowing the sweet spot and knowing how to qualify in or out relatively efficiently. Failing fast is an underrated skill.
3. **Rep turnover.** If it's high, even by design, there are some leaks in the foundation.
4. **How to shorten** the sales cycle.
5. **Win percentage.** Factor losses to 'business as usual' into the equation.
6. **Do my team and I know** why we are winning and losing?
7. **How much sales coaching is my team getting?** Am I coaching effectively?
8. **Is my team engaged?** Professionally and personally.
9. **The customer!** How do our customers perceive us? Are they satisfied? Are we addressing their needs? Are there additional needs we could be addressing?
10. **Have I built an effective machine?** In other words, do I know the right kinds of behaviors/activities and the metrics attached to those behaviors to get the results that my team needs to produce, and do I have a dashboard or investigative means that gives me a pretty quick, accurate assessment of where the team stands at any point in time toward getting those results.

— [Robert Koehler](#), Focus expert and Global BI Field Sales Enablement at Hewlett Packard

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4 Hunter, Farmer or Beater?

1. **Hunters, farmers and beaters:** Hunters kill, beaters beat the bushes for opportunities, and farmers farm the fields for up-sell and add-on opportunities. Hunters don't like to farm or beat. Beaters can't hunt. Farmers don't beat or hunt — although many think they can hunt, and that is a real problem. Do you know what type of salespeople you're hiring?
2. **Sales methodology:** Most of the salespeople you hire to hunt today really do not know how to hunt. Methodologies such as B-to-B Selling®, Solution Selling®, Miller Heiman®, and The Complex Sale® can all be effective. The key is to integrate your selling methodology with reporting systems and to follow through and follow up. Event training simply does not work. If your sales managers tell you that it is not important to train because they “only hire experienced salespeople,” you better worry.
3. **Sales motivation:** Do you want to know why there is never any movement in the forecast? Why is it that there does not appear to be any progress until an account is either won or lost? The first and main reason, as I often say, is that salespeople do what you pay them to do, not what you want them to do. Sales executives are driven by control, credit and compensation. All three of these elements are strong motivators that can quickly turn into de-motivators. Sales executives will often hide the steps in the sales process between lead acceptance and close. They fear accountability and being blamed for a loss, so they provide little visibility (except for wins) unless they are forced to do so.
4. **Hire:** The first of three “science of selling elements,” about which volumes have been written. The keys here are W-2s and testing. I would not hire again without looking at proof of performance or without intelligence and “fit” testing.
5. **Compensate:** The second “science of selling elements”; the key here is to compensate *below* the comfort zone. Many managers do not understand what the comfort zone is and how to use it to motivate (it mostly demotivates).
6. **Train:** The last “science of selling” element, and covered in part under No. 2 above. The key here is actually managing to a process. I don't think the sales methodology is as important as living it every day. As my book states, if you put someone through methodology training and then default to traditional, seat-of-the-pants management, you are going to lose.
7. **Deploy:** The first of the “art of selling elements.” Putting the best resource in front of the best prospect at the best time is ideal deployment. Most of deployment today is geographic and/or vertical focused. This generally does not work.
8. **Monitor and Manage:** The second “art.” The key here is to monitor, manage and measure each sales rep on the basis of a certain number of accounts. Sure, they can add during the quarter if they want, but your evaluation of them (in more complex selling situations) is movement in the core target prospect list. Whatever you get on that number of accounts in three months is what you can expect on any similar list of prospects in the next three months.
9. **Coach and Counsel:** Coach those who can do it but don't know how. Counsel (eventually this ends up translated into “can”) those who could get the job done but won't. Coaching and counseling are NOT the same thing. I can't tell you how many times I have heard sales managers say that they were going to “coach and counsel” a rep.
10. **See what is there, not what you want to see:** Managers do two things that kill them. They see what they want to see and they manage from the top. Make sure you see what is there and that you manage from the bottom, not the top.

— [Dan McDade](#), Focus expert and President, PointClear, LLC

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5 Don't Waste Precious Time

1. **Are we concentrating** on the pre-purchase buying decision process rather than the solution sale?
2. **Are we gathering data**, understanding need and presenting solution too early in to the buying decision process?
3. **Are we actually helping** the Buying Decision Team get collected/recognized?
4. **Are we trying to make an 'appointment'** too early and thereby wasting time with just a few members of the Buying Decision Team, and how do we know?
5. **Do we assume** we have a prospect/lead? And how do we know the difference, up front, between one who will close and one who won't (Hint: It's possible to know on the first call if the call is being directed to a change management/ decision facilitation process rather than a selling process) — and save ourselves vast amounts of time?
6. **Are we entering the conversation** too early with an introduction to our solution when the Buying Decision Team hasn't collected all of their joint criteria, and do you know when/how they do it?
7. **Do you have the skills** to enable the Buying Decision Team to recognize and manage all of the behind-the-scenes elements they need to manage before they can make a purchase? Or do you sit and wait while they do it themselves, off-line, and you have no influence?
8. **Are you presenting** 1. in front of too few people; 2. data about your solution that you assume they need to hear — and may be different from what each of them, individually, needs to know in order to choose you?
9. **What's the difference** between your selling patterns and the buyer's buying patterns?
10. **If sellers don't know** how to enter the buying decision at the point of the behind-the-scenes buy-in process, you are closing sales largely out of luck. It's very possible to enter even before the Buying Decision Team has been fully chosen and has influence, but it's not possible using just the sales model.

— [Sharon Drew Morgen](#), Focus expert and Developer of Buying Facilitation, Morgen Facilitations, Inc.

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6 This Is Not Day Care for Adults

In no specific order, they include:

1. **Lead from the front**, not the rear.
2. **Understand that they have** a dual role: 1. managing — setting expectations; 2. coaching — with the expectations set, coaching their team member in attaining them. Greater emphasis on the latter.
3. **Make sure that they have** a coaching plan mapped to the specific needs of each rep.
4. **Establish a clearly defined** sales process or clearly articulate the corporate sales process.
5. **Manage the process** not the individual; don't get personal.
6. **Use metrics** to maintain an objective slant.
7. **Be an advocate** for their teams to the rest of the organization.
8. **Invest time and money** in their own education and skills development (industry/managing/selling).
9. **Do not fear** a vacant territory — hire slow, fire fast.
10. **Call it like it is** — you are not running a day care center for adults.

— [Tibor Shanto](#), Focus expert and Principal, Renbor Sales Solutions Inc.

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7

Don't Let Worries Become Headaches

I am going to answer this question a bit more from my perspective, which is how can managers using data and insights to improve performance. These are worrisome in the sense that being insidious, if left unmanaged they could lead to real headaches.

1. **Customer:** Let's put the customer front and center here. How well do they know the customer, both historical as well as expected behavior? If they do not anticipate and use both dimensions to add value to every customer interaction, then this could be the most worrisome aspect of all.
2. **Cycle:** Do the salespeople have a good idea of customer buying cycles, and have a consistent process to manage these customer touches?
3. **CRM System:** How well are they using the CRM system? Is it up to date, enriched with analytics and metrics, and easy to use? Are you training, listening to feedback and making it work for them?
4. **Educate:** Have an active outreach program to — as a primer — show how to understand data, create reports, detect patterns and learn basic analytic concepts and how to interpret them. (And, no, I didn't want to confine this point to something starting with a C.)
5. **Collateral:** Are reps using all resources available to them? Have you raised awareness about the resources and consistently promote them? This includes everything from internal (marketing), to partners, peers and even industry resources.
6. **Comfort Zone:** Are reps and everyone working within an area with which they are most familiar? When you want to improve performance, you often have to step outside to try something new.
7. **Culture:** Both management and sales reps should have an open mind to “test and learn” from insights. Document mistakes and share for others to learn/avoid.
8. **Confidentiality:** Be respectful of what you share and with whom you share it. The goal should never be to punish but to motivate.
9. **Continuity:** When you set rules to measure performance, maintain the same definition and metrics over time, so that everyone can see where they are going. Think of this as consistency over time.
10. **Consistency:** the information that you use and provide to your team should be reliable, predictable and timely.
Consistency = Value.

— [Parth Srinivasa](#), Focus expert and President, Valgen, Inc.

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8

Does Your Industry Fear Your Resolve?

If a sales manager should be worried at all about maximizing performance, they might be concerned that:

1. **Their salespeople** have the right attitude.
2. **Their market** has enough potential.
3. **Their company** understands the story.
4. **Their industry** fears their resolve.
5. **Their community** knows they care.
6. **Their team** avoids passive aggression.
7. **Their culture** rewards execution.
8. **Their plan** focuses on people.
9. **Their own effort** matches their expectations.
10. **Their people** feel important.

And another thing — “balance” shouldn’t be a part of the discussion. Try “harmony”!

— [Dan Waldschmidt](#), *Focus expert and an ordinary dude with an outrageous vision, Edgy Conversations*

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9

Get the Right People, Give the Right Training

1. **Finding the right** people. (Recruitment is difficult.)
2. **Giving them** the right sales training.
3. **Creating the right** incentives to keep them motivated.
4. **A CRM system** that helps them be as efficient as possible.
5. **How to handle** ongoing coaching and being able to take care of the best salesmen and not just focusing on the worst.
6. **Creating an efficient** sales process.
7. **Teaching salesmen** to follow up and nurture customers into repeat customers.
8. **Getting your sales staff** over their fears.
9. **Producing results** every month.
10. **How to constantly** keep the activity level high.

— [Daniel Wood](#), Focus expert and Country Manager, Looking To Business

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10 Focus on Maximizing Performance

The focus is on maximizing performance, a key job of sales management indeed. Here are 10 things a sales manager should be worried about in my humble opinion:

1. **Have I hired** the right people with the right attributes?
2. **Does the sales team** possess the right skill level?
3. **Is there an adequate level of experience** by sales teams demonstrable to customers?
4. **Do we have the right level** of sales enablement systems in place?
5. **Is our content** for customer and sales messaging on target?
6. **Do we have quality leads** and opportunities being generated?
7. **Can we shorten** the sales cycle and remove roadblocks?
8. **Do we have the right structure** for sales to operate within and succeed?
9. **Do we have the right compensation plan** that motivates performance?
10. **Are we providing adequate training** in conducting sales conversations and building relationships?

Undoubtedly, there are more “worries” for a sales manager, as this role faces more and more challenges than ever before — making a sales manager role one of the most demanding in business today.

— [Tony Zambito](#), Focus expert and CEO/CFO/VP/Director, Goal Centric

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* Source: Visa, Inc. Commercial Consumption Expenditure Index fact sheet.