

Tune-up your Sales Team for Maximum Performance

By Marie Warner

Do you know where your sales team stands compared to other firms? What's your plan for improving results? Would you characterize your sales team as "Eagles", "Average" or "Underperformers"? Evaluating your sales force is often challenging for Sales Managers.

Yet you can proactively and objectively evaluate your sales team - and "tune-up" the entire sales force to deliver maximum performance.

Measurement of 2010 sales performance at over five-hundred companies indicated:

- Top-performing firms exceeded team quota by **106%**.
- Average firms attained **76% of team quota**, and
- Underperforming companies achieved **only 22%** of their team quota goal.

Do you want your sales team to exceed this year's revenue goals? How can you "tune-up" performance to be better prepared to exceed next year's targets?

It all starts with the *individuals on the sales team*. If you want to consistently exceed your revenue objective, it is imperative that the sales manager *consistently* evaluate each sales professional. And be prepared to make some *tough decisions*.

Early in my career as a Sales Manager, I would diligently work with each and every member of my sales team to improve their skills and boost their performance. This included a few Sales Reps, who, quite frankly, would have been better off in another – *ANY other* – line of work. In other words, they should have been "let go."

A respected superior and mentor counseled me that no sales manager can *consistently exceed revenue goals* by fostering the "laggards" on the sales team. Rather, *the Sales Manager must focus on getting top performance - from the top performers.*

When a talented golf pro is struggling with any aspect of the game, a coach will advise that the athlete **focus on the strongest** part of that Professional's game – **not the weakest**. This same "natural selection" is practiced in corporate management.

Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, instituted the 20-70-10 "Rank and Yank" performance guideline. The top 20% of employees received grooming and opportunities for advancement. These were the "A" graded employees. The middle 70% of employees were trained and developed with the goal to improve – and it was "Up or Out" for these "average" performers. These were the "B" graded players. The rest of the employees? After two "C" grades, the bottom performing 10% of employees were invited to explore a career elsewhere.

There have been many critics of ranking and differentiating employees in this manner. Criticism of ranking is not as heated in sales roles, where there is an objective measure and ranking each quota year – *Did you make your number or didn't you?*

But it's not that simple, is it?

Not many Sales Managers welcome the task of replacing a sales team member. Hiring expense can be \$30K to \$40K to replace a sales representative. It can take *two to three months* for a Manager to recruit and hire a Sales Rep, plus *another three months* until that new Rep achieves sales productivity. *For this reason*, and because not many Sales Managers relish the tough task of firing, underachievers can remain on the Sales Team. This is a “lose-lose” situation for both the organization and the individual – who continues to struggle to succeed in the wrong role.

The struggling economy has dampened sales achievement across the board, making the evaluation of sales performance much more difficult. How can a Manager know which Sales Rep has “eagle” potential, but may have just suffered a bad year in an off-economy”?

There is a systematic, efficient and equitable way to “Tune-Up” the sales team. Here are the steps for a “Sales Tune-Up”.

1. **Test and Assess** - Select and administer proven Sales Assessment Tests for your entire sales force. For our clients, Warner Professional Sales implements several nationally recognized tests for both pre-hire screening and for employee benchmarking. Many tests can be customized to reflect the unique nature and requirements of your company’s sales process.

Analysis of test results will reveal the innate characteristics of members of your sales team – and whether a Sales Rep is “wired” to be able to *ever* succeed as a sales professional for your firm. Other assessment test results will show those areas “needing development” in a promising, but temporarily underperforming sales talent.

2. **Hire New Talent** – Based on testing results and job performance (recent and past), *remove the under-performers from your team*. Recruit, **test** and hire replacement sales talent. Remember that the hiring and ramp-up process can take months. If you want any new sales professional to make a contribution within the first half of the new selling year, you must step up to this task before year-end.
3. **Define your Training and Development Plans** – Review individual performance metrics plus assessment test results, and create training and coaching programs for your top performers and your promising “average” reps.

When your Sales Team is finishing the year with the Eagles exceeding your team revenue goals, your opportunity for continued success can be enhanced by adopting a continuous “sales tune-up”

If your Sales Team had a disappointing quota year, you **must** take these steps to “Tune-Up” sales performance. Otherwise *your* own career as a sales manager may be at **risk**.

About the Author

Marie Warner is founder and President of **Warner Professional Sales**. Warner Professional Sales helps firms get greater revenue growth from their sales teams by *recruiting* the right sales talent; *training and developing* those sales professionals to exceed revenue goals; and helping management to define and implement the best sales “process” and tactics. Marie has over two decades of experience in sales and sales leadership of enterprise level and startup organizations.

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