

The Top 5 Things Your Sales Manager Should Be Doing

Sales managers do a lot of different things in furniture stores. Sometimes they are actually merchandise managers, performing those duties that would ordinarily be part of that function. Creating price tags and maintaining catalogs, swatches and price lists are some examples. You might suggest that merchandise and sales are the all part of the selling mix and, of course, you'd be right for most small businesses in our industry.

Sales managers often have sales administration duties like managing the office staff and, perhaps, customer service responsibilities also. They usually handle all of the company's irate customers and can have many other duties depending on the nature and size of the company. Many things your sales manager is doing should be done by clerical employees.

There are some specific, critical sales manager functions that relate only to salesperson performance and customer engagement that every store needs to pay attention to. Someone has to be responsible and accountable for these things in any professional sales environment. If you don't have your sales manager concentrating these things, you're probably under-performing in sales by 20% or more.

1. Maintaining Your Selling System

Now, this assumes that you actually have a selling system that's written down and that every salesperson knows inside out. Experience shows clearly that when salespeople and companies follow established, proven and tested systems, they sell more individually and the company maximizes its profits. Consistency of service, predictability of outcomes and higher sales and profits are the result. Managers know what to look for in salesperson performance and can apply additional training to fix performance problems. Training is expected to cause behavior to align with your selling system strategy.

If you have no system specific to your store your system is the conglomerate system of all the salespeople. It varies from person to person and customer to customer. The level of service your customers receive is not as dependent on where they shop, as on who helps them.

2. Developing And Tracking Goals

Goals are management's most important strategic tool to align behavior and performance throughout the organization. But salespeople's goals should be their goal – the level of sales and income they're committed to achieve. You'll need to have some minimum expectations, but when goals are developed with people based on their needs and there is a goals management system in place, performance improves dramatically. This is the first indicator that managers and owners have regarding how many salespeople they should employ.

Once developed and set, you should have a system in place to track both sales and earnings and this is one of the important aspects of your sales manager's job. Goals tracking are the connection between behavior and outcomes and is the starting point of all coaching initiatives.

3. Living In The Metrics

If goals are important, then tracking all the right numbers (we call them metrics) is crucial. The selling equation is simple in retail stores that depend on personal selling:

Sales = UPs x Close Ratio x Average Sale

You need to know all four of these factors all the time to manage well. Your sales manager should live in these numbers to drive performance. She should know the range of performance among the sales staff in each of these key factors and be able to relate the variances from average performance to goals and to your selling system. In fact, metrics are so important and understanding how to deal with the *ranges of performance* so central to successful sales management, that metrics define a large part of the sales manager's job.

Sales managers should make things happen in sales. They may not be responsible for traffic (UPs), that's the advertising department's job, but they should be responsible for constantly improving the your store's *close ratio* and *average sale*. She'll do this by determining the store's average performance in all key performance elements, then bringing those people performing below average to at least that level of consistent performance. These small improvements, in all key performance elements, will put large amounts on your bottom line.

4. Observing Performance

If the coach isn't on the field, he can't know how the game is being played or how to fix the things that are wrong. Your "play-book" or selling strategy can help him solve performance problems through training, but if he doesn't watch the game being played he can't spot those quirky performance issues to know what and who needs work.

Sales managers in furniture stores belong on the floor. It's just that simple and when you make this commitment, sales and profits will both improve immediately.

5. Coaching Weaker Salespeople To Average Performance

This is that group of salespeople who are performing below your store average in one or more of the key performance factors. These always include average sale and close ratio, but may also include fabric treatment sales, other add-on products, warranties, furniture guarantee programs, delivery charges, finance sales, follow up contacts or any other factor that is important to your profitability.



Depending on how low performance is, improving these people's performance is a critical factor in building sales and profits. Of course, some top performing salespeople may be weak in some area, and you'll usually find that you get more improvement from them faster than from your weakest performers.

But, you can't just ignore them and let things go along on their own. Doing this in a way dishonors the efforts of your best people. When you provide your lowest performing people with the same number of customer opportunities as your strongest performers, you have the right to expect reasonably equal performance. This is why you sales manager as to do all five of the things spelled out above.