

Grow

Great Salespeople in the New Year

Introduction: The Gift of Great Salespeople

One of the hardest things for companies in our industry is getting the most out of their salespeople. You don't have to look far to find a retailer whose sales team consists of the grizzled industry veteran (who's chock full of bad habits), the under-experienced youth (who's more interested in scrolling social media than serving customers), and the overwhelmed business owner (who's trying to hold everything together). While this doesn't describe every company, most suffer from some combination of the list above.

The reason that most companies in our industry find themselves in this position—struggling to find and retain good salespeople—is four-fold.

1. **They don't have a sales process.**
2. **They don't train their salespeople.**
3. **They don't offer salespeople a path to grow.**
4. **They don't hold salespeople accountable.**

BY TIM REED

As the new year begins, you can attack every single one of these problems and give yourself the gift of great salespeople who perform for your company for years to come.

Here's how you do it.

Step 1: Develop a Sales Process

When a company doesn't have a defined sales process, it's impossible to train salespeople—because there's no standard of how sales are done. As Zig Ziglar famously said, "If you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time." That's exactly what happens for most companies in our industry.

While developing a sales process takes work and commitment, you'll find that it simplifies and focuses your training like nothing you've ever done. Without a sales process, your sales team is like a group of explorers who have split up in the jungle—all trying to find their way

independently of each other. Sure, one may occasionally make it out, but most will remain lost. By outlining the steps in the customer journey from start to finish, you'll create a map that everyone in the company can follow.

For me, this became real a number of years ago when I was responsible for training new salespeople in our company. I was sick of reinventing the wheel every single time and creating the framework of a sales process was the obvious answer. That process looked like this:

- Step 1: Greet the Customer**
- Step 2: Understand Their Problem**
- Step 3: Advise a Solution**
- Step 4: Explain the Process**
- Step 5: Call to Action**
- Step 6: Pursue the Opportunity**
- Step 7: Show Gratitude**

As you think about your process, it may be different than this—and that's just fine. But it's worth sitting down and mapping out the steps that your sales team should follow from start to finish. Of course, you're welcome to use these steps if they're helpful. But no matter what, you should document your sales process so you have a foundation to build on.



Step 2: Create a Training Program for New Salespeople

Once you have a sales process in place, the next step is to create a training program to help new people in your company master it.

I would suggest an intensive program for the first month that a new team member is with your company that lines out the essentials of what you'd like them to learn. This may sound like a lot, but it's really not too bad. Simply separate the first four to five weeks into five-day blocks and outline what you would like to accomplish each week. From there, break it down into days and assign items to certain times of the day—so, all together, you'll be creating this for 20 days (if you'd like a four-week program) or 25 days (if you'd like a five-week program).

Here's an example of what Day 1 could look like:

- 9:00am: Company Tour and Introductions**
- 9:30am: Open Process and Close Process**
- 10:00am: Sales Process Overview**
- 11:00am: Showroom Tour**
- 12:00pm: Lunch**
- 12:30pm: Phone System Training**
- 1:00pm: Sales Process Training (Step 1: Greet the Customer)**
- 2:00pm: Key Fireplace Categories Training**
- 3:00pm: Online Education Modules**
- 5:00pm: Daily Summary and Wrap Up**

Now, I know it's intensive, but this is what's needed if you want new salespeople in your company to succeed.

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The beauty is that once you've outlined this one time, you never have to do it again. In fact, you'll find that you can assign certain days to different people in the company so it doesn't all fall on you—and every single time a salesperson goes through this, you'll find small modifications to add that make the training program better for the next person who goes through it.

After the first 30 days, create protected lanes for a salesperson to sell within. In my company, the first lane we opened up was for gas inserts. A new salesperson could sell gas inserts after 30 days—as long as the customer had a masonry chimney with a gas line already in the fireplace. I know that's extremely limited, but it was amazing how many of these jobs were out there when a salesperson was forced to focus on them. What was also amazing was that this limitation forced new salespeople to take the time to understand the customer's problem thoroughly because they knew they needed to bring someone else in if the situation was outside of their lane.

Most companies in our industry fail because they either open up every sales lane right away or lock them all down until each one has been mastered. Both of these are grievous mistakes that will cost you time, money, and salespeople—but they can be avoided by thoughtfully defining the lanes that salespeople at different stages of their development can sell within.

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Step 3: Grow Their Money and Their Skill Set

One of the reasons that good salespeople—or salespeople with the potential to be good—leave is because they don't have a path for growth.

I remember, years ago, having a conversation with my boss because I was about to get married and wanted to see if I could take on more responsibility to make more money for my new family. I'll never forget being told that what I made (which was \$20 an hour) was the most money that was possible in any part of our industry and there was no path for anyone to ever make more.

That was the moment I knew that I wouldn't stick with the company. It wasn't that they were ill-willed or evil—it was that there was no path for me to grow.

If you want salespeople to stick with your company, grow their pay as they grow their performance. There are all kinds of ways to do this—the simplest being a commission structure, but it doesn't have to be that necessarily. What's important is to give your salespeople agency in what they will make





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based on how they perform. My friend Brian Hogan once told me that every team member in your company needs three P's to succeed—purpose, pay, and a plan—and this is especially true for salespeople.

But it isn't just pay that has to grow—it's also their skill set. Great salespeople are made when their skills are developed and honed over time. And there's a simple rhythm I've found to do this: weekly sales practice, quarterly trainings, and yearly experiences.

Weekly sales practice is exactly what it sounds like—setting aside time each week to practice the craft. Here's how you do it: Write a number of customer scenarios down on small pieces of paper and put them in a bowl for people to draw out. Then, assign one person to be the salesperson and another to be the customer—and let them go while everyone else observes. After each practice session, go around as a group and affirm the things that went well while offering a couple of pieces of feedback on what could be improved—then repeat and do it again.

This simple practice will revolutionize the performance of your salespeople—both new and experienced—if you consistently commit to it over time.

Quarterly training events are more specific and

structured than weekly sales practice. I would advise making them three to four hours long and getting out of the office. For my team, there was a nice coffee shop near our showroom that had a private room we could rent. Wherever the venue, use this time to learn new skills together as a team. Examples of this could be bringing in one of your best sales reps to train you how to sell a new product, going through a digital workshop together (by Franklin Covey or Dave Ramsey), or learning how to use a new tool that will help your day-to-day workflow. The point is to do it together.

Again, simple rhythms like this solidify the skills that you want your team to learn.

Finally, offer a yearly experience to your team that shows them your commitment to their growth. Obvious examples would be the HPB-Expo or NCSG Convention, but there are also local association events that are more cost-effective if budget is an issue for your company. The point is, find a conference or training event somewhere and take your team to it. The experience of leaving your day-to-day work behind and traveling somewhere together (I recommend carpooling or taking the same flight if possible) will bond your team in ways that going to the office never would. I can remember the first time I sat in an education session at the HPBExpo and how formative it was. Carter Harkins and Taylor Hill of FutureNow Market-

ing absolutely rocked my world, and I'll never forget the inspiration I felt from the classes they taught all those years ago.

By making a yearly investment into your team, you'll find that it galvanizes them and inspires them—often much more than you know.

Step 4: Grace and Expectations

My friend Tim McDonald once told me that the key to parenting was to simultaneously set high expectations for your children *and* show-er them with grace when they fail to achieve them—and the same is true for salespeople.

Many businesses in our industry don't hold their salespeople accountable at all, and they get mediocre performance as a result. And for those who do, it's often all stick and no compassion, so salespeople get discouraged and don't stick around.

We want to offer them a path that sets an ex-pectation *and* helps them as they struggle to achieve it.

The expectation that has to be set is the sales goal. All salespeople—or sales teams—need a sales goal to go after. Going back to those initial classes from Carter and Taylor, they presented a study that performance increas-es by 14% simply by having a goal to go af-ter—regardless of what that goal is.

A sales team without a sales goal will floun-der. Why? Because without a goal, they don't know if they're winning. Put together a goal for each month of the year (bonus points if it

fluctuates with the seasonality of your business) and give it to your people to go after.

After you've set the standard of a sales goal, the next step is establishing a rhythm of grace with a monthly one-on-one.

Get together with your salespeople individually each month over coffee or a meal and ask them the following questions:

1. How are you doing with your job?
2. How am I doing for you as a boss?
3. What are you excited about?
4. Where can I help you achieve your goals?

While these questions have nothing to do with the sales goals for your company, they have ev-erything to do with the spirit of your people. By getting together intentionally each month and making an investment into them as people, you'll find that incredible things happen as a result. In these meetings, I've seen grown men break down in tears, learned about struggles with debt, and watched team members conquer major chal-lenges in their lives.

As you show your team that you are there for them—in season and out, regardless of their performance—you gain the credibility to speak truth into their lives and give them the help they need to achieve their goals.

I've never had to fire a salesperson for not hitting established goals—because the combination of expectations and grace inspires performance out of the right salespeople while revealing the wrong salespeople. In most cases, the wrong salespeople self-select out when they realize that they're actually going to be held account-able.

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be held accountable."**

By setting expectations and providing the grace needed to help your team during difficult times, you'll find that your salespeople are inspired to perform because they want to win—and they don't want to let you down.

Conclusion: Growing Great Salespeople

At the end of the day, growing great salespeople isn't an unknown mystery. Rather, it's like planting a garden. Sow a sales process, a training plan, an investment in their skill set, plus expectations and grace—and the garden will grow if you faithfully water it over time.

Because great salespeople are all around you. They're in your service department right now—waiting for a chance. They're retired

in your neighborhood—looking to put their sales skills back into use part-time. They're the little brother of your installation scheduler—wanting to start a real career.

People in our industry often repeat this common refrain: "I just can't find good people." But that's just not true. You *can* find good people—and turn them into great salespeople—if you create a place where they can grow.



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