

7 STEPS TO

# SUCCESSFUL SALES LEADERSHIP

smarter selling  
stop talking and start listening!

## **HIGH PERFORMING SALES LEADERSHIP**

### **7 STEPS**

- 1. Your behaviour**
- 2. You've got this**
- 3. How to motivate your team**
- 4. Hands-on or Hands-off**
- 5. Reduce the complaining**
- 6. Mind your language**
- 7. Be calm**

We know that the success of any business is down to great leadership. In the sales department, the 'engine' of the business, leadership qualities are even more so under the spotlight. Money needs to come in to make the rest of the operation work. A Harvard business review states that 69% percent of salespeople who exceeded their annual quota rated their sales manager as being excellent or above average. So, we can see that the high performing leader creates a high performing team. Let's find out why that is and how you achieve that.

About these 7 steps I'm sharing: the first step is to do with how your behaviour affects the overall results. The following 6 steps are based on how you interact with your team and how to improve the overall performance.



## 1. YOUR BEHAVIOUR

### **What's needed then to be a high performing leader?**

In a recent poll top sales manager scored 19% higher in the self-discipline facet and 27% higher in the priority focused facet than underperforming managers.

Let's take a look at what that means. Someone who prioritises and then has the self-discipline to stick to it is going to be successful and reap the rewards. As long as they are prioritising the right things. In my line of work, I am coaching leaders every day and it's very apparent that the connection between being organised and getting results is profound. So, organised, prioritising and self-discipline are interconnecting skills that set you up for success. Let's touch on these.

**Focus** is the first step in organisation and prioritization. Think of yourself as the captain of the ship. Where are you heading? Where do you want to be in 5 years, 10 years? We need to be crystal clear on where we are heading so we know where to aim our focus.

**Planning** allows you to break down the important milestones that need to be achieved yearly, quarterly, monthly, weekly and daily. This means you need to be clever about where you put your energy and effort. Watch your planning, most people overestimate what can be done in a day but hugely underestimate what can be done in 5 years.

**Prioritising** is key, it's what gets results. We all have access to the same amount of time in a day, so it's what we each do with it. Ensure you are aware of prioritising what's important and not what is shouting out the loudest or easiest to just get 'out the way'. This takes discipline. Bundle up distractions and 'parcels' of work into different time slots across the day and week. Some people find they are more disciplined if

they break down the day into segments, i.e. learning, leading, reacting, engaging, admin.

**Success-driven** The other stand out factor was that 20% of top sales leaders rated higher in the success-driven facet. When you strive to be successful you are constantly looking at ways to improve. You are learning along the way. You are able to break down a situation and see the interconnecting dots of where something went well and where the wheels fell off. You are reading, absorbing, learning, expanding your knowledge. Among the leaders that I train their average time spent on development is at least one hour a day. This might be a book, a podcast whilst driving or exercising, a YouTube channel –something that is taking them from where they are to where they want to be.

Whenever we update our resources page with new articles, immediately the first batch of 'downloads' is by the same leaders. They are at the cutting edge of ideas; they want to know what the latest thinking on sales is, how they can help their team, how they can improve results. They are passionate about advancement. When we run webinars, it's the same batch of leaders who have simultaneously signed themselves up as well as urged their teams to do so.



## **2. YOU'VE GOT THIS**

This starts with you. Are you behaving everyday as a leader would? Are you always 'turning up' showing the best version of yourself? Are you respectful and kind, are you tuned in to when a rep needs extra attention with a challenge? Are you leading in every area of the business, meaning when a new solution pops up are you embracing it with open arms, excited about selling it yourself? If you want your team to be excited, polished and professional, then know that it all starts with the standards you hold for yourself as well as for others.

Being extremely organised sends a message to your team. It's saying, I know what I'm doing. I am calm, reasonable and rational, I've got this. This plan will get us the outcome we need. I am disciplined and I stick to my plan. I prioritise so that the right things get done.

A note for when taking on new people - ensure they are shadowing a model of excellence. In other words, only put them with a rep who is professional, polished and does all the right things. (The last thing you want is for the newbie to pick up any bad habits.)



### **3. HOW TO MOTIVATE YOUR TEAM**

You want to know how to motivate your team to sell more, get them sold on what they are selling. And I mean really sold. In fact, so sold that they just can't wait to get on the 'blower' and reach out to help more people. They need to be 100%, inside out, upside down sold before they engage with anyone. When you conduct internal training on products/services – ensure it's clear on how those benefits relate to the client; make sure every person knows the questions clients may ask; the sorts of questions you need to be asking clients to know exactly how your solution fits into the mix. This includes your USP and that of all the other main alternatives available to the client. It is crucial, as leaders, to read the signs when our team may not be understanding the solution or are themselves not sold on the value.

If they can't explain it, in detail, back to you then they are in need of more training. Make sure they are comfortable speaking their truth, don't humiliate anyone who is brave enough to show their cards and come clean that they are 'not sure' or 'not sold'. This is a far better scenario than a rep who bangs their chest in confidence to appease you and save face but has no substance and will unwind when faced with a questioning client.

Regular training is best, even with a really experienced team. They need to see training as positive. In every internal training that I have, we regularly 'bounce about' the solutions and refine our message. In every situation thus far (since 2009) the reps have not had a consistent language. That's not unusual nor necessarily negative, it just means everyone has 'their way' and their own default 'banter'.

Regular training where each rep has a chance to showcase how they put forward a solution is extremely beneficial so other reps can then pull themselves out of their own bubble and open their minds to other – better approaches. This enables them to cross share and evolve more client questions to ultimately read the client better and arm them with refined answers allowing a more flexible and adaptable message delivery with a compelling, better aligned solution. The reps sharing also provides a great insight for you on their abilities, revealing their gaps.



## 4. HANDS-ON OR HANDS-OFF

How much time do you spend with each rep? Do some reps never check in and others call you just to complain? Are they seeking answers? Do they listen to your answers?

There is nothing worse than getting instructions from a boss who hasn't been out seeing a client for a while. I once had a whingy rep (she lasted 3 months) who after some time declared 'I have saturated the market, I literally have no more reasons to see anyone'. So, for the next 4 weeks I saw an average of 30 people a week presenting new ideas. Yes, I was exhausted (I didn't let them see that) but it proved a point and it lifted the mark for everyone for years to follow.

Stick in some grunt work every now and again. Most importantly it will bring you up to speed with current challenges and ways to overcome them, plus allow the team to see that you empathise and understand any roadblocks they are facing. So, when you pitch in with solution ideas to identified problems, they respect these as thought through, well founded and credible.

When making head office decisions I would suggest really working out how to deliver it to the team. Be very clear on the 'why' and crucially, how they are to take that message to market. Arm them with how to deliver the message, how to handle questions etc. I know of at least 20 companies that have moved their low value clients over to the internal sales team. Only one of companies handled it well, the other 19 - just left it to the sales reps assuming they would manage it maturely (assumption kicks us up the bum). These reps, in turn, handled it dreadfully by telling the clients that they were low value so 'unfortunately I can no longer look after you'.

If you, yourself, like to be autonomous and prefer that style, it's highly likely your leadership style is equally 'hands-off'. We operate outwardly according to our own default, thinking 'I hated it when my boss did this, so I won't do that behaviour'. The same happens if you, when as a rep, needed lots of support, as a leader you may now naturally be assuming your team too need lots of support. Both of these are totally normal reactions. The downside is it's based on managing you and not managing *them*. I.e. you could be overlooking a rep who actually needs lots of support or you could be micromanaging someone who is totally competent and capable not wanting so much attention. A good leader recognises that each individual will need them differently.

Equally, each individual's performance needs to be observed on its own merit. Eg Jane needs lots of close attention as she is new, then when she is competently capable 'I'll offer regularly weekly check ins'. Onto, 'Ah, Jane has missed her target for a few months, she may be off the mark and feeling vulnerable. I will manoeuvre the situation so that I'm more accessible again as Jane may have slipped back needing more guidance and encouragement'. Good leadership recognises that each individual's needs around their competence are fluid and fluctuate.



## **5. REDUCE THE COMPLAINING**

Do your team spend a majority of their time with you complaining? If yes, you're probably thinking 'I wish it weren't so, but they just come to me with problems'. So, you are needed to lead and to manage headspace. If this is out of balance, i.e. your interactions with the team entails more of them complaining then it has spiralled into a 'I'm on your side against the company' or the 'parent/child' whinge is awarding them attention. The more you foster it, the more they will whinge. It's unlikely they are even conscious of this pattern. You may not be cognisant of the fact that perhaps at some point they were encouraged by a throw away comment of 'my door is open, come and see me with anything'. Little did you know they would! Oh, how you may wish to turn back time. Also be aware of co-dependency. Hand on heart do you enjoy them coming to you, and feel like it's building a relationship? Be honest with that secondary gain there. (i.e. you say you don't want them being so needy but actually enjoy being their go-to person). In other words, unconsciously are you an enabler?

I know how it happens: we take our foot off the accelerator to deal with 100 other fires that need putting out and that rep gets away with some 'not so good choices' - but we'll leave it as we don't have the bandwidth to deal with it right now - justifying how at least they are bringing in money and frankly you can't afford to lose them at this point. And then, before we know it, this person isn't applying the right behaviours, be it making enough calls, doing the back-end work, being negative with other team members, whatever it is, we have to re-establish and recalibrate a 'new' normal again. Having a 'bad egg' that gets away with discordant behaviour is sending a dreadful message to all other team members.

Ensure you set standards to rethink behaviours which are not ideal. Eg. are your team taking personal calls in the day? Maybe one was ok and now it's regularly? This conveys the message that it's ok for everyone to do it. Standards slip when we allow a one-off to become a habit. Reset expectations so that everyone is clear of what is needed in the engine room.



## **6. MIND YOUR LANGUAGE**

**Competitors:** Let's start with language referring to your competitors. Clients are after a sophisticated, intelligent sale where you are out for their best interests. If you are referring to the client's alternative solutions as 'competitors', and doing so in a negative derogatory tone, the message the client may pick up is that you care more about winning than obtaining the right solution for them.

**Win:** With your team, watch encouraging terms like 'wins' as opposed to both 'doing the right thing' and 'making a profit'. I see reps sell all sorts of stuff just to get their bosses' approval in striving for a 'win' despite it losing money with lack of higher purpose and reason in place. It's as though they have lost the point of why a business exists. Drive home some commercial awareness to help with this. It's about being financially stable and serving more people.

**Expensive:** Do not say it's more expensive. No-one in your business should think that it's expensive. After all, if your rep thinks it's expensive the client certainly will! Instead focus on the value.

**Issues:** Avoid saying to your team 'if you have any issues' or words like 'concerns, problems, worries' you are basically predicting there is going to be a problem, concern or worry. Instead swap for 'if you need any clarity' let me know.

**Difficult clients:** There is no such thing as a difficult client. Implying such is detrimental and may cause the team to unconsciously generate bad vibes towards them. If you would like to learn more about why clients spend and how they decide to buy, study our website on Motivation and Buyer Behaviour. Basically, no bad-mouthing of clients.

**Positive language:** Get the team 'helping' clients, discovering how we can help them further is a deeper, more intrinsic driver than 'selling at' someone. Not that selling is bad, it's just that 'helping' drives towards more meaningful and deeper conversations which end up, organically, and consequentially, in a sale that benefits both parties.





## **7. BE CALM**

Being calm around the team brings an air of control. The calmness means the team are able to better process what you are saying. Scattergun or knee-jerk reactions bring unrest. You don't want to be stressed yourself or get your team stressed. Stress does all sorts of bad things to our bodies and mind. It down regulates genes and brings on disease.

Stressed, you literally can't think straight on 'where did I put my keys'. This is because most of your cognitive decision making along with how you choose to behave, act and feel comes from the prefrontal cortex. This brain part also handles intellect, concentration and self-awareness, which all function hunky-dory until stress comes along.

Another part of your brain that overrides all cognitive thoughts and reactions when you experience intense emotions, is the amygdala. This is where your emotions are processed into instinctive reactions. I.e. freeze in terror when overcome with fear.

When you are stressed you may react by being cranky, depressed or anxious. The very fact it's an intense emotional state means the amygdala has been triggered causing every part of your being to become concentrated on the issue. All the constructive energy from the other brain parts, like your prefrontal cortex, are now drained so that the deepest, almost central part of your brain, the amygdala, is getting all the action. This leaves the rest of the brain performing poorly. Your prefrontal cortex – decision making, behaviour, intellect and concentrations – is now depleted of resources, basically it's running on empty. That's why your IQ drops in stressful situations.

Don't put such an emphasis on targets if the team get stressed, rather put your emphasis on building relationships and getting in front of new clients etc. Think about what has the best effect on their positive mental health and performance.

***Leadership is full of challenges: at its core is people skills. You may sometimes feel you are just putting out fires or running on the spot. A great team is due to a great leader. Nurture your own abilities and that of your team so that everyone is always evolving.***



## About Charmaine Keegan

Charmaine Keegan is on a one-woman mission to give sales the recognition it deserves.

*"I want people to stand out in a crowd and feel really pleased about their job title as a salesperson."*

*Why? Sales is a valuable profession!*

*As salespeople, we are consultants, and we have a really important job to do.*

*Our key focus is on understanding our client and providing solutions. Selling with authenticity and integrity supports our clients, solves their problems and makes their lives better.*

*Sales is a simple process, but being an effective salesperson takes strategy and skill.*

*I am passionate about selling, and empowering others to sell well."*

Charmaine Keegan is a Keynote Speaker and Founder of Smarter Selling - with a sales career spanning 30 years.

She has trained over 8000 sales professionals, empowering them with the confidence to embrace selling with integrity and authority, to deliver immediate revenue growth.

Her approach to sales involves five elements:

- Intent to help
- Clear Strategy and Process
- Exceptional Sales and Communication skills
- Personal Accountability
- Positive Mindset

Charmaine is fascinated by human psychology. She is a Certified Trainer in Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), Hypnotherapy and Timeline therapy. She has authored over 20 ebooks and is a sought-after panellist and keynote speaker.

Smarter Selling training programs set sales leaders up for success, helping them to develop high performing teams via simple to execute, contemporary and proven sales methodologies.

Renowned for being engaging, practical, interactive and fun, Smarter Selling programs are conducted face-to-face and online.

Training created by a sales expert for salespeople.

## **NEXT STEPS: BUILDING ON THESE** **SKILLS, WHERE TO FROM HERE?**

There's no doubt that the current crisis is taking an intense toll on some businesses. But it's equally true that others are thriving – their sales are doubling or even trebling compared to pre March.

Being able to quickly pivot in response to a changing environment will serve you well. The good news is once we have learnt a new skill, adapted and evolved, then learning more becomes easier. We continue to develop.

Be comfortable with the uncomfortable!

To learn more about how to do this from someone with 28+ years of experience as a successful high performance salesperson and international sales skill trainer, contact us.

Read more of our sales tips  
and strategies on [LinkedIn](#)  
plus our [Resources page](#) online

Sydney: 02 9188 5253  
Melbourne: 03 9088 3382  
[team@smarter-selling.com.au](mailto:team@smarter-selling.com.au)  
[smarter-selling.com.au](http://smarter-selling.com.au)

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