

Maturity pays

Simon Cooper makes the case for the valuable, 'mature frontline sales force'



The younger age groups do not, as you might think, dominate the group of salespeople in non-sales management roles. A report on sales occupations by the Marketing and Sales Standard Setting Board found that 60 per cent of 'junior sales' positions are held by people over 35 years old, and a third of these are over 45.

This group of more mature frontline salespeople is large, and it is growing. The ratio of numbers in a sales team to sales manager continues to rise; salespeople are staying longer in frontline sales roles, preferring the work, lifestyle and income level to management or alternative roles.

These salespeople are 'rich in years', are also 'rich in experience', and are likely to be responsible for the highest proportion of revenue and most valuable customers. They will have demonstrated that they can perform well and companies need to continue to reap the benefits from this knowledgeable and valuable asset. Similarly, the older salesperson knows that just 'seeing out' the later years of their career is not appealing and is not an option as there is nowhere to hide in sales!

So, what efforts are needed to continue to motivate competent mature salespeople? The assumption is that sales managers wish to develop their salespeople year on year and not have them just repeating their first year of sales 15-20 times over. A hard 'machismo' culture, where salespeople are not allowed or afraid to admit that they don't know how to do something, will fail to motivate and develop the career-minded salesperson. The role of their manager is to create the culture where all salespeople can learn without fear or ridicule, where it's okay to say "I don't know."

If an organisation is going to be a place where the 'more mature frontline career salespeople' want to continue to work and grow, the right support is needed:

- Salespeople should have a personal development plan
- Specialist skills should be nurtured and kept up-to-date
- Professional and soft skills development should be endorsed by the company
- Regular training should be experienced by all.

More progressive sales managers are encouraging this important group to embrace advanced selling skills, relationship management and account development programmes. Great learning opportunities exist that, instead of segregating different abilities as in the past, bring together young and old to learn from each other and openly share their knowledge and experience.

*Simon Cooper is Director of Sales and Marketing Training at TACK International
Tel: 01494 766 633
e-mail: info@tack.co.uk www.tack.co.uk*

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