

# YOU CAN ALWAYS SELL MORE ...

## ***“Increasing Your Sales Leadership Skills By Being A More Proactive Manager”***

by Jim Pancero

How much of your management time do you spend being ‘*proactive*’ vs. ‘*reactive*?’ A ‘*reactive*’ manager approaches his or her work life with a “*If it isn’t broke, then don’t waste time trying to fix it*” mentality.

With other departments, you can still be successful managing your areas with a predominately ‘*reactive*’ style. You can be a ‘*firefighter*,’ only fixing problems as they arise before quickly moving onto other challenges. Though you do occasionally invest time helping your people understand what can be done to prevent these problems from occurring in the future, this type of proactive planning and coaching is definitely in the minority of your time allocation.

But successful sales leadership demands a more proactive style of management. A sales team needs to be led, not just fixed. You cannot build a successful sales force by just fixing problems as they occur. The goal of sales management is to significantly grow a sales force, not just maintain your current performance levels. How much effort have you invested in profoundly improving your sales team compared to just maintaining? One of the most critical errors of sales managers is trying to manage (and grow) your sales levels by only managing with a ‘*reactive*’ maintaining style of management.

Even with your full work schedule it is still critical to somehow find additional time to devote to proactively coaching and guiding your salespeople in addition to all of the more reactive transactional discussions you have with your team.

The first consideration to shifting your managerial style is to review where you focus your attention when talking with your salespeople. When working with their team, most sales managers divide their conversations spending approximately 50% of their time on ‘*History*’ and 50% on ‘*Today*’ focused issues.

‘*History*’ focused issues deal with understanding how things progressed to where they are now allowing you to identify the necessary background information. ‘*Today*’ focused conversations allow you to identify what immediate actions need to be taken to resolve the identified problem. Both conversations, though positive and critical to any problem resolution, are still only functioning in the ‘*reactive*’ management style.

A ‘*Proactive*’ manager, before ending the discussion, will pull the salesperson into a third conversation focusing on the ‘*Future*’ issues of what extra efforts can be accomplished to either prevent this problem from occurring in other accounts or to turn this situation from a negative problem into a positive selling opportunity. As you work with your people solving problems, consider ending each problem resolution discussion with questions like:

- *“So what can you do to make sure this never happens again with this customer?”*
- *“If this happened with this account, then lets talk about how many of your other customers are most likely headed toward this same problem?”*
- *Now that you’ve solved this crisis with your customer, what can you do as an extra effort to rebuild, improve or strengthen your relationship with your client?”*
- *“What have you learned from this problem and how can you now change the way you sell to improve your overall success?”*

Most of the problems facing experienced salespeople do not involve personal productivity or functional implementation issues. An experienced sales rep usually has these skills under control. Growing the sales volumes and profitability of an experienced salesperson requires you, as their sales manager, to help change their focus, approach, messaging or persuasive style. These kinds of changes involve more than just reactively ‘*fixing*’ problems but instead require your proactive coaching and guidance to help your rep redirect and refocus their efforts.

Becoming more ‘*proactive*’ as a sales manager is more based on the focus of your comments and coaching efforts than it is the additional time you can devote to working with your salespeople. The job of a sales manager is to help each individual achieve more than they would have without your involvement. How are you proactively helping and leading your sales team to be focusing on the really big stuff as they improve the way they sell and build their profitability? And what else can you try doing as a sales manager that can make you more proactive as a sales leader?

Jim Pancero