

Why Salespeople Fail and What Managers Can Do About It

[Article Theme: coaching your salespeople, managing your team, leadership, training for managers, executive coaching](#)

An article by Keith Rosen about coaching your salespeople, managing your team, leadership, training for managers, executive coaching

"Why do salespeople fail?" A question that managers, as well as their salespeople have asked for decades. And one contributing factor that keeps this question alive and in the forefront of our mind is the fact that there has not been one universally accepted answer. Whether the salesperson's failure is being blamed on the salesperson, on the manager or a collaborative effort, the reasons often remain subjective, even elusive and as such, history is then bound to repeat itself. The timeless struggle for a solution continues to plague our thinking, while the collateral damage due to this fallout dominates the manager's time.

Whether your team consists of one thousand salespeople or just one, the simple fact stands; avalanches roll downhill. It starts from the top. That's why the first of six principles managers need to incorporate in order to build a world class sales team is this:

Strategy # 1

Take Full Responsibility For Your Salespeople

Become 100% accountable for the success and failure of their sales team. While there are many symptoms as to why a salesperson fails, it is the reluctance on the manager's side to take on this full accountability which is the leading cause of a salesperson's failure. You can be burdened with excuses or empowered by the ability to make better choices. Either way, you're accountable for the excuses used as to why your salespeople fail, just like you are accountable for your sales team. Here are just a handful of excuses that managers have used to justify why their salespeople fail.

1. I inherited my sales team. I didn't hire these people.
2. We don't have time for a sales training and coaching program.
3. That's normal in my industry. Turnover is just something we just have to deal with.
4. We can't offer competitive packages like other companies can. It's straight commission. No salary or benefits. We do our best to play the hand we're dealt.
5. The salespeople are really independent contractors. So if they need help, they should get help on their own.
6. They fail, then they really weren't cut out for this position.
7. Needed help? Then they should have come to us. We would have helped them. That's their responsibility. How can I read their mind if they're having a problem.
8. It's hard to find good sales talent out there now. Our market is super competitive and this is what I have to work with.

Since you are evaluated or compensated by how successful your team is, then tolerating these excuses will come at a heavy price. Ultimately, you will be the one responsible for breathing life into these excuses or pioneering innovative solutions in order to squash them from existence. Once you take full accountability for yourself as well as each person on your sales team, you are now able to empower others to be fully accountable for themselves.

What follows are five additional strategies that any manager can begin to implement in order to build a team of sales champions; strategies that any business owner or manager can incorporate into their management style, strategy and approach that is sure to reduce turnover and increase the retention of star players, prevent a new salesperson or a star veteran from becoming an underperformer and maximize the performance and production of your team.

For those salespeople who are reading this and feel these strategies only apply to management, consider this. The more awareness you have around the role you and your manager play in your overall success and failure, the more you can educate and help your manager best support and manage you around these areas which you may feel you have less control over.

Strategy # 2

Develop your Skills as a Coach

Without actually working with your own executive sales coach or participating in a coach training program to develop your coaching skills and competencies, then all you are doing is changing your title, rather than your essence, your thinking and your skills. The coaching model is based on the belief that the question is the answer. Coaching isn't about giving information. The coach is responsible for people finding the answers themselves and developing their own problem solving skills. And being able to self generate solutions and solve problems on your own is the premise of coaching; a competency that; like learning any new discipline, sport or hobby needs to be learned and developed over time.

Strategy # 3

Consistent Weekly Coaching

While some managers tell me they don't always have the time to meet with their team, think about the things that are taking you away from coaching and meeting with your team in the first place. I guarantee many of the issues and the problems you're dealing with are actually a result of not coaching and connecting with your team on an individual and more frequent basis. If you have a team of five or ten salespeople, it's much easier to manage your time and your schedule to accommodate weekly, one to one meetings. It's when you have a larger team that makes it more of a challenge strictly due to time constraints. While group or team coaching is also an option to fill in some developmental gaps, there is still no substitute to providing individualized attention. I suggest a minimum of two individualized coaching session per month for each member of your team, understanding that weekly one to one coaching sessions would be ideal. Frequency and consistency is key, just like when going to the gym. The more time you spend at the gym and the better you eat, the healthier you become. The same rule applies to maintaining and building the health of your career, your leadership skills and your sales team.

Strategy #4

Develop a 30 Day New Hire Strong Start Orientation Program

Regardless of your product or sales cycle, every manager needs to be able to confidently assess whether or not someone is going to 'make it' within their first thirty days on the job. If you feel you're unable to do so, it's because you haven't taken the time to outline what the measurables and milestones are that you expect every new hire to hit within the first four weeks. What do you expect from a new hire within the first thirty days? What do you want them to learn or achieve each day? Whether or not they make it doesn't need to rest solely on whether or not they are selling. There are other factors you can use to gauge if you made the right hire, such as their commitment, their sales acumen, assimilation of product and industry knowledge, pre-selling activities and their overall attitude. Are they following through with any preliminary work that needs to be completed before they're ready to sell on their own? Do they have a routine and a selling system that's ready to be executed? Are they doing the basics, i.e. showing up to work on time, following through with any preliminary training, putting together their target list, going

through role plays with you, etc. Finally, are they being evaluated to ensure they've assimilated the industry or product information and selling acumen that's needed to succeed?

Strategy #5

Develop More Diligent Hiring Procedures

I've always heard managers report, "With all the interviewing you can do, you really can't gauge someone's work ethic until they're on the job." While this may be true to some degree, I've seen many companies institute additional steps into their hiring process to help better gauge the person's work ethic before they're actually hired. For example, have the new candidate go out and ride with the manager for a half day or with a salesperson you trust to get a good sense of who they are, and for the candidate to get a feel for what their day to day responsibilities would look like. Another technique that helps reduce failure would be to conduct skill practice scenarios and role playing exercises throughout the interview process. This would give you a better sense of how they think, how creative and flexible they are and how effective they would be when in front of your customers and prospects. Finally, the number of interviews plays a huge role in reducing failure amongst salespeople. The more interviews you conduct, the more interviews the candidate has with various people within your organization, the less of a chance you will make the wrong hiring decision.

Strategy #6

Develop and Implement a Tactical Turnaround Strategy

Without having the awareness and discipline to develop and execute a turnaround strategy when needed, the costs to every company are great. Companies that lack a clearly defined strategy to handle underperformers tend to overcompensate in other areas for the weakness this void creates. They are more apt to accept turnover and a certain level of attrition as a natural course of doing business and building a team. There are a myriad of reasons why a salesperson fails and why a turnaround strategy is a vital component needed to ensure their long term success. Managers need to be acutely aware and sensitive to the fact that some turnaround situations will result in termination or the salesperson deciding to leave on his own accord. Regardless of the underlying reason why a salesperson isn't performing up to desired expectations, a four week turnaround program will help you identify what's really going on and provide you with the framework to quickly determine how you can turn around an underperformer in less than thirty days or whether you and your company are better off without them.



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Keith Rosen is the preferred, authentic coach that top executives and sales professionals in many of the world's leading companies call first. As a prominent, engaging speaker, Master Coach and well-known author of many books and articles, Keith is one of the foremost authorities on assisting people in achieving positive, measurable change in their attitude, in their behavior and in their results. Keith's articles can be found in Selling Power Magazine and has appeared in feature stories in The New York Times, The Washington Times, Inc. Magazine, Sales and Marketing Management's Ultimate Motivation Guide with Stephen Covey and The Wall Street Journal. For his work as a pioneer in the coaching profession, Inc. magazine and Fast Company named Keith one of the five most respected and influential executive coaches in the country.