

Motivating a Sales Force

Last week's column about Frederick Herzberg's "Motivation-Hygiene Theory," which states that the characteristics that produce job satisfaction are very different from those that induce job dissatisfaction, produced a higher than usual flow of calls and emails from readers. Most of these inquiries pertained to the motivational component of Herzberg's theory.

The definition of motivation includes, "Having a strong reason to act or accomplish something." Today we will explore five ideas for motivating a sales force.

1) Communication. The importance of employee communication is often overlooked. Remarkably, communication is often lacking with sales platforms. I'm not talking about the boss telling people what to do. The communication I am referring to is twofold.

The first is asking questions and listening for answers about what the sales force is thinking, how they are feeling and what the company can do for them to increase their job satisfaction and decrease job dissatisfaction. Again, according to Herzberg, these are two mutually exclusive sets of characteristics. Probing and listening are the best ways to

determine how an employee is feeling about his job.

The second aspect of communication comes in the form of letting employees know they are valued. Showing appreciation for hard work or a job well done goes a long way toward making an employee feel like what they are doing is positively impacting the company. Many studies have shown that feeling like their work is a valuable component helping the company achieve its objectives is a more important characteristic to employee job satisfaction than money.

Author Keith Ferrazzi often discusses what he calls "co-elevation," where two parties can work together to achieve greater success than either could achieve alone. It is the quintessential $1 + 1 = 3$, which illustrates that partnering can take both parties beyond the sum of their parts. Ferrazzi postulates that in order for co-elevation to exist, transparency and communication are necessary.

An important aspect of effective communication is that it must be frequent and face-to-face to produce maximum benefit.

2) Empowerment. Employees want more say in how they do their jobs. Bosses should

ask for their ideas and suggestions. Most people can provide valuable input into how they can be more effective and they may not share this feedback if they are not asked. Regular reviews of employee performance help to create this exchange of ideas and thoughts. What is empowering and motivational is to take an employee's advice and implement it. The more authority an employee has to make her own decisions, the more empowered she will feel.

3) Opportunity for Advancement. Most people want to produce results and be recognized for their actions. They also want to feel like they are working toward something. Organizations that set clearly defined goals and objectives provide a roadmap to measuring success. Criteria should be established for production, attaining a new title, getting an office (or a larger one), receiving more support from the company, etc. Achieving production goals should be rewarded with trips, awards or recognitions. Without goals, what are people working towards?

Motivation can also be achieved by providing training to sharpen skills employees need to perform better. Training all employees, regardless of tenure, is important in particular for younger employees, as it gives them the ammunition they need to represent the company well and achieve success.

4) Provide Incentives. Incentives are motivation boosters, and they don't need to be expensive. Extra days off, tickets to a game, a gift certificate for dinner with a spouse don't cost a lot but create great motivation, not to mention loyalty to the firm. When we wanted to grow our Massey Knakal Realty Services platform, we offered monetary incentives for any of our employees who identified a new hire. This motivated them to constantly be on the lookout for new talent and provided the company with over 200 "recruiters" who were helping us grow.

5) Leadership. Strong leadership motivates a sales force. Good leaders lead by example. They are "do as I do" types, not "do as I say." You can't ask people to be in by 7 a.m. and stroll in at 9 a.m. Leaders should behave the way they want the people they work with to behave.

Goals and objectives should be clear and be in writing. Leaders must show excitement about the goals and get on board with directing everyone towards them. A positive attitude is also essential in motivating a sales force. Good moods are infectious; the opposite is also true.

Simply put, motivation plays a key role in keeping your best employees working with a high level of job satisfaction. It also provides the inspiration for others to achieve successes beyond what they thought was possible.



Robert Knakal.