

Building a formidable sales team



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Early in my career I thought I would never want the responsibilities of becoming a sales manager. The stress from the activity and decisions I was required to make as a salesman seemed overwhelming. As I matured, those daily tasks became less challenging and I found myself ready for a larger platform. To my surprise, before I could ask, I was offered and accepted a job as a Zone Sales Manager covering the Southeastern quadrant of the US.

Almost immediately after I assumed my new managerial position, I found the job came with certain personnel issues. Specifically, two of my eight sales reps did not appear to be team players. One was prompt with his correspondence, but lacked communication skills. His response to the success of others was to boast of his own opportunities rather than offer his colleagues congratulations. Unfortunately, he also was not closing business. The second rep was aloof. He missed important meetings and did not pay attention to the details of the business. His itinerary never matched his actual travel plans.

In his book, **The Ideal Team Player: How to Recognize and Cultivate The Three Essential Virtues**, Patrick Lencioni, postulates that to succeed in

a work place one must be a team player. Businesses have the best advantage over their competitors when their leaders are able to identify and hire people who work cooperatively.

Lencioni describes three core traits that team players share:

Humble – Humble people are concerned about the requirements of those around them, as well as their own needs. They recognize the merits of others without hesitation and easily admit their own mistakes. Humble players prefer collaborative efforts and willingly take on lower-level work if it is for the good of the team. They also will offer and accept apologies graciously.

Lencioni explains that there are two types of people who impede the development of a humble environment—the arrogant and those who lack self-confidence. The arrogant try to force their will on others, while those who lack self-confidence hold back from expressing their ideas.

Hungry – Hungry people do more than the job requires. They look for opportunities outside of their area of responsibility and set goals centered on the team's mission. These people are self-motivated, constantly learning and contributing to the work effort.

There can be a downside to hunger. Lencioni cautions that overtly hungry people can become overly ambitious. Their identity can become locked to

their work effort, causing them to ignore other aspects of their life. This type of hunger is self-centered and not good for a team.

Smart – Lencioni's "smart" doesn't refer to intellectual proficiencies, but interpersonal skills. Smart people can generally read what others are feeling during meetings and conversations and understand their needs. Their attentive listening skills facilitate genuine interest in the lives of others. Smart people are aware of how their words and actions impact others and adjust their behavior and communication style to fit the nature of a conversation or relationship.

A manager needs to be aware of smart people who use their abilities to manipulate others to their will, however. You do not want them on your team.

As described above, two individuals among those that I inherited as a manager were not team players. One was more passionate about his personal business than that of the group. The second problematic rep, in addition to being non-attentive to our business, was still working for his previous employer — he was double-dipping. Both reps had to be terminated, which is a manager's most difficult job. As a neophyte in sales management at the time, diagnosing incompatibles was challenging and once two members were removed, it took a long time to rebuild strong team trust.

Fostering the positive sides of Lencioni's three core characteristics in your team members, and looking for them when hiring a sales rep, ensures both strong individual and team dynamics. "It's not one or two that makes the magic, but the combination of all three positive trait manifestations that makes your team sing," concludes Lencioni. 

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