WHAT YOUR SALESPERSONS ARE AFRAID TO TELL YOU

A WHITE PAPER POWERED BY
It seems like most managers have forgotten the mentorship part of their jobs – if you listen to the voice of the sales rep. “He doesn’t seem like he wants to help me out,” a respondent said about his manager in SalesFuel’s survey of salespeople. “He is not around when I need him or he fails to see the importance of an issue I need his help to resolve.” Is this same thing being said about you or sales managers you know?

These are direct quotes from two of the 725 salespeople SalesFuel polled in January 2017. And it’s what sales representatives are thinking but aren’t telling their managers. Let’s not forget that sales managers are hired to provide leadership, guidance, feedback and support to sales teams. Managing is not only about updating spreadsheets and writing reports.

“He does not listen when I talk.”
A handful of recurring themes revealed what many sales reps find most frustrating about their managers. But what they crave might be surprising. They actually want more time with their managers — but productive, meaningful time. Bet no one saw that coming. 43% of surveyed salespeople only meet with their managers once a month or even less than that! “She is hard to get a hold of when needed,” a respondent said. “He overschedules his day so he is not readily available if needed,” another respondent relayed in the SalesFuel survey.

Because an Aberdeen Group survey found only one-third of salespeople meet or exceed their quotas, supervisors need to engage and coach them. Managers must build a culture of accountability and trusting relationships that good salespeople want to be a part of and that involves regular and frequent meetings with them. Developing employees helps attract and keep great employees, keeping them engaged. It helps build loyalty, and loyalty increases revenue.

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What comes next might sting a little. The respondents were brutally honest in this forum, and SalesFuel intends to share that honesty to make an impact and initiate change. Every single sales manager can overcome the behaviors outlined below. Every single manager can develop a better leading style and therefore develop a better team, which produces higher sales. But, every single manager must take a hard look in the mirror in order to do it.

What you need to focus on first is why your sellers are afraid to tell you what they’re really thinking. Mostly, it’s because you don’t listen and you’re never around to communicate with them. “My manager is hard to reach.” Ouch. “She is vague, doesn’t respond to emails.” Burn. “My manager doesn’t show up.” Boo. “He doesn’t listen when I talk.” Hiss. It comes down to respect. Your salespeople don’t feel respected by you, causing them to tell SalesFuel things like this: “He doesn’t consider my ideas for improving the way we do things.”

It’s simple. Start showing up – in all manners of the phrase. Set aside time to listen to each of your reps. Schedule time in your calendar to be available for office “pop-ins” and communicate this time slot to your team. And for Pete’s sake, take their calls, texts and reply to their emails – faster!
“She does not put enough confidence in me and recognize what I’m able to do,” another respondent noted in the survey. They want to be treated — and rewarded — fairly. And more often than not, that reward is quantified by advancement.

Yes yes yes, salespeople still want the money (41% put bonus programs — monetary rewards — at the top of the list for how to improve motivation), but the real reason they’re hitting those goals is to get in front of your face so you will promote them. 39% told SalesFuel that they need opportunity for advancement or they might leave. Another way to keep employees from leaving? 41% want the opportunity to earn paid time off.
“Sometimes other people get credit or extra praise when it is not deserved,” he shows favoritism toward some employees. Managers are creating culture whether they realize it or not. And the survey showed playing favorites is a common part of sales teams’ cultures. 69% of reps are unsure or flat out disagree that the culture / work environment at their company is a good fit for them.

**Work culture is important to attract and retain the best talent.** It defines the way employees interact with each other and how an organization functions. A great culture brings out the best in employees, making them more productive and improving the bottom line. When culture isn’t working, you have a problem. In fact, **35% have left a company because they didn’t like the company culture, purpose or values.** Don’t let anyone on your team say that you’re “not treating all employees fair and consistently” anymore!

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An unfortunate theme that’s pervasive in the survey’s open-ended question is **yelling**. Yes, multiple reps said, “the one thing my manager does that frustrates me the most ...” is **yelling**. This might seem obvious, but the data supports telling you: **Stop yelling**. It is not ok to yell at or around employees. Ever. Get it together, man. Do what you need to do to cool down when tempers or egos flare. Take a walk, sit in your car for 5 minutes, try some deep breaths.

The yelling is demoralizing the entire team. Because of the screaming, reps secretly hate their managers. This is part of the reason 27% of salespeople would NOT follow their managers to another job/company. Furthermore, SalesFuel’s survey found **31% of sellers changed jobs or departments within their companies because they were incompatible with their direct manager** or dissatisfied with their manager’s performance.

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Managers, please note: **Setting clear goals is not the same as providing feedback or praise.** Only 35% told SalesFuel their managers set realistic, obtainable and clearly defined goals. But, approximately 49% say their manager has coached them in ways that make a difference. And 60% say they are receiving constructive feedback.

What seems to be missing is understanding how to reach their goals. As one survey-taker put it, “He does not follow up on questions or concerns I have asked about.” A Gallup poll found **only 12% of U.S. employees strongly agree their managers help them set work priorities** – and these 12% are much happier in their work than the others. Well, that sounds simple enough.

Managers can elicit far better returns from their reps simply by **helping them set work priorities and/or telling them exactly what priorities to set to reach their goals.** This might require some very frank conversations, and a direct approach for some. But guess what? Sellers want that! A study respondent found it frustrating that her manager “does not communicate things to me directly.”

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Why is all this important? Why do sales managers need to change their attitudes just because their reps are whining about them anonymously? Because *employee turnover destroys profits.* Because the **high-achieving salesperson will leave the company because of her manager.** The survey revealed 39% of respondents actually left jobs because they didn’t like their direct managers or were unsatisfied with their managers’ performance.

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*Source: 2017 SalesFuel, Voice of the Sales Rep*

Now, how does a manager keep people who might move on? By **talking to them about their past jobs and what they need from their current jobs.** Of people who have left previous jobs of their own accord, only 22% said the current manager offers effective sales coaching. **Just 20% said their managers have meaningful discussions about their careers. And 20% said they receive personalized coaching.** Although 60% of sellers said they received praise within the past 2 weeks, that’s not the same as coaching and development. **21% are looking for learning opportunities, training or education.** So give it to them! If you don’t know how, track down some experts or find training sessions to offer them!

Also, **these folks would stay longer if they received more opportunities for advancement (32%).** Having an effective recruitment and evaluation process is critical to reducing turnover. Over 30% of these people left previous jobs because of lack of chance to advance or a poor match with the manager, work environment or co-workers. The numbers are similar for all employees and suggest retention could be improved by better screening before an employee is hired in terms of fit.
And if your reps do not work on commission, this may be yet another uncomfortable topic they don’t want to bring up with you. The SalesFuel survey reported **salaried salespeople are pretty much satisfied with their managers, but dissatisfied with compensation offerings**. Instituting a new compensation system might improve work output and loyalty. For employees who are compensated by salary only, no bonuses or commission – **35% would be willing to stay longer at the company if there was a compensation plan that rewarded sales more fairly**.

Then you have 42% who said it is fun to work in the current company. But it would be way more fun if there were financial incentives! **66% would like to see bonus programs (monetary rewards) to improve motivation**. Try asking the sales team what they would do differently with the compensation package. Then you’ll know exactly what motivates them and you’ll get some great suggestions. No one will be able to say this behind your back anymore: “She doesn’t listen to anyone else. She only listens to her own opinions.”

**Employee Motivators**

- **66%** Bonus Programs (monetary rewards)
- **33%** Public Recognition
- **16%** Company Branded Merch
One last thing: salespeople are afraid to ask their managers for better tools and systems. More than 1 in 4 (26%) said they’d be more successful if their company provided better sales tools and systems. Training and coaching are critical parts of development but like assessments, they’re frequently used as stop-gap measurements. Instead of “acting busy by calling for meetings,” try coaching reps on prospecting, account/territory plans, pipelines, deal strategies, weekly time blocking, and actual sales calls. Try “being in the field or on the phones helping them in customer situations,” David Brock, author of Sales Manager Survival Guide, recommended. “Your single highest priority is working directly with your people.”

“At least 50% of your time needs to be dedicated to working with them – coaching, teaching, collaborating, discovering – not telling.” Invest in tools to help manage coaching and training. While many managers think coaching is “spending time” every day with people – usually getting status updates and telling them what to do – it is not. Coaching improves the performance and capabilities of salespeople. Stop leaving them to “figure it out” themselves. An employee’s personal relationship with her manager is the key to engagement. Engaged employees are happier and more productive.

It all comes down to this: seeing the big picture. Managers who want to succeed will do it by developing successful sales teams. And that starts with taking accountability, listening, being available, (not yelling) and being responsive. Your sellers are begging for these actions from you. They’re just too afraid to tell you. But we’re not.
"He doesn't seem like he wants to help me out."

"She is not around when I need her or she fails to see the importance of an issue I need her help to resolve."

"She does not put enough confidence in me and recognize what I'm able to do."

"He doesn't listen when I talk."

"He does not follow up on questions or concerns I have asked about."

"Sometimes other people get credit or extra praise when it is not deserved, [he shows] favoritism toward some employees."

"[He gives] no positive feedback. Constantly negative. Gossipy."

"He overschedules his day so he is not readily available if needed."

"He is unable to coach me... since he does not have any experience in that position."

"[She] expects me to perform tasks without any training."

"She is vague, doesn't respond to emails."
Methodology

From December 29, 2016 to January 3, 2017, SalesFuel surveyed an online panel of 1,194 salespeople at companies with 10 employees or more in the United States. 725 fully completed the 2017 Voice of the Sales Rep survey. Respondents included: inside/internet sales representatives (41%), outside sales representatives (32%), new business development specialists (15%) and inbound/call center representatives (12%). They were asked about their experiences and attitudes about their positions, their direct managers, their companies, their motivation and their careers.

About SalesFuel®

SalesFuel provides more than 1,500 sales teams nationwide with “The Power to Sell Smarter” through its unique portfolio of sales tools, training and intelligence. This empowers sales teams to provide value-first to their accounts, stand out from their competition and attract a higher level of talent and clientele. Thought leadership is delivered free-of-charge through the firm’s many white papers and daily sales+management briefings at SalesFuel.com.

SalesFuel also produces the Media Sales Today e-publication, which is updated several times daily for media sales professionals across North America. SalesFuel is the creator of AdMall, the most powerful consultative sales intelligence database available for local and digital advertising. More than 3,000 media properties nationwide arm their sales staffs with AdMall including: Television, cable, newspaper, online, direct response, out-of-home, radio, cinema, local search, and magazine. Additional information on AdMall and a free trial for qualified media companies can be found at AdMall.com.

About TeamKeeper®

SalesFuel’s TeamKeeper is the ONLY data-driven platform for sales manager enablement. Similar to how sellers use CRMs to manage their accounts, the SaaS-based platform is used by managers to lead their salespeople – helping them discover, develop and engage quality sales people. You can find out more about TeamKeeper and request a demo at TeamKeeper.com.
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