

C.H.A.M.P... a disciplined approach to effective leadership

Exceptional leaders understand the value of human relations and the distinction between leadership, management, supervision and training. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, they are able to apply these skills in appropriate doses and at appropriate times. The role of a sales manager is one of the most daunting of all within the business development enterprise. Caught between rightfully needy and demanding front line sales people and the requirements of executing on the strategies developed by upper management, they walk the fine line between; intermittently serving the role of nursemaid one moment, strategist the next, motivator and coach in one instance and collaborator, confidant and negotiator the next. It is expected that they will execute on all these roles flawlessly while maintaining focus on attaining ambitious revenue goals which they may or may not believe to be attainable.

What is it that great leaders do to avoid being swallowed up in these competing requirements, rendering them ineffective? They recognize that leadership boils down to their ability to maintain focus on those practice areas which yield the greatest gain: Coaching, Hiring, Assessing, Managing and Planning, an acronym which I have come to call **CHAMP**.

Great leaders are, above all, champions of the cause and champions of their people. Great leaders are able to rise above the minutia and sustain allocating 80% of their time to these five critical high gain areas. Let's look at the components of each of these practice areas in greater detail:

Coaching:

Current management practices require us to accomplish more with fewer human resources at our disposal. Effective managers are good at coaching. They are able to take a step back from the frenetic pace, sift through the tasks and find ways to continuously coach their people. Coaching is undoubtedly the highest order of human development available to managers. A great coach will turn an employee's mistakes or challenges into significant growth opportunities. Lesser managers see similar issues as management intervention or disciplinary opportunities.

Hiring:

Human Capital is undoubtedly your greatest corporate asset and great managers recognize this fact. The sad reality is that many managers spend more time selecting the right copier than hiring the right employee. In fact, most organizations have no process and virtually no training for managers in what is arguably the most important thing they do.

Managers do not invest enough focus into recruitment and interviewing. In reality hiring can be looked at as a distraction as they are consumed with urgent fire drills that inevitably pop up. **In most instances these urgent fire drills relate directly to the quality of the sales rep which they have hired in the first place!** The only way to really break out of this vicious circle is to invest the time in hiring great salespeople from the outset. Exceptional managers have learned to avoid six key "Hiring Horrors:"

- Hiring from a position of desperation
- Ill-defined selection criteria
- Superficial questioning techniques
- Too much reliance on the interview
- Bypassing the reference check
- Failure to validate using objective testing

Leaders realize that there is no time in their business career when they have more to gain (or lose) than when they are hiring someone. They adhere to stringent guidelines when selecting and evaluating candidates.

Assessing:

The importance of assessing and benchmarking their team is important to leaders. There is a need to know, in a very detailed way, the strengths and weaknesses of their team as a whole, as well as those of the specific individuals who comprise that team. Assessments allow them to benchmark and measure those specific skills and behaviors required to succeed within their work environment. It also allows them to create targeted training and coaching which will enhance individual behaviors. There are many subjective as well as objective testing tools which are designed to inspect competency in skills, knowledge and behaviors. Objective assessments are part of any great manager's toolkit.

Managing:

Corporate America is results driven, and expects more productivity from fewer and fewer resources. This causes management to focus on quantifiable end results. Many managers focus on the final result - quota attainment - and leave the daily blocking and tackling to their sales reps. Unfortunately this approach leaves a large gap between daily activity and an eventual sale, providing enormous pressure (but very little guidance) for the individual.

I agree that in the final analysis the real measure is the team's performance to their stated objective. A disconnect, however, occurs due to the seemingly loose connection between cause and effect, in this example, between activity and results derived from that activity.

A reps activities two weeks, two months or even two years previous will generally result in a sale today. By measuring results, we are measuring a latent result of a success or series of successes that are long past. Successful leaders have reverse engineered their goals (quotas) and have established metrics and activity standards which hold their people to clearly defined activities. Instead of measuring sales results, they monitor performance when it really counts, weeks or months preceding the order.

Planning:

While the majority of companies in corporate america engage in annual strategic planning, fewer than 20% of sales reps operate from a written strategic plan. Great leaders effectively close this gap. They make this connection by helping their people understand the importance of creating a plan. Furthermore, they help their people manage to that plan on a regular basis through inspecting and coaching them on their attainment to the metrics outlined in their plan. Ineffective managers get caught up in hysterical activity in an attempt to get a lot of "stuff" accomplished. The problem is that this activity lacks the purposeful activity that accompanies effective planning. To make matters worse, their employees will usually mimic the pace of their leader, and they too get caught in a frenetic pace. The most empowering action by a leader is to provide their people with a strong connection between their goals and daily tactics; a well-defined strategic plan, and then coach them regularly to attaining that plan.

A sound strategic plan allows an enterprise to avoid the opportunity cost of working on average or good when there are superior or better opportunities that should be demanding their time. So there are really two pieces to strategic planning. The first, building the plan is fairly straightforward. If you Google "strategic planning" you will receive 59,500,000 results, so finding a template which you can use should present no problem. The more problematic piece of strategic planning is execution. This is where most planning fails, as the leadership team fails to stay in front of the plan, and cascade that planning throughout the enterprise.

Time management is the most requested workshop which I conduct. As managers it is easy to get caught up in daily tasks if we do not have the discipline to say "no" to those demands that are not "mission critical." Leaders maintain a focus by spending 80% of their time and energy on the high gain activities. Their greatest strength is their ability to focus. They have a wonderful ability to say "no" to good opportunities. Why, because they say "yes" to BETTER opportunities.

Effective leaders have an uncanny ability to maintain focus and alignment. They are effective at living the mission and set the organization's pace through their strong example. The sad reality however, is that the majority of managers have not received adequate training or coaching and continue to spend 80% of their efforts on all but the high gain activity.



All Things Sales...

A life-long sales professional, I am passionate about enabling organizational change through leadership and coaching. As a sales leader, sales trainer and sales coach, I deliver blended learning experiences including sales and sales management training, leadership workshops executive coaching, and mastermind groups that serve as the foundation for any top performing company. Our commitment is to create lasting positive behavioral change for all companies with whom we work.