



The Benefits of Peer Mentoring in a Sales Team

The word mentor means many things in different contexts. Recently there has been a significant level of interest in the relationship between sales management and mentoring. What is of particular interest is how peer mentoring could benefit particularly new recruits.

A lot of work has been done on the role that a salesperson's peers play in influencing personal motivation and skills development. Peer mentoring has been described as the relationship between a more experienced salesperson (mentor) and a less experienced protégé.¹ The relationship is usually aimed at providing the protégé with orientation, support and skills development. These relationships can be formal or informal and are often most successful when they are entered into spontaneously. But what of the benefits of mentoring- both to the new sales executive and the more experienced team member, including the sales manager?

For the mentor, the clear benefit is an opportunity to look at old ways of doing things in a new light. There is also overwhelming evidence that mentoring reduces absenteeism and increases sales staff motivation –two huge hurdles in the context of the current global crunch. For the protégé there is the opportunity to be fast tracked and take learning from the sales training classroom and discover quick, accessible routes to implementing sales principles in an efficient, timeous and practical way. It is generally accepted that the benefits for the protégé are both vocational and/or task related on the one hand and psychosocial on the other. For the sales manager there is the reassurance that on the job, just in time learning is happening, and whilst this does not let the sales manager off the hook when it comes to sales coaching, there is a reinforcing of best practice in a managed environment. The peer mentoring process can go a long way to supporting both medium and long-term sales objectives that the sales manager may be looking to institute.

Given this background, it may be worthwhile approaching some of the more experienced sales people on a team to establish both their mentoring ability and willingness. By identifying those sales members who are open to starting and maintaining new relationships and encouraging peer-mentoring, a sales manager can go a long way to creating that high performance team.

The current research certainly indicates that peer mentoring is one way of addressing issues around job motivation, job involvement, job satisfaction, and overall organizational commitment. One word of caution, if you begin a formal peer mentoring process, then it is important to manager both perceptions and expectations because the research also shows that protégés often expect more than they receive.

ⁱ Bolman Pullins, E., Fine, L. M., Warren, W. L. (1996). Identifying peer mentors in the sales force: An exploratory investigation of willingness and ability. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 24, (2), 125-136.

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