

How to Save a Struggling Sales Rep

Sales managers have all seen this: a new or experienced sales rep who's got everything it takes to be a top performer - maybe he or she even has been one - but the numbers just aren't there anymore. You're starting to wonder if maybe that new hire left the former job for a reason or perhaps the former sales star is just, well, past prime and ready to be put out to pasture. Should the struggling rep be let go?

Sometimes, the reasons for a recent or short-term slump are known or become plain once you've had a short talk with the struggling rep. It could be problems at home, a family crisis, or something similar that can be explained and can give reason to maybe give the rep a little slack until they get through it. Or perhaps it's something more work-related, like a loss of interest or a feeling of complacency on the job that just needs a little motivation sprinkled on it. Or maybe it's just that the rep is in a serious slump and is as confused as you are about why that's happening.

One solution many sales managers do not always consider is coaching. Sometimes a new perspective, new energy, or a few different ideas are all that the struggling rep needs to be a star.

Good coaching begins with an assessment of the sales rep and his or her abilities. A new hire may look great on paper and interview well, but is perhaps not quite fitting in with the corporate and sales room culture, so he isn't doing as well as he could be. Or maybe the former sales star has just lost her edge and needs the perspective and habit change an honest assessment can bring.

An assessment should begin with an attempt to get as deep into the sales mind of the individual as possible, looking at everything about their techniques and capabilities as well as their weaknesses, skills, attributes, and more. These are not all things that can be quantified on paper, but must be gauged and "felt" by the trainer or coach doing the assessment. The assessment should consider the salesperson's capabilities in prospecting, self-starting, teamwork, relationship building, and closing - at the very least.

Once the coach and the salesperson themselves have a good idea of where they are, it's time to compare those assessments with the current top performers in the company. Look at the way the struggling salesperson prospects, closes, etc. and compare that with those who are doing well and see if there are keys that can be learned. If possible, have one of those top performers mentor if you think it will help.

Once those required changes or updated ideas are found, train and develop them by working closely with the salesperson to reduce their weaknesses and emphasize their strengths.

With a little investment of time and effort, it's possible to take a struggling sales rep with promise and turn them around so they'll become a star. The investment is certainly worth it and far cheaper than the costs associated with firing, seeking out new talent, and training them for the job.