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theSales Performance Journal

VOLUME 3 - ISSUE 2

▶ **Developing Sales
Managers for Success**

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The Sales Performance Company

the Sales Performance Journal

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The Miller Heiman Sales Performance Journal, Volume 3, Issue 2

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Publisher

Miller Heiman, Inc.
10509 Professional Circle, Suite 100
Reno, NV 89521
(800) 526-6400
www.millerheiman.com

Acknowledgements

President & CEO, Miller Heiman: Sam Reese
Editor-in-Chief: Jennifer Vodehnal
Creative Director: Bret Poinier
Senior Editor: Rachel Gattuso
Production Editor: Kaye Lingad
Writer: Louis Greenstein

Success doesn't always imply a progression up the ladder. To accomplish true success, you must have the courage to recognize where you and the members of your team are happiest performing in a sales organization.

In this edition of the *Sales Performance Journal*, members of our executive team speak on the growing responsibilities and pressures of front line sales managers. This resource provides an honest look at the personalities and skills necessary to really thrive in this crucial role.

Miller Heiman founder, Bob Miller, provides his perspective on the critical importance of this role in the integrity and endurance of any successful organization.

Let's face it, the importance of front-line sales management is increasing. In a marketplace with many uncontrollable variables, your best investment is in the people who are responsible for leading and coaching your sales forces to succeed.



Sam Reese

President and CEO, Miller Heiman Inc.

developing sales managers for success

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The Frontline Sales Manager: The Keystone of a Lasting Organization

One of the most crucial roles in a sales organization is that of the sales manager, and it is one that is constantly overlooked. Sales organizations cannot plan for stability and continued existence without strong sales managers who take on the roles as conduits of information, cheerleaders for progress, and coaches for improvement. Miller Heiman founder, Bob Miller, illustrates how investing in the development of these critical members of the management team is not only a surefire way to implement change and improve performance and results, but a certain method for ensuring a company's longevity.

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Taking on the Role of Sales Manager: How to Conquer the New Terrain

Not all career transitions are simple. The move from top-performing salesperson to sales leader means transitioning from a selling mentality to a motivational mentality. Discover the importance of shifting from top performer to supportive leader and avoid the common mistakes new sales managers often make. The change of priorities and responsibilities can seem daunting but, with the proper approach, new sales leaders can navigate the terrain confidently.

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The Move to Sales Management: Assessing the Fit

Selling and managing sales are two different disciplines involving two different sets of skills. Individuals who are considering or have accepted a promotion from sales representative to sales manager must consider the implications and take a proactive approach to possible career progression. Don't underestimate the transition – research the realities. Asking simple yet vital questions and learning what challenges and rewards are involved will help determine the best course of action.



THE FRONT-LINE SALES MANAGER

The Keystone of a Lasting Organization

by Bob Miller, Co-Founder, Miller Heiman

The Roman Empire left an indisputable thumbprint on civilization. In a time before cell phones, email, and webcasts, the Romans revolutionized approaches to warfare, modern conventions and architecture for generations to follow. The ingenuity and enduring power of their thoughts and accomplishments secured their place as leaders in progressive thinking.

Arguably, the most notable achievement is the architecture that still exists after centuries of weathering and progress. The essence of many of these longstanding monuments is the arch, which is designed for structural endurance, and its vital keystone, the component that connects and locks its adjoining supports.

In reality, one can draw clear similarities between the worlds of architecture and sales. Both have been around for a long time,

both rely on the strength and arrangement of the individual components for durability.

Both craftsmen are in the business of assessment. Externally, salesmen and architects assess the needs of clients and then assess how to incorporate products and services into a workable solution that benefits both parties. Internally, we assess candidates to hire, employees' efficiency and contributions and top-performing practices to leverage within the organization's operations.

But until lately, the sales profession has been overlooking one of its most critical roles and greatest assets: the sales manager. Think of them as the keystone of your organization. They are the communication piece for responsibilities and the conduit for action.



Front-line sales managers, organizational keystones, bear the strain from both sides of the organization. To appreciate the extent of a sales manager's importance, analyze what they do and who they reach on a consistent basis. On one side, managers handle the expectations delivered by executive management; overseeing the particulars of a team of unique individuals to ensure the company arrives at its revenue goals. On the other side, sales managers have a responsibility to be customer advocates for the client to the selling organization. As such, it is critical that sales managers clearly understand the buyers' concept of what needs to be fixed, accomplished, or avoided in the solution. Coach, leader and driver, sales managers have a tough and often thankless job. It's an intricate balance that must be reached to power an organization toward improving results and attaining the corporate revenue goals while assuring that the client needs are well met so they will buy again.

To achieve those results, performance is crucial. There is no getting around that fact. When it comes to quota attainment and increasing growth, it's the sales force that puts their feet on the pavement. Sales organizations invest time and resources into scouting, training and enticing top performers to bring their skills to the table, but often forget there is another line of performers who act as the glue for the organization. Without strong front-line sales managers, how can you ensure stability and continued existence? It's a bit like purchasing the finest horse and chariot money can buy without giving any thought to who will drive it. No doubt your operation will look pretty but with no talent in the driver's seat it's not going anywhere.

Take for example the instance of a firm that found itself faced with a pressing need for cultural change. This \$56-million, nationally-recognized firm had salespeople with highly technical education stepping into sales and sales leadership executive positions. To successfully drive the internal shift of focus from a technical product selling approach to a customer-centric approach would

require strong, consistent leadership. Such a change meant its leaders needed to become experts in the sales processes and effective coaches that would inspire and propel the change from within. This firm understood the key to implementing such a cultural change was its sales management, investing significantly in sales leadership instead of salespeople. Without them, the change may never have come to fruition.

Having a working sales process is absolutely vital but does no good with no one to implement it. The actual motivation for change and growth rests in the hands of front-line sales management. They are the means to a successful end, the keystone to balancing upper management and team performance while solving customer problems.

Realistically, as we buckle down and take time to pursue accounts harder and more aggressively during an economic crunch, sales managers can be the most crucial factor in ultimate organizational success. And it's time to invest in them if you're interested in growing your company's earning potential.

The importance for investment in front-line sales management can be further demonstrated in the case of a multi-million dollar media education company that went through a lengthy transformation as the result of fast growth through several acquisitions. Successfully combining a collection of diverse sales teams resulted in the emergence of a new culture. Through a tremendous emphasis on sales management training, the company was able to position its sales leaders as experts in the application of effective sales processes. This company invested more in its leaders than it did in its salespeople, and the effort paid off as a common language and consistent selling practices became clearly evident within the organization.

Without a willingness to invest in front-line sales management, sales organizations will remain stagnant

in an ever-changing market. It's a role that is embedded with challenge and difficulty, and one that not everyone can readily fulfill. Great as top-performing salespeople may be, the bottom line is that it takes a certain character to be a top-performing manager. If it were true that every top-performing salesperson could excel in the management role, there would be a greater percentage of out-performing sales organizations in existence. Selling, while it may have its similarities, is leagues away from managing those who sell, and it comes down to knowing who can tackle each type of challenge and who has the potential to be developed to make the transition. The proper assessment needs to be performed before saddling the entire structure with such a crucial keystone.

Front-line sales managers worth investing in will grow numbers and enthusiasm and decrease stagnancy and turnover. The good ones, made of grit and chutzpah, will want it. You've just got to learn who they are. Sales managers who operate at the top of their game reduce costs, leverage best practices and deliver increased results. Now is not the time to tinker with ideas of improved products or altered processes – now is the time to take a good hard look at the people operating the cogs of momentum. Connecting the right people to the jobs they can contribute most to is a goal every sales organization should work toward, as they can expect the greatest return on investment from sales talents content with their positions.

Sales managers excel when they inspire others to excel. They must provide strong leadership within their own team while practicing upward leadership. They must bounce back from rejection and loss – the need for resilience is great. They must take the bad with the good and extract useful information to improve their team. What comes their way must be channeled both up and down in an open line of communication for greater support. Like the keystone, they must shoulder the tremors of bad weather in addition to the complacency of fair weather.

Investing in the proper materials for a sales organization has the potential for greater staying power than might be imagined. Integrity and durability of character are necessary for an organization's endurance. It's just a matter of identifying those materials, investing in them, then placing them in their proper location within the structure. To truly provide your sales organization with a foundation for survival, good economy or bad, invest in the individuals who can appreciate the fair weather and forge through the bad. ■

About Bob Miller

Bob Miller co-founded Miller Heiman Inc. in 1978. Bob developed the initial *Strategic Selling*® program in the early 1970s and has continued to develop new content and relevant sales courses, all of which were incorporated into Miller Heiman, Inc. He continues to work full-time with Miller Heiman today in a consulting and advisory capacity, focusing primarily on product development.



THE MOVE TO SALES MANAGEMENT

Assessing the Fit

On one hand, it's sensible to promote outstanding salespeople to the ranks of sales management. After all, who knows the product or service better than a star salesperson? Who else knows the customers, the territory and its nuances like the back of their hand? And who has a better sense of the goals the organization should reasonably expect its salespeople to achieve? Successful salespeople tend to be self-motivated, disciplined and good at dealing with others. In terms of career development, a move from highly successful sales representative to highly successful sales manager seems to be a no-brainer.

On the other hand, much of what may have made a sales star excel – independence, the ability to close a deal no matter what and a fierce competitive spirit even when competing against his or her peers – are not the traits associated with legendary sales managers.

Two Different Disciplines

Selling and managing sales are two different disciplines involving two different sets of skills. Most successful sales managers have a solid support structure provided by high-level executive management. They are empowered to make things happen and trained to know where to find the necessary resources, including internal and external coaches. Successful sales managers know how to take stock of their team, identify best practices and replicate them across the organization. To help individual members reach their goals, they provide coaching as well.

According to Miller Heiman executive vice president of sales, Bill Golder, “No professional can afford a whimsical approach to career progression. Moving up requires an old fashioned pros-and-cons approach to weigh responsibilities and stressors in light of traits previously

relied upon. It's a crucial exercise for sustainability of job performance and overall happiness.”

Not every star salesperson wants to be a sales manager. Some want to make the transition, but find themselves unhappy once in the new role because no one articulated what to expect. No one taught them the skills and methodologies they would need as sales managers. Others may not be suited to the role of sales manager. This is why an honest self-evaluation and a thorough assessment should be prerequisites to the transition.

Attributes of Sales Roles

Salesperson

Independent

Competitive

Bends Rules

Challenges Management

Sales Manager

Collaborative

Supportive

Enforces Rules

/s Management

Bethany Schultz, vice president of client engagements at Miller Heiman, believes aspiring sales managers must look at the realities of such a change. “They need to analyze what will be different about income and payment,” Schultz says. “The rewards and incentives are generally completely different, so aside from asking whether you're emotionally ready, you must determine if you can physically handle the nuances of this change.”

If you or someone you know is considering a move from salesperson to sales manager, we recommend taking a proactive approach to this critical career progression. First, perform an informal self evaluation. To do that, you'll need to gather some information from current sales managers and – if possible – from sales executives. Seek out these individuals either at your own organization or at other companies. Arrange a time to sit down and talk with them (preferably in person, but the telephone is okay if distance or time is a problem).

Discovering the Sales Manager's Role

Ask questions and take notes. Among the things to ask these seasoned professionals:

- What does a sales manager do day-to-day?
- What are the risks of a sales manager?
- What are some real best and worst case examples of sales managers?
- How do the activities of a sales manager align with the organization's overall strategies?
- Where can the job lead – to the C-suite?
- What are the steps between sales management and executive management – how long might it take to arrive in the C-suite?
- What criteria will be used to assess performance in the new role?
- What resources will be made available and what must sales managers come up with on their own?
- What kind of training is available to help transition into the new role and what training is available for your team?

Once you have a clear sense of the job requirements, the expectations senior management will have of you, how you will be rewarded, and the resources you will have at your disposal, ask yourself a simple question: “Do I actually want this?”

A simple question, yes, but many factors must be considered when determining your answer. Are you an individual contributor or a team contributor? Do you get excited by the idea of the organization as a whole achieving its goals or do you care about making your own numbers, exceeding your goals and achieving success on your own terms? While your personal traits and characteristics are not written in stone, change can be hard. Plus, you may not want to change. Knowing what you know so far about sales management, do you feel you fit the profile? Is it the right job for you, or



should you remain a star salesperson? Visualize yourself in the role – performing the functions of a sales manager day in and day out. Would you be happy? Or would you prefer to remain in sales? Is it going to help you get where you need to be long term? There is no right or wrong answer. Only you know what's best for you, given your background, your inclinations and the organization where you work.

Mentors, Coaches and Communications

Now that you have taken stock of what strengths you can bring to the role and what areas challenge you most, you may want to consider whether there is training available to help you get up-to-speed in areas where you need improvement. For example, great salespeople may never have had to coach other salespeople – especially ones with more experience. Great salespeople may never have had to give a performance review, set sales goals for others, motivate poor performers, help a team devise a prospecting plan, know when it's time to bring an executive into the sales process or know how to align sales and marketing activities. You could be a great salesperson, able to communicate to customers the value of your products and services. But can you communicate with fellow salespeople to help them understand why customers buy from you, who the decision makers are at your target companies and how to appeal to each decision maker's unique needs? These skills can all be learned. But does your employer offer such training? Many do. Others do not. Ask a mentor, or a current sales manager or executive, or perhaps someone in your HR department about the training your organization can provide. Some sales managers must learn these and other critical, proven methodologies on their own.

Still interested in making the transition? As you proceed, keep in mind that the most successful sales managers identify internal and external coaches. Even before your promotion, it's not too early to find yourself a good coach or two. Of the sales executives and sales managers with whom you spoke, which ones gave the best advice? As described, some organizations offer very little training to up-

and-coming sales managers. Once you're in your new role, it may be up to you to locate the resources your team will need. Identifying coaches who can help you navigate the twists and turns of sales management is a good idea.

Formal Assessment

If you're already a sales manager or a sales executive, and you're thinking about promoting one of your outstanding salespeople to a sales management role, we recommend asking that person to conduct their own discovery and self assessment. There are tools available on the market that make following up with assessments an easier process and highlight the benefit of the practice. Rather than the assessment being viewed as a pass-or-fail test to determine whether the candidate is "management material," think of the assessment as one part of a process that involves self evaluation, formal assessment and appropriate training.

Many organizations fail to provide sales managers with clear objectives, tools or processes to do their jobs effectively. This can be disastrous for sales managers who get stuck between a C-suite that doesn't communicate well or neglects to align strategies with rewards, and a sales team that lacks clear direction. Based on what you've learned so far about your organization, your team and yourself, it is time to develop a plan of attack. If your organization's executives haven't done so, you should begin to think about the clear objectives you will set for your team and how those objectives align with the organization's key strategies and goals.

Like any other discipline, sales management requires proper behaviors and interactions that build rapport, keep the lines of communication open and apply proven methodologies to the job. And like any other discipline, sales management has its own challenges and rewards. Before considering or accepting a promotion from sales representative to sales manager, conduct your 3-step process to ensure you are headed in a direction that aligns well with your personal goals.

1. Learn what sales management is about and what it takes to be successful in the role. Sales managers impact an organization in ways that salespeople do not.
2. Perform an honest self assessment to determine whether you really want the promotion and if it's right for you.
3. Identify coaches, mentors, processes and tools you'll need as a sales manager.

“Personal wins aren’t just important to our customers, they’re important to us,” says Golder. “I have seen both sides of the sales management spectrum and know that individuals are generally happiest when they’re in a position to contribute value. Determining where you’ll gain the most satisfaction, whether it be managing your own team or remaining on the front lines, serves both you and your sales organization’s best interests.”

Because the skills required in the roles of salesperson and sales management are so different, the transition is not one to be considered lightly. Never assume it will work itself out on its own. It won’t. Rather, preparation, planning, and support are critical to making this career path a successful one. ■



TAKING ON THE ROLE OF SALES MANAGER

How to Conquer the New Terrain

The move from top-performing salesperson to team leader is more than just a cumbersome exercise in transporting pictures, pens and kitschy paraphernalia. The transition can be a tumultuous, arduous journey. Your confidence in your abilities has allowed you to succeed as a top-performing salesperson and garnered attention from those in your sales organization. While that confidence can serve you well in your responsibilities as sales manager, you will need to develop a very different skill set to best equip yourself for the journey ahead.

“In truth, sales managers are champions for persistence and instigators of progress on the front line. But it’s a position of heavy responsibility and little praise,” says Sam Reese, president and CEO of Miller Heiman. “You’ve got to recognize the personal wins your team achieves as extensions of your

own success. Learning to do that will propel you further on your journey toward sales excellence.”

Whether you’ve just landed the role or have been in the position for a while, now is the time to assess the realities of your changed circumstances. The challenges of a sales manager are numerous, and it is often the burden of the newly promoted to determine precisely what they are and how to best tackle them. Either on your own volition or someone else’s recommendation, you have landed this role and need to prepare yourself for the embedded responsibilities.

Changing Lenses

Rarely are sales managers in their positions without having succeeded on the front lines. Solid performers

exude confidence, an attitude that wins recognition and generates positive results within sales organization. But this change in position implies a necessary mindset shift. No longer will it be acceptable to employ individualistic thinking. Sales managers require a mentality centered on the success of many groups of people.

“The significance of being able to look at success from this new perspective is often underestimated,” Reese observes. “For someone who has grown accustomed to measuring success by his or her own efforts, thinking in terms of rallying a group of individuals to drive success is not a transition that comes without conscious effort.” Sales managers are no longer looking out for number one. They need to learn what contributes to team success and shift from top player to enthusiastic, empowering coach, rounding their players up to continually put out their best performance.

Scouting Ahead

For any new position, there is a learning curve, but there is advice that can help you navigate around common pitfalls.

“New sales managers must understand that their role is not about their own performance,” says Bethany Schultz, vice president of client engagement at Miller Heiman. “It’s about helping everyone else on the team raise their level of performance.”

Most importantly, new sales managers need to realize that to be an effective coach, they must leave their individual method of selling behind and adopt methods that push others to win.

- Don’t be hasty. You might want to roll up your sleeves and make changes immediately, but fight the urge to disrupt things before you’ve had time to assess your team’s working balance. Instead, take time to determine the nuances of the operation. Observing the working dynamic of the individuals on the team ensures you

don’t miss problems or weaknesses and the indicators that will highlight how best to leverage strengths.

- Don’t assume your way is the best way. Learn from your team what has worked in the past and whether it will continue to be effective or not. Asking their opinion will lend you credibility as a manager concerned with everyone’s success.
- Don’t focus on the wrong motivators. Understanding what truly inspires success for your team will take time. Shy away from immediately offering monetary incentive. Instead, determine wins your team members will work hard for.
- Don’t wait to scope talent. Keep your radar for top performers on constantly rather than falling into panic mode when a position on your team becomes vacant.
- Don’t fixate on low performance. Devote significant energy to both middle and top performers on your team rather than continually investigating and diagnosing the problems of low performers. Instead, look at leveraging those best practices for the entire team to increase results.

While discovering what makes specific sales teams tick, new managers should invest time discovering why your clients engaged with your solution. Do your homework on the accounts existing above and within the funnel. You should start with your sales team, but don’t end there. Understanding how and why customers purchase your solution will supplement the knowledge of your team’s performance for a better idea of what needs improvement. The key factors behind why your customers are buying from your sales organization may provide a different breadth of knowledge. Engaging in an open dialogue with clients can also highlight the areas your team can improve on with training.



Increasing Results

Sales managers shoulder a different set of responsibilities than salespeople. Often thought of within Miller Heiman as an invisible layer of change, the position requires managing influence and pressure from several different directions at the same time as ensuring top performance from the members constituting their team. Sales managers are responsible for driving the motivation to secure wins for their team, the clients and the sales organization as a whole. While the road to achieving these three sets of goals can be difficult for new sales managers, a vital tool for arriving at that final destination is solid, open communication. “Those that have succeeded previously in the sales arena can be aided by their ability to negotiate and obtain internal resources,” Schultz says. “The ability to cultivate internal relationships is a skill worth leveraging, though sales managers must keep in mind the skill sets for top-performing salespeople are, for the most part, vastly different than that of top-performing sales managers.”

New sales managers can certainly draw upon the skills developed previously, but they must be developed further. A successful manager will learn to recognize the traits of sales superstars and the areas of improvement among poor performers. Seeking out constant habits, excuses or reasoning can help direct corrective efforts. Look for specific sets of behaviors that indicate whether your team members are taking you seriously and are following your direction to the front line.

Salespeople assess a customer’s problem and further identify the situation by asking questions to avoid making inferences. In much the same way, sales managers need to classify problem issues through questioning but must arrive at their conclusion through a different audience. Learn to recognize what communication types work best with each audience and at what frequency. Perhaps the C-Suite in your sales organization is constantly on the go and shooting an email they can read from a mobile device is a preferred use of time as opposed to a phone

call. The best way to determine this will be to ask them outright what works for them.

Determining what mode of communication is favored by different audiences and at what regularity will allow a consistent and timely exchange of information. Sales managers must be certain to clearly relay what is expected of each. Your sales team should have no question of what you expect of them. You should have no question of what information your management expects from you. Don’t be afraid to clarify if you’re uncertain. Sales managers are often relied upon as resources of information. Obtaining the most accurate direction from upper management ensures a smooth transition of deadline, process and goal expectancies. Securing frequent, updated information on the accounts within your teams funnels guarantees you’re providing a constant picture of where the company is in relation to its revenue goals.

Whittling Down Data

Clear paths of direction and proper communication technique are vital for sales managers, but there’s no denying the value of numbers. Data can be gleaned from abundant sources, but not every number will help get the job done. It is the responsibility of the sales manager to determine which metrics will identify areas for improvement for their teams and use the information to implement change.

When it comes to numbers, less is more. Without choosing metrics that give the most bang for the buck, sales managers can easily waste time poring over excessive data.

If they are not currently in place, certain processes are crucial to ensure your team’s success. You will need a process for holding accountability of large deals and their accompanying review processes. Resourcing, pursuing, discovering, solving, influencing, negotiating, closing and delivering processes will need to be assessed for relevance and then implemented or streamlined.

Making the Move

The journey for a new manager to become a competent coach, leader and administrator may seem a daunting task, but is one that confident individuals can tackle. Approaching it with the mindset that sales management is a transition instead of a progression launches new managers in a positive direction. Mistakes are bound to occur initially, but understanding how the sales organization functions and what you can bring to the table to best supplement its operation will help keep you on track.

Hard work and diligence can make this position one of the most rewarding in the sales profession. The good news about such heavy challenges is that the gratification for a job well done is amplified. If you do your job well, your team will reflect your strength and commitment, translating into powerful results that any sales organization will appreciate. ■