Create a ‘No Excuses’ Sales Environment
by Tony Cole, President & CEO, Anthony Cole Training Group

What is your company’s sales culture or environment? Can that question be answered quickly and articulated consistently across your organization? The foundation for creating a clearly defined sales environment begins with the leadership - how they set sales standards and then demonstrate, communicate and inspect accountability to those standards. What sales standards do you set and communicate? Are they extraordinary? If we followed you around for 30 days, what would we observe about your actions and interactions with your team? What would we discover about the personal accountability of each individual in your organization and about their standards as a sales team? Do your salespeople make excuses? Do they blame the economy, the competition, or the company for their failures? Do they complain about the lack of support, technology, training, or products and services?

Here’s the litmus test. When there is a failure to reach a stated goal, would the majority of your sales team state that the reason for failure is a result of something they personally failed to do or is it due to the market, the company or something outside their control? That first answer demonstrates a sales environment that has established extraordinary standards. We describe this type of sales environment as ‘no excuses, no rationalizations and no yeah buts’. There must be personal accountability at every level of the organization if your organization hopes to grow in a consistent and predictable fashion.

There are several components that contribute to your ability to set and attain extraordinary standards. The first component is commitment - your personal commitment as well as the commitment of your sales team. This involves the ability of each individual to take responsibility for success and failure as well as their commitment to the achievement of their personal goals.

Here are a few things that we know about commitment:

- It’s an inside–out job
- You can’t train it to make it happen
- You can’t teach it to make it happen
- You can’t demand it to make it happen
- You can demonstrate it
- You can tell people what it means to you
- You can decide to have a committed team

I’m sure you’ve heard the story of the pig and the chicken discussing who is more committed. As they look into the farm house window, the family is sitting down to breakfast to have bacon and eggs. And the pig says to the chicken, “That meal alone defines the difference between commitment and dedication.” We are not suggesting that your people are chickens or pigs, but we would ask you to think about how committed they are. Are they willing to do whatever it takes (assuming legal, moral and ethical standards) to reach their sales goals? What evidence is there to defend or support this claim of commitment?

These are very important questions for any sales leader to be able to answer. Even without people who are committed to success in selling, you will still get your product and services sold. What will not happen is consistent and predictable sales growth. You won’t be able to create or develop a sales group that is top of class. You won’t be able to get them to change or grow. Commitment to success in sales
means doing whatever it takes. So, are your people willing to do whatever it takes to be successful in sales? How do you know? The answer is to watch them.

Next, are your salespeople committed to your vision and mission? Are they executing the activities that are consistent with your vision and mission? Do they pursue opportunities that are consistent with your business strategy? Do they focus on the priorities that are consistent with what you have communicated? Or do you find that your sales force is focused on their individual achievement and they disregard the direction and focus of the company? This is true if you have to constantly fight battles over compliance to systems and processes. This is true if you are constantly in a battle with them in regards to the types of ‘deals’ they are bringing to the table. How critical is this? Without a team that is committed to your vision and mission, you will not achieve the growth goals for your sales team or company.

In summary, your sales culture will be defined by how you communicate your expectations and how you hold your people accountable to what they say they will do and how they perform. This is not micro managing. It is about demonstrating your own commitment to the end goal and inspecting your sales team’s commitment to the sales activities necessary to reach the goal. Setting and clearly communicating these standards will eliminate guess work. Make sure that you listen for excuses and make sure that they are no longer allowed by you or those whom you lead.

Remember, any reason that is given for a lack of performance other than a statement that begins with “I” is an excuse. Recognizing this is the first step to creating a ‘no excuses’ sales environment.

Tony Cole’s Bio

Tony Cole’s Sales Java blog

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