12 Sales Process Management Best Practices of Top Sales Managers

INSIGHTSQUARED

SKALED

Build. Coach. Drive. Exceed.

Perfecting your sales process and perfecting the management and repeatability of that process leads to more deals and more revenue for your business.

Sales managers follow a number of different strategies and methods to achieve and exceed targets. We've narrowed it down to 12 Sales Process Management Best Practices of Top Sales Managers based on the wealth of engagement, process, and revenue data InsightSquared aggregates and the work Skaled has done with hundreds of companies to optimize their sales process.

The effective use of data and how to make it actionable are going to be significant components of a well-managed sales process, and they are also key when coaching your people, as you'll see in a few of the best practices shared.

If we're talking about sales process management, it also makes sense to break down these best practices into stages themselves that are repeatable, growth-oriented, and effective.

Build
Building a team dynamic and skills

Drive
Coaching reps to be top performers

Coach
Driving to better results using data

Exceed
Exceed targets and goals by continuous evolution

The four stages of Build, Coach, Drive, and Exceed aren't necessarily a linear path. Top sales managers are usually performing various best practices in all four of these stages at once.

However, categorizing these best practices into stages makes it easier for sales managers to understand the purpose of each and how they all work together to reach the ultimate goal: effective sales process management that allows you to hit and exceed targets.

Use these 12 best practices if you're looking to improve your process management methods and generate more revenue for your business.

12 Sales Process Management Best Practices of Top Sales Managers

Build

#1 Make sure the process is clearly defined and adopted across the team

#2 Make continuous learning a priority

#3 Make relationships just as important as the work

Drive

#7 Use data to identify team themes

#8 Use data to identify individual trends

#9 Use engagement as a key driver

Coach

#4 Balance between selling and leading

#5 Ground conversations in data and do your homework ahead of time

#6 Further develop strategic and account planning skills

Exceed

#10 Create a development plan for the team to work on key areas every quarter

#11 Create development plans for reps to work on key areas every quarter

#12 Invite and welcome feedback

Build

#1 Make sure the process is clearly defined and adopted across the team

The first best practice in effective sales process management is a clearly defined process or playbook. You may think this best practice should go without saying, but many team's processes aren't properly documented. Or they are documented, yet reps are following their individual processes and having different conversations.

It's hard to manage and make adjustments to how your team is qualifying, moving prospects down the funnel, and closing deals if everyone is doing something different.

A great sales manager knows a standardized process is a must but also knows that adoption and the evolution of the process are critical to build on as well.

Use technology to drive adoption through automating parts of the process and provide regular, real-time feedback to help reps navigate a dynamic sales environment without veering too far off of the path your organization has put in place.

Good sales managers know that a defined sales process is key to sales. Top sales managers know how to use technology to increase adoption and to provide regular feedback.

#2 Make continuous learning a priority

Your product, your industry, your buyers, and your buyers' industry are always evolving. Even if a salesperson has been with your company for years, it's essential to keep building on the knowledge of your products and how the needs of your buyers change.

Continuous learning to improve your reps' skills, whether strategic skills building or new technology, is important. Still, a regular cadence of training on your products and buyers can be even more important to keep your team from becoming stagnant, even for your top reps.

Develop a regular cadence for product and industry trends training for your team to ensure they're always up to speed on what's most important to your buyers.

#3 Make relationships just as important as the work

Behind every great sales manager and sales process is a great team. Trust is the foundation for building a great team, and that means building dynamic relationships that allow you to challenge each other.

If members of your team feel like they can't come to you and ask questions about decisions, it will be tough for them to grow or hear feedback. A manager who isn't trusted with their team's problems can't properly manage them, and a team who can't take feedback will never be manageable or coachable.

Sales is relationship building. That means building team, coach and coachee, relationships as well.

Coach

#4 Balance between selling and leading

There are two ways the balance tips. (1) Some sales leaders spend too much time in admin or managerial duties and don't spend enough time with their team in the trenches to understand the challenges they face and keep a finger on the pulse. (2) Other sales managers who were previously in sales roles may find it hard to get out of the selling or rescuer mindset.

The role of management and leadership is to make sure deals get closed and your team is on target, but more importantly to coach your reps how to grow and succeed without you.

Don't nurture dependency. Coach your reps to develop the skills they need to be successful in the long run. Be ok with letting them fail to learn.

#5 Ground conversations in data and do your homework ahead of time

Before meeting with your reps, listen to their calls, review pipeline, and check activity ups and downs ahead of time to have data-driven and coachable conversations. Conversation intelligence and machine learning tools highlight areas of focus and make gathering these insights easier and faster for managers to accomplish.

Many managers get to a meeting and start with, "Tell me what's going on." This isn't valuable to your reps, and it's not a valuable use of time when you have to spend half of the conversation getting up to speed versus solving important challenges.

Use technology to pull insights ahead of your 1:1s to have better, coachable conversations grounded in data.

#6 Further develop strategic and account planning skills

One of the most overlooked areas of sales process management is developing reps' strategy and account planning skills.

Have a monthly account strategy meeting and have your reps come with 3-4 accounts they're in conversations with or trying to break into. Start to teach them a framework of how to plan 3, 4, 5 steps ahead. It takes time, but continuing to develop their strategic thinking skills means your team will learn how to put together a proper account plan and then your role becomes overseeing and fine-tuning.

Developing your reps' strategic skills will help them understand and think about the sales process 3 to 5 steps ahead.

Drive

#7 Use data to identify team themes

Review your sales cycle and conversions by stage in detail to identify themes around your team's strengths and weaknesses in the sales process. What does this data say? Are there consistent areas where deals are going long, not converting at certain percentages, or at different stages?

Regular review of your team's sales cycle, average age in stages, and conversion percentage by stage allows you to identify areas of optimization while your team focuses on selling.

It's up to you to review and interpret the data coming in to continuously improve on the process and identify areas of opportunity.

Regularly review sales cycle data by stage to identify common themes and specific areas of improvement.

#8 Use data to identify individual trends

Along the same vein as using data to identify team strengths and weaknesses, individual reps will be stronger at certain stages of the sales process over others.

Look at the data on an individual level to identify average sales cycle length by rep, stage length by rep, and conversion percentage by stage by rep.

You can use this information to coach reps on their specific areas of weakness while also identifying what your top performers are doing and replicate certain positioning or actions they are taking across the team.

Use the same data sets from identifying themes among the team to identify trends in individuals to optimize length and conversions in the sales process by rep.

#9 Use engagement as a key driver

Engagement activity is also a great place to find and diagnose why certain deals get stalled or why stages take longer and conversions are low.

Once you've used data to identify areas of opportunity, you can use it to identify solutions. Use stats such as number of and time between calls and emails, social interactions, decision makers involved, canceled meetings, time between the next meeting, etc,. to pinpoint where deals start to veer off.

Compare high-performing reps to lower-performing reps. Are there small to medium tweaks that can be made by looking at engagements that will optimize the process across your team or department for better results?

One data point isn't worth much but put together a pattern, and you'll be able to drive change.

Exceed

#10 Create a development plan for the team to work on key areas every quarter

To continue optimizing the sales process, build a development plan for your team to work on specific areas on a quarterly basis. If you're just starting this process, this could look like the quarterly plan you put into place after identifying the team's initial common themes and weaknesses.

Eventually, quarterly development plans will start to fall in line with the continuous learning cadences you've put in place to ensure you're continually optimizing the process to fit the evolution of your products and buyers.

Don't try to do everything in a quarter. Start with the most impactful changes you can make first to create an avalanche effect as you make smaller changes the next quarter and the next without overwhelming yourself or your team.

#11 Create development plans for reps to work on key areas every quarter

You may have started to notice a theme here. Everything you do on a team level will almost always need to trickle down to the individual level.

Develop plans with individual reps as well to work on where they need the most support and coaching within each step of the sales process. Be specific and make sure these plans are actionable to ensure reps can follow through.

Individual reps could be great in areas the team as a whole needs improvement and vice versa. Team goals and improvements are important, but individual goals and improvements are where you develop your team of superstars.

#12 Invite and welcome feedback

Top sales managers invite feedback and create a safe place for their reps to provide it. To exceed expectations and goals as a team, managers and reps have to be able to challenge each other in a respectful and comfortable environment.

As a manager, invite your reps to tell you where you can be better, what they need from you, and if you could be doing anything differently to support them further or understand their day-to-day challenges.

These conversations don't have to be awkward or formal. Depending on your team's dynamic, sometimes the safest place to do this is outside your everyday environment, such as over a coffee or a virtual coffee where the only purpose is to invite feedback.

Manage your reps and pipeline with ease.

Learn more at InsightSquared.com

ABOUT INSIGHTSQUARED

InsightSquared empowers revenue professionals to make better decisions by equipping them with actionable, real-time intelligence that drives predictable growth. B2B organizations worldwide rely on the company's revenue intelligence platform to build stronger, healthier pipelines, improve conversion rates, target rep coaching, boost forecast accuracy and significantly increase competitive win rates. For more information, visit www.insightsquared.com.

INSIGHTSQUARED

ABOUT SKALED

Skaled is a top-rated sales and management consulting company offering sales process, strategy, operations, and enablement services. We bring strategic and tactical talent to every engagement, driven by results and 250,000+ hours of sales leadership experience. For more information, contact us at www.skaled.com.

SKALED