The Art of MODERN SALES MANAGEMENT
Driving Performance in a Connected World

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The Art of Modern Sales Management

Driving Performance in a Connected World
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Tim is a manager working for a large farm implement manufacturer in the Midwest. While visiting one of their international partners in England, he conducted a joint sales call with the lead territory sales representative and three-time top sales club winner, Andrew.

Tim began the meeting by introducing himself and showcasing the latest and most innovative benefits of their products. Throughout the call, Tim and Andrew seemed very misaligned. Phillip, the purchaser at a major distributor, seemed disinterested and preoccupied. Fifteen minutes into the call, Phillip excused himself and requested that the meeting be rescheduled to a later date.
During the call debrief, Tim surmised that Phillip must have had a “personal situation” and that it was simply a bad day for him to meet.

- Does this scenario seem familiar?
- How could Tim and Andrew have made the most of this call?
- What elements should they have considered for a successful call?

When managing internationally, sales leaders need to be aware of cultural aspects that affect the sale and should prepare their sales reps accordingly. When doing business globally, do your homework to understand the environment you will be working in. Be aware of:

- cultural differences
- communication styles and preferences
- meeting etiquette
- team alignment.

In this particular case, Tim did not consider the differences between American and British cultures. He got down to business the same way he would have in his local environment. Had he done his homework, he would have understood that the English business environment includes proper introductions, elements of dry humor, personal small talk (without emotion), and discussion of customer concerns. For British customers, building rapport is valued and a sign of respect. By not following the proper introduction, Tim created an uncomfortable environment and disregarded his customer’s needs.

**Do Your Homework**

Proper cultural preparation is the key to success in any international business meeting. Sources of information about cultural differences include: a phone conference with the local HR representative or a member of the management community, the Internet, and books about cultural diversity. One book that I refer to frequently is *When Cultures Collide*, by Richard D. Lewis.
Before one of my trips to England I read the chapter about how the British interact in business meetings. I learned they take initial business meetings very seriously and begin on a last name basis. Soon after, jackets and ties come off and they use first names on second and third meetings. This helped me understand how to act during first, and subsequent, meetings with business partners. Although the British take business seriously they also value humor in a business interaction. Being prepared for dry and sarcastic humor really helped me to create a bond with our business partner. It was also useful with some of our staff and customers in Great Britain.

The book also shares thoughts and concrete tips on what behaviors to adopt when selling in other cultures. With the British, being sentimental or emotional has no place in a public or business environment. Talking too much is also often taken the wrong way. Taking sides and giving opinions is viewed as unprofessional.

Brits tend to simply look the other way, or go with another partner, instead of complaining or bringing forth their concerns in business situations. Therefore, you have to ask a lot of questions to get at the concerns and once you do, you must deal with them in an emotionless way.

In the opening example, if Tim had done proper research he could have avoided upsetting an important customer.

When preparing for any international business meeting, make sure you understand proper business introductions, what a particular culture values, and how to interact with sales subordinates. Involving the local leadership and representatives will increase enthusiasm and heighten the professionalism when facing customers.

**Connect With Team Members**

Engaged team members who are eager to participate are the most important element for global team success. To increase the effectiveness of a global team,
enable members to communicate—both informally with each other, and more formally during team meetings. Use whatever tools your organization has to create a shared virtual workspace—one with a regular pattern of communication (scheduled virtual meetings, informal sharing of various topics and best practices) to promote the exchange of cultural information and other team topics. Create a set of standards and rules for using this common workspace. It’s also important to set communication guidelines about what is acceptable to share and discuss.

Obviously one of the challenges for team meetings will be time zone differences. To overcome this obstacle, vary the schedules weekly or monthly to give everyone a turn to join at a reasonable time of day. Include the time zone on meeting invites to help avoid confusion.

A good practice is to document team meetings. Meeting minutes and follow-up communication should summarize the main points discussed, emphasize the decision points, outline the responsibilities moving forward, allow attendees to share additional comments, and verify understanding of the outcome of these meetings.

Make sure that language does not become a barrier to effective communication. If an official business language is used in your organization, be sure to follow the rules below.

**Business Language Rules**

- Make sure that language training is available to those who are non-native speakers.
- Promote the use of the official language at every possible occasion.
- Provide a list of officially used terminology to all team members.
- When conducting meetings or customer visits, be aware of your pronunciation and enunciation and make sure you are speaking clearly.
Get Aligned

To stay in sync with global team members, hold an alignment meeting each month and schedule face-to-face meetings whenever possible. Priorities of the monthly alignment meeting should include topics such as:

- local business priorities
- employee development status
- overall performance
- issues and concerns requiring support.

It's imperative that business priority alignment takes place on every conference call, meeting, or face-to-face interaction. Unclear objectives will create confusion and misalignment of focus. A global team can easily become disoriented and unmotivated if they get the sense that the organization is struggling to align priorities.

Commitment to the organizational priorities and goals will vary based on the individual perception of “What's in it for me?” It's important for the manager to communicate the value of the goals in a way that relates it to both the team's long-term vision and individual growth goals. If team members lack commitment they will focus their energy on areas that bring personal value.

A global team provides many benefits. Having access to team members 24 hours a day allows you to create a productive project environment and leverage a variety of experiences and skills for customer interactions. Requests for information at the end of a work day in Toronto can be forwarded to European counterparts and responded to by the start of the next working day.

Analyzing opportunities and isolating the right ones for the right audience is paramount to any global team. To do this, I usually hold a group session designed to identify the best practices and to eliminate the ineffective ones. To practice, we look at what works and we want to keep. We also look at what doesn't work that we want to either improve or stop.
Once opportunities have been prioritized and best practices identified, determine as a team how to implement the best course of action. Desired skills to achieve these best practices also need to be identified and training may need to be provided. This exercise allows you to build a library of behaviors and skills desired for your team. From this list, you need to determine how to best acquire the skills and habits. Team members benefit from this exercise by looking at their own work habits and skills and challenging themselves to limit the ineffective traits and adopt new ones that have been proven to work.

When planning training for team members, getting input from the team will not only provide a great product but will also provide instant buy-in and reduce any resistance to implementation. The team members will be the best catalysts to influence others to implement the solutions.

**Choosing Your Global Team**

Choosing global team members wisely is a must for a high-performing team. There are a number of factors that should be considered when choosing your team members. One key trait to look for is whether or not the personal values of team members align with the company’s values. Skills and performance can be coached and tracked, but values are lived and cannot be taught, when values are part of company culture it is paramount that these align. It’s also important that team members have a very high level of autonomy and the ability to work through issues. For example, remote workers can easily fall into an isolation syndrome, a pattern where people feel that they are working in a silo by themselves with little or no support. Allowing team members to fall into this pattern will create underperforming individuals and promote working toward one’s own initiatives and directions instead of the team goals. Other characteristics to look for in global team members are autonomy, drive, competitive nature, vision, resourcefulness, and the ability to perform with limited guidance and
supervision. Identifying these skills when hiring will improve success and limit the amount of work required to manage team members remotely. Using behavioral questioning—questions that ask candidates to describe how they have handled previous situations—is a great way to help you find the right global team members. Ask questions such as:

- What was your specific role in a successful business situation?
- How did you respond to a customer complaint?
- Please describe your behavior in the last big customer call.
- How did you handle your last customer objection?

Onboarding New Team Members

Onboarding new salespeople is crucial for any team—particularly for geographically dispersed sales team members. Setting the stage properly will provide direction and clarity of the expectations for the role. Formalizing the onboarding process will provide a way to monitor progress, outline desired behaviors, and create an action plan that will be agreed on by both team member and team leader.

Onboarding is the time to communicate the basics, such as parameters to live by, expectations of the role, company culture, team leader expectations, and legal and compliance rules.

In addition to providing yourself as a resource, a great onboarding practice is to assign a peer mentor to spend time with the new team member to help them get up to speed more quickly. If you are onboarding a new international team member and feel he may lack a bit of local support, assign someone who is local or as geographically close as possible. It is sometimes difficult for new team members to express concerns or even to share weakness with their team leader, so someone who has been around and knows how to get things done can relate to the struggles a new team member may feel.
During the onboarding process, sometimes new team members find themselves second-guessing their decision to join the organization. Provide them with clear and precise directions and communicate expectations and parameters. With a good onboarding process the time to performance will be reduced and productivity increased. As a manager, be available to manage that shift and their commitment to the organization. You may need to increase your support and be more available. As the new team member becomes more proficient, more knowledgeable of the organization and the customer base, and knows the resources available, you can start taking a bit more of a backseat. At this point, be more of a consulting resource, letting team members make decisions and venture out of the box now that they have a better idea of the organization and the parameters in place. Let them manage their business their own way while spot checking and building trust. Remember, team members who are fully onboard and performing well can become good mentors to others.

Ongoing Development

Whether you are working with high-potential or career salespeople or new team members, everyone needs a development plan. I use a contract of self-development with each team member. This is particularly important for salespeople, because gaining effectiveness can directly relate to accomplishing sales goals. We start with one, two, or three skills or behaviors to work on. In addition, we describe how that behavior will benefit the team or customer. It is important to understand why the skill or behavior is relevant, and for both parties to agree on what the manager will do and what the team member will do for the development plan. It is important for new team members to understand that you will be contacting them regularly to review their progress. Allow four weeks between reviews and book an hour or two to review the action steps taken on the plan. You are looking for evidence of actions and improvements. This might
be walking through action steps taken, or walking through a report to demonstrate understanding of report analysis. When you meet, review the contract and have a dialogue about progress on the development plan. This should be a living and breathing document. After skills on the plan have been achieved, your team member should choose other skills or areas for development.

You should assess the development level of team members in that skill or topic area every time a new topic is covered. Frequent follow up and reassessment of the desired behaviors is a must for efficient onboarding and successful performance. Recognition of achievement will also support the development of new team members. Keep motivation to perform high by challenging team members with new initiatives, new project work, or mentoring other team members.

I found that one of our salespeople needed help with closing and listening skills. We put together a plan and I assigned training modules around closing and up-selling. We did role plays over the phone, and at times I played hard ball in order to see how she would handle it. I also asked her to document five calls. The salesperson walked me through each customer call including her positive opening, how she applied listening to understand customer needs, how she asked for the order or further commitment, and how she closed the call. Once this sales rep mastered these elements of the call, we updated her development plan and added other skills to work on.

Managing Life in the Fast Lane

When managing internationally, you have to be very careful with how you manage your time. This is clearly not a 9-to-5 job because it spans several time zones. Consider this job like a project and plan your time accordingly. Allocate a certain amount of time for each sales opportunity, daily tasks, team meetings, and travel. Try to stay true to this allocation so you can have time for family, friends, and your health. Achieving a balance between work and your personal life is
extremely important. Too much work and not enough personal time will have a negative impact on your effectiveness as a manager.

**Building Cultural Acceptance**

David Livermore, of the Cultural Intelligence Center, developed some key characteristics of a culturally intelligent organization. While it was developed for an organization, the principles are valuable for a sales team as well.

- **Trust:** While trust is built intuitively between people with similar backgrounds, it takes consistent follow through and reliability to build trust in a multicultural setting.

- **Engagement:** When different perspectives are valued, people are more willing to speak up and offer ideas and opinions. Knowing what motivates people makes it easier to get their best work.

- **Influence:** Influence can happen with clients, and inside the organization with peers and even supervisors.

- ** Authenticity:** Encouraging people to be themselves, even while learning to adapt required behaviors, will require less energy and will be less draining.

- **Positive intent:** When we do something like answer a call in a movie, we know it is because it is important. When others do it, we assume they are being rude. Assuming the best of people, even those who are different from us, can stop us from making harsh judgments.

**Time Zones**

Another thing to understand and plan for is time zones. Managing across time zones adds complexity. Make sure you reach out using email versus phone calls during team members’ off hours. Schedule phone calls in advance so people are available and can answer your calls without interrupting their meetings or customer calls.
For example, if you are based out of Zurich and you manage people in the Americas and Asia, you are looking at both ends of the time spectrum. Time zones make it difficult to have discussions with both groups at the same time of day. If you have team members who don’t mind working outside regular work hours, you can find times early morning and late evening to talk to both. Be sure to alternate meeting times so the same group isn’t always meeting early or late. It is important to have everyone participate but you also need to be aware of their work schedules.

Priorities

Because there are always too many things to do and not enough time to do them all, I use the Eisenhower Matrix to categorize tasks and workload into four quadrants. Unless you are proactive and deliberate, you will find yourself playing catch up all the time. Here’s how I use it:

- For important and not urgent, allocate time to get these tasks completed soon or they will become urgent. (These are “B-Tasks.”)
- For items that are not important and are urgent, it is helpful if you can delegate these. (These are “C-Tasks.”)
- Unimportant and not urgent tasks I call “dump it,” or “tasks for dustbin.” Spend time on more important things.

Figure 6.1

![Eisenhower Matrix]

- Important
- Not Important
- Not Urgent
- Urgent

B-Tasks
A-Tasks
Tasks For Dustbin
C-Tasks
Email is another task that can take a lot of time. Allocate a certain time of day that you are effective and productive at completing emails. For me, it is the morning hours. If I have an hour or two early in the morning, I categorize my messages address the important ones first, and delegate tasks as necessary.

**Travel**

Managing globally requires a lot of travel. Schedule your trips in advance whenever possible. I typically plan a three- to four-month calendar and allocate family time in between trips. Planning a good quality family weekend is important. I get caught up on projects and emails during the week so I do not have to spend the family time on work.

**Availability**

Some countries work on Saturday or Sunday, so you may have to work on weekends. Plan for it. When you are not available, use an out of office notification to let people know that you are out. If you take time off, be sure to set up a key person others can contact when you are on holiday. Sometimes when you are not available, emergencies or urgent questions that need to be answered come up. Be sure your team is always supported by knowing when you are available and when you aren't. When you aren't available, make sure your team knows who they can contact to complete proposals and close business.

**Summing It Up**

Global management is exciting and there is always something new to learn. But as exciting as it is, it’s often very demanding and requires different skills and a different focus than managing a co-located team. You may go through the same
things—onboarding, developing skills, coaching, communicating—but the way you do these things is different because you are not all together in the same place. Managing across time zones, dealing with other cultures, and working with people that you don't see face-to-face on a regular basis can be challenging. To get a handle on these factors, do your homework. Find out about the different cultures you will be dealing with—read books and talk to people who are familiar with the cultures. Understand what time zones your team members are in and know what skills and talents each possess. Make opportunities for them to communicate with each other and with you.

Many people are competing for your time, all the time and at different times of the day and night. You need good management skills and the ability to prioritize and set boundaries. One priority should be making time for team members and supporting them in whatever they need to do their jobs. Another priority should be to yourself. Work to balance effectiveness with efficiency, team time with individual time, and management responsibility with leisure time. Achieving this balance can make your role as a manager of a global team both exciting and rewarding.

**Action Plan**

Questions for reflection:

- Do I manage people equitably, making sure their needs are met and they feel supported?
- Do I approach my work from a project perspective, proactively planning in order to spend my time on the right areas?
- Am I giving my family and loved ones the attention they deserve? Am I totally present when I am with them?
- Am I proactively planning my calendar in order to accomplish the most important things and drive business?
References


About the Author

Claude Chadillon has worked his way up from sales positions to sales leadership to director of global sales training and development with Hilti. He is responsible for the learning transfer of sales and leadership skills of 20,000 employees in more than 120 countries. He develops and delivers training around the world and lives the global trainer life. He was an APEX Best Portfolio Award of Excellence Winner in 2011.