

# Mastering Management



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## The tricky business of sales management

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**S**ALES management is critical for a commercial organisation. It helps sales professionals achieve business objectives in an effective and efficient way. So, each organisation focuses on building dedicated and result-oriented sales teams.

However, it does not ensure success unless senior leadership manages the sales team in a well-planned manner, say management experts.

“The organisation may have excellent company vision, superb marketing plans, quality products, state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities, and ISO certification,” says AI Moqbul Ahmad, chief executive officer (CEO) of AimPlus, a leading management consulting firm in Bangladesh. “But these can only click if the sales team is managed well.”

Ahmad, who also worked for several multinational and national organisations like Social Marketing Company and ACI Ltd, says, “A company should emphasise sales team management by ‘keeping the family happy’ because many good sales people usually leave or are highly demotivated due to poor management.” Here, the term ‘family’ means the ‘sales teams’ of area managers. So, the senior manager should take initiatives to make the sales team happy as it will ensure dedicated, effective, result-oriented and long term service for the company, says Ahmad.

Muhammad Shamsun Noor, a trainer of Strategic Sales Consulting, a Canada-based consulting firm for sales and customer service, says, “The

need for selling a product has gone bigger. Manufacturers now want their products to be sold even faster. Not long ago, the focus was on the product, stitched to a set of features and benefits.”

So, the paradigm shift is on the customers. They now want to deal with salespeople who sell but provide a ‘solution’ as well, says Noor.

Hence, the company has to emphasise more on the customers, their needs and the solution. The salespeople need to be trained not just to sell but more decisively, demonstrate to work as ‘consultants’ to the clients, says Noor.

Noor, who is now in Dhaka, says, “To be a successful solution provider, the salespeople need to master the craftsmanship of all the necessary skills that are embedded in the selling process.”

Faiz Noor Elahee, general manager of Eon Group, a leading animal health company in Bangladesh, says, “Effective sales management is especially crucial for pharmaceutical companies because we can not promote the products directly to the consumers due to certain rules and regulations.”

The Eon Group does business in different segments, such as animal health, crop protection, aquaculture, food and consumer care, environmental health and information technology.

Elahee says, “We usually depend on doctors and chemists for sales. So, the sales team has to focus more on these peoples.”

There are around 15 million chemists who have licences to sell medicine and nearly 40,000 doctors have



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AI Moqbul Ahmad, chief executive officer of AimPlus, speaks to sales personnel at a training programme in Dhaka.

the authority to prescribe medicine directly or indirectly, Elahee says.

So, the sales teams of the pharmaceutical companies have to be more skillful to persuade these doctors and chemists by depicting the product ingredients, he adds.

For this, the company should motivate the sales team by training and appraising the good performers, says Elahee.

The chief executive of AimPlus, who has worked extensively in the area of sales and marketing, says, “If you do not have good area managers, you will not have good sales representatives. The reality is that good sales representatives can work anywhere, and will not work long term under ‘bad’ area managers.”

He also says senior management should include the sales representatives in setting sales target, with a lot of debate, as it creates a feeling of ownership among them that ultimately inspires them to achieve the target.

In managing sales through repre-

sentatives, area managers are responsible for developing their subordinates to their full potential through ‘on-the-job coaching’.

“Hands-on experience shows that within a very short time, a sales representative’s sales-call competence can be developed through on the job coaching,” says Ahmad.

The coaching process would take only 2 or 3 days and the subsequent practice by the representative and follow-up by the area manager, says Ahmad.

But, most business leaders or managers do not either bother about on-the-job coaching or they do not have enough idea about the coaching process.

Regular short training sessions at the area/base level can be conducted for training on product knowledge and selling skills. But before conducting effective on the job coaching, the area manager must attend formal training. This trainer must have the job experience so that s/he can demonstrate examples of his real life experience, says Ahmad.

Any ‘generic’ training in this aspect would definitely fail and the expenditure for the training will just be wasted.

The CEO of AimPlus also says, “Gaining commitment from customers in sales management is a very vital issue. For example, I recently received a mobile phone call from a renowned mobile company representative (from their customer service department number). He asked me a few questions to know if I am using their internet service through mobile phone. He stated some features of his package and said good-bye without asking for my commitment.”

This implies that the gentleman on the phone is either under-trained or he forgot or is not habituated to ask for the ‘commitment’ (what we call ‘closing’) to avail their service. So the telephone sales call ended in ‘no result’ for the phone company gentleman, says Ahmad.

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## How to guide sales teams

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**A**SHRAF Bin Taj, business director of ACI Consumer Brands, is working in the areas of marketing, advertising and media for the last 16 years. He joined ACI Ltd at the end of 2005 and is responsible for a large and diverse portfolio of well-known brands, such as ACI Aerosol, Savlon, ACI Mosquito Coil, ACI Pure Salt, Colgate, Nivea. He was responsible for culinary product marketing and headed the marketing communication and media functions for all the major brands for five years. In recent talks with The Daily Star, he shares his views on sales management.

*Why should a company focus on sales management issues?*

The result of all the effort behind a brand or a product becomes successful when end consumers get the product within their easy reach and the final sale is made in the market place. No matter how good a brand or a product is, if it is not available in the right distribution channel in the right quantities, then it will never reach the consumers, who ultimately decide the fate of a brand.

*How could a company motivate its sales team?*

There are various ways to motivate a sales team. To me, the first and foremost way is to give the sales team an achievable yet aggressive target. Target achievement is the biggest motivator that gives the team a taste of victory and a feeling of accomplishment. There can be sales incentives for individuals or the team, in both cash and kind. There are concepts like Achievers’ Club for consistent high performers, which give them special recognition in the organisation. Many companies also offer foreign trips to key team members. Above everything, a well defined career path that ensures growth of people at different leadership levels is highly motivating.

*What is the most crucial factor to achieving the sales target?*

First of all, communicating the SMART (specific, measurable, aggressive, achievable, realistic and time bound) objective is very important that is supported by appropriate sales and marketing promotional programmes. Let us assume that the demand of the brand is at a decent level. After that, the crucial factor is the capability of the sales team to map out the source of business volume by channels and by customers and ensuring flawless implementation of the

promotional programmes through its people. Leadership in the field towards objective achievement is the most crucial factor.

*Many people say, “If you don’t have a good area manager, you will not have good sales representative.” What is your take on this?*

I fully agree. One of the most important positions in a sales structure is the first line supervisor/area manager, who will provide the on ground leadership to the team to achieve the targets. Since sales management is about managing a fleet of people towards achieving a common goal, it is extremely important that the leader clearly knows the opportunities in the market, is aware of the tactics that need to be applied, can create an environment where team members follow instructions and guidelines without confusion, can empathise the problems or hurdles the sales representatives face and know how to overcome those. Once the first line supervisor can demonstrate that, the team can get a taste of success and the sales representatives tend to stay with the leader more. Nobody wants to work under a weak or poor leader.

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Ashraf Bin Taj

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