

BUILDING A SALES TEAM

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Given the complexity of selling in today's market and the increasing need to incorporate several different types of sellers in our sales teams it becomes critically important to create an environment in which teaming works. The team is used frequently without much thought. What exactly is a sales team? Our working definition is a group of sellers and support people working together to reach a goal that they all believe in and one that would be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve by working alone. It is a collaborative group, interdependent on one another and working interactively.

Some necessary elements to create a sales team in your distributorship include a charter or mission statement that defines the reason and logic for working together. The very essence of why the team is necessary is defined by this charter.

Members of the sales team must be independent and interdependent. They must understand their unique role, eg. key account seller, and perform the unique functions. The interdependent component...Each seller must also understand and depend upon the other team members to compliment their unique role. They need each others' experience, ability and commitment in order to arrive at their mutual goals. The members of the sales team must be committed to the idea that working together leads to more effective and efficient decisions and satisfied customers than does working in isolation to do it all! This synergy is the engine that drives increased productivity and profitability.

Each member of the sales team must be accountable as a member of the functioning sales team within and consistent with the larger organizational context and objectives. In order to have a functioning team each member must know their role, they must know the rules of engagement with other members of the team, they must be held accountable for the factors that they exercise control over, they must have a vested interest in making the team successful and they must feel confident in the skills and abilities of other members of the team. Clear and unambiguous definition of role, tasks, measurements, and rewards is basic to the team. Knowing that I can trust the inside seller, for example, to perform in a competent fashion on our assigned accounts enables the outside seller to go new places and sell new things.

There are several common characteristics or themes of effective sales teams. You can evaluate how well your own team fits these characteristics.

1. The effective sales teams produce results. It capitalizes on the strengths of its members to produce extraordinary results, results that individuals working alone cannot do.
2. The purpose of an effective sales team is clear and its members feel that it is worthwhile. Team members see how they can make a difference and they are more focused on meeting the team purpose and satisfying the team goals more than their own personal goals.

3. Team members feel invested in the success of the team and feel accountable for the output of their team.
4. Effective team members seem to have fun, even when they are working harder than other groups. This is an observable spirit and energy.
5. Effective team members are clear about their roles. There is no confusion about who does what.
6. Effective teams are open, nothing is under the table. Issues and concerns are shared without attack or criticism. Issues and concerns are used as a healthy way of surfacing points of view and generic creative solutions.
7. Members of an effective team are not afraid to surface a problem that may impact the entire team's performance. Trust, respect, collaboration, and candid discussion are evident.
8. The effective team does not lose sight of its goal and become enmeshed in power struggles. Instead, the eye is clearly focused on achieving the team mission and moving toward the vision. The higher purpose transcends the day-to-day ups and downs and makes power politics appear trivial and unimportant.
9. In their book entitled, *Team Fitness*, Meg Hartzler and Jane Henry suggest several key areas for developing your sales team:

FOCUS

Focus is getting clear on the expectations, values, priorities of those who receive your work, and ensuring that those expectations share the requirements for the services you provide. A team shapes its products and/or services by identifying its primary customers and clarifying their needs and expectations.

TEAM DIRECTION

Direction defines the unique contribution of the team, from its broadest purposes to its specific actions and activities. Direction shows the fit of the team's and the organization's purpose. A team creates a vision, defines its unique mission, and thereby gains a shared purpose. Goals and objectives are then developed to obtain results.

UNDERSTANDING

Understanding means learning and interpreting the inherent nature of ourselves, our team members and our organization. A team identifies individual team member strengths and blind spots. The team finds ways to understand and support each other, and agrees on strategies for effective teaming. The team also takes responsibility for working with each other, to reach each other as unique individuals while resolving conflict and differences that occur.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is the process of mutually agreeing on what results the team is expected to achieve specific projects and plans and how the team will be responsible to the organization and one another. The team builds agreements on specifically "who does what around here," and develops team operating principles.