

CHAPTER

1

# Gnawing Your Way Out of the Sales Management Trap

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A paradox is a statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense yet is true. In *13 Fatal Errors Managers Make and How to Avoid Them*, Steven W. Brown describes the paradox of management: “You get paid for doing *less* of what you got promoted for doing *more* of.” Top-producing salespeople who become sales managers often find themselves doing two jobs, their old one and their new one. The boss announces your promotion by saying something like this:

“Congratulations, you’re the new sales manager. Of course, we want you to maintain your accounts until you’ve developed a couple of people to take them over.”

That’s how the *sales management trap* is sprung. You got promoted for being a good salesperson. But now you you get paid for doing less of what you got promoted for doing more of. It is next to impossible to find the time to develop salespeople to replace the irreplaceable *you* while you are still doing the job from which you were just promoted. And even if you manage to avoid doing your (prior) full-time sales job, you can quickly get trapped in the minutiae of sales management. These Stage 2 sales management tasks rob you of focus and time; they keep you busy, and send you home tired.

You walk in the front door and the person you love greets you affectionately.

“Hi, honey, how was your day?”

“Busy.”

“Oh, so you got a lot done?”

“No, I didn’t get anything done. I put out one fire after another.”

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Sound familiar?

Let's look at why this happens in case after case. There are four phases of learning any skill (bear with me, even if you've seen this model before). Let's look at how you learned to sell, for example. You started way back as a **Phase 1—Unconscious Incompetent** individual. At this phase, you don't know that you don't know. You're new to the job of sales. You can't imagine that it could be that hard. You're ready to go out and start making calls. It's great to be employed and starting a new career. Then, you run smack dab into Phase 2.

**Phase 2—Conscious Incompetence.** You know you don't know. Salespeople in this phase are hit with the complexity of the sales job. You are starting to hear objections and field complaints from customers, and are becoming aware that you don't know enough to succeed. The competition is fierce, and the customers are tough. How do you build relationships with people who won't take your calls? How can you sell your product without heavy discounting? You begin to wonder if you should join the military; it's got to be easier than this. Not every salesperson makes it through Phase 2, but those who do enter Phase 3, which is a very nice place to hang out.

**Phase 3—Conscious Competence.** This is the point in your sales career when you *know* that you know what you're doing. After a few years and hundreds of meetings, you are fully aware of what to expect. You're experienced, glib, and confident. You have a repeatable sales process that you have honed over the years. You have customers who buy from you more or less habitually, and you have been around long enough to have developed a network. They return your calls and refer you to their peers. Your career is on track, which leads you into the last phase.

**Phase 4—Unconscious Competence.** In this phase, you actually *forget* you know and just do it. You're operating on autopilot. You don't have to think about everything. The job is familiar and as natural to you as breathing. You are selling up a storm, just like I was. And the people in the corner offices have you on their radar for a promotion.

And that, my friend, is just about the time that your boss brings you the good news. You've been promoted!

If you accept that promotion, you will be a Phase 1 Sales Manager. You have now gone from a Phase 4 salesperson to a new manager who once again doesn't know how much he doesn't know. That's because you can't start a new job that requires a completely different skill set from the job you have been doing so well without going back through the phases of learning that will guide you through the new facets of sales *management*.

Here's the real rub. As the new sales manager, you have forgotten what you know about selling. You are skipping steps that a brand new person cannot skip. You take shortcuts because you can. But you may be managing salespeople who don't know they don't know. This is why developing salespeople can be so frustrating. Doesn't it sound fun?

Certainly not. In fact, it's not fun at all. But it is, of course, necessary. And that is why I am going to guide you through this process—and show you how to succeed at sales management more quickly than you would have if you weren't reading this book.

That's all; but that's plenty.

Jeff Sleete is the vice president of marketing for Sinclair Broadcasting. He describes the patience it takes to manage new people: "You can't get frustrated with people who don't know. You can never let that [get] old to you. They are going to have [the] same problems that the last person had, but you

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can't let that get old. They are going to fall down and make mistakes. You can't be irritated with them unless you want to crush their egos."

You don't want to crush egos or make people afraid to raise their hands and ask for help. So, acknowledge the fact that you will have to guide and coach new salespeople through all four phases of their development. Your key objective as a sales manager is to get sales results through others. It involves planning, staffing, training, leading, directing, and disciplining your salespeople. It means holding them accountable to achieve the results your company needs. As their boss, you have the most immediate and profound impact on their success and failure. But many sales managers have trouble finding enough time to do that developmental *people* stuff. They get trapped in the minutiae of their jobs. And trust me—there is plenty of minutiae.

This is why I've created the Sales Management Trap—a useful model you can use to isolate the tasks and duties that are mission critical from those that are not. (See Figure 1.1.) I call it a *trap* because new sales managers often get stuck in an endless cycle of Stage 1 and Stage 2 activities. These tasks eat up so much of their days that the sales manager doesn't spend enough time in Stage 3 tasks. For that reason, much of this book will focus on Stage 3 tasks—because the people side of the business is where the fun and freedom come in. Once you have a team of people who can sell (almost) as well as you could, you will end up hitting your numbers and spend more time celebrating success than putting out fires.

This book will move you from captivity to freedom.

Don't get me wrong, dealing with Stage 1 and 2 tasks are neither inherently bad nor inherently good. And sometimes they are urgent and necessary. However, when sales managers don't spend adequate time doing Stage 3 tasks, they don't

| Stage 1  | Stage 2  | Stage 3  | Stage 4   |
|--|--|--|---|
| <b>Nonmanagement Duties</b>  | <b>Other Management Tasks</b>  | <b>Human Resource Development</b>  | <b>Strategic Market Planning</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Maintain status as top biller<br><input type="checkbox"/> Handle own account list<br><input type="checkbox"/> Handle regional accounts<br><input type="checkbox"/> Handle national accounts | <input type="checkbox"/> Sales support<br><input type="checkbox"/> Account list management<br><input type="checkbox"/> Monitor sales<br><input type="checkbox"/> Conduct sales meetings<br><input type="checkbox"/> Firefighting<br><input type="checkbox"/> Handle complaints<br><input type="checkbox"/> Communicate with management<br><input type="checkbox"/> Sales force compensation<br><input type="checkbox"/> Inventory management | <input type="checkbox"/> Staffing<br><input type="checkbox"/> Training<br><input type="checkbox"/> Coaching/counseling<br><input type="checkbox"/> Developing salespeople<br><input type="checkbox"/> Motivation<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Communicating<br><input type="checkbox"/> Mentoring<br><input type="checkbox"/> Recruiting | <input type="checkbox"/> Strategic planning<br><input type="checkbox"/> Market analysis<br><input type="checkbox"/> Customer analysis<br><input type="checkbox"/> Competitive analysis<br><input type="checkbox"/> Cost analysis<br><input type="checkbox"/> Profit management<br><input type="checkbox"/> Forecast sales<br><input type="checkbox"/> Prepare budget<br><input type="checkbox"/> Set objectives |

**Figure 1.1 The Sales Management Trap**

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multiply themselves and achieve results through others to the extent that they could.

Berry Plastic's Cliff Albert took one look at The Sales Management Trap and made the following comment:

When you don't see success in the field, you are very quick to jump in and get your hands dirty—to the point where you're doing the lower level tasks that you've hired other folks to complete. You want to bypass the rep and call the customer yourself to find out where in the process the sale is. You've got a \$2.5 million opportunity and it's sitting there staring at you while your sales guy is telling you that it's moving along. You want to call the customer and find out precisely, "Where is this project?" At Level 3, you're really coaching your team to understand that this project is not moving. Unless you resurrect it, it has flat lined—and you might as well move on to something else because you've exhausted every bit of life that's left in it.

Use The Sales Management Trap to see exactly where you're spending your sales management time and effort. When you are operating in Stage 1, you are a salesperson. When you are operating in Stage 2, you are managing—and while these tasks may be important, they don't help you grow as a manager. You've been putting out fires and handling complaints for years. Running a sales meeting to discuss pipeline progress and next month's special program is not the same as running one that's designed to develop your team's sales skills. Preparing budgets is a necessary evil, while coaching people is the surest way to *make* these budgets.

Even executives can get mired in minutiae: According to Matrix Fitness' Kent Stevens, Senior VP of Marketing:

This is such a fast game. Every day goes by so quickly. I am not spending enough time sitting in a quiet room to gather my

thoughts about the big picture, asking myself what's going on, and really working on strategy. A lot of the job is reactive. I need to delegate the minutiae and spend more time leading the strategy on how we are going to continue growing this. I can get a call from a territory manager about a pricing issue or field a customer complaint about a shipping issue or incomplete order. Bigger issue items to me are things like dissecting our industry by account, by channel, even by product. I have to answer questions like, How can we sell more crank cycles? How can we develop a [more noticeable] presence in the 'active aging' market?

One of my weaknesses is that I have always been able to handle a lot of tasks. I need to better learn how to delegate the small stuff, and rid myself of the notion that I always need to be involved in every project and process, or that I always want to keep my e-mail box clean. We recently had back to back trade shows, which lead to countless e-mails piling up way above my comfort level. I realized that when I took a couple of days on the weekend to clear my inbox, I could delete the older ones quickly when I got to them—because they all involved matters that had taken care of themselves without my involvement. It helped me see that I don't always have to chime in on every situation; when I don't, people just do their jobs.

Like so many before him, brand new sales manager Garfield Ogilvie spent his early sales management career trapped doing Stage 1 and 2 tasks. Now a vice president of sales for Clear Channel Outdoor in Dallas, Texas, he was promoted from within to his first sales management post at a radio station in Timmons, Ontario. According to Ogilvie, "In the early going, I had to learn that my role was not to make the sales. It was to teach others how to do it. I had three salespeople in my first sales management job—and I was generating 60 to 70 percent of the revenue. Essentially, I had two people servicing the

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accounts so I could go out and make it rain someplace else. In short—I was doing their jobs for them.”

In fact, Ogilvie didn't get out of the Sales Management Trap until he took a job in Toronto:

[There] I had a number of salespeople dispersed over a number of markets. I started to get away from making the sales to taking a more supervisory role—simply due to physical distance. Then, when I jumped back to a sales management job in another market and had a staff of 10, I realized that I had transitioned.

I had been promoted from within in the first situation. Because of this, I hired people to take care of accounts that I had nurtured and couldn't cut the ties. But I didn't have the personal history with the customers in the regional sales management job in Toronto that I previously had. So I made the transition and became more of a leader-manager. I went into that market without prior sales history. I went in as a manager; I didn't start as a salesperson. So I didn't have to get rid of existing relationships.

Without a sales history, I could build relationships on a sales management perspective. They weren't based on having dealt with an account list of 25 businesses that I knew intimately from selling and servicing them exclusively for a number of years. I met people in the new situation as a manager—so the dynamics of my role and relationships with customers were different. For me, it really required that physical location to make the transition.

Note that Ogilvie didn't make the full transition until he took a new sales management job. And of course, that is always an option. Ogilvie got stuck in Stage 1—generating 70 percent of the revenue. He didn't have a clear picture of what “good sales management” looks like. When he moved to Toronto, he was hired as a sales manager and not promoted

from within. Mind you, it is possible to transition to higher level sales management tasks without resigning your current position even if you were promoted from within. It's not easier, but it is possible.

Ken Greenwood and I worked together for seven years conducting a quarterly Leadership Institute for high-level broadcast executives. Ken puts it in much the same way that Ogilvie does:

It is more difficult when you are promoted to sales manager from within—since you're put in charge of the group of which you were once a member. It's easier to come in from the outside, begin to lead that group, and make the necessary adjustments—because there is less history involved. When you've been a playing member of the team, you know a lot of its members' shortcomings and frailties. But you may never have thought about their strengths. You only have half a view of the group of people you're now managing.

And it's hard because you're new to management, too.

Ogilvie's first position in sales management was difficult because he was trying to do both his old and his new job.

Successful sales management careers are built on Stage 3—or Human Resource Development—activities. Nothing you've done up until this point in your sales career has prepared you to excel at these skills. Once you master them, you're well on your way to becoming a successful sales manager.

Focusing and spending time in Stage 3 Sales Management Tasks is where you make your career. Getting stuck in Stage 1 and 2 makes your life a living hell of constant firefighting. Stage 3 sales management tasks allow you to multiply yourself and your expertise through others. Otherwise, you will spend your time doing your salespeople's jobs for them and constantly cleaning up their messes.

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The number one threat to your career as a sales manager occurs when you diminish your impact by failing to develop your team to be at *least* as good as you were when you were simply selling.

The *secret* of sales management success is to get so good at Stage 3 and 4 tasks that you don't have to spend huge amounts of time on Stage 1 and Stage 2 tasks. You generate all of your leverage as a manager at these higher levels. These are the management responsibilities that lead to big sales increases.

In other words: **You will have better salespeople when you become a better sales manager.**

A salesperson approached me once during a seminar break and said, "Everything you're saying makes sense, Chris—except I've got a terrible account list."

"Then you're probably not a very good salesperson," I said.

"What do you mean?" he replied, somewhat offended.

"If you were a better salesperson, you would have been able to turn some of those terrible prospects into good customers. If you were a great salesperson, your management would have entrusted better customers to your care."

It is easy for salespeople to blame their lack of production on management, the competition or the situation, rather than take a hard look at their own shortcomings in knowledge, skills, and attitude. The same goes for sales managers. You can complain about your salespeople, but when you become a better boss you have better people. It never fails.

Sales and sales management are two completely different jobs that require two completely different mental approaches. That's why the transition is difficult for many people to make—and for some, it never occurs.

In fact, some of the characteristics that made you a great salesperson and got you promoted to sales manager will actually work *against* you as a sales manager. The next chart looks at just eight traits. I cut this out of a magazine many years ago, have referred to it often, and have even added my own embellishments over the years.

| Salesperson                                  | Sales Manager   |
|--|---|
| 1. Drives self                               | Finds out what drives his team and uses that                      |
| 2. Feels a constant sense of urgency to sell | Practices patience and uses pressure sparingly                    |
| 3. Wants and gets recognition                | Gives recognition and often gets very little in return            |
| 4. Lone Ranger (self-reliant)                | Relies on team  |
| 5. Builds customer relationships and loyalty | Builds relationships with team and fosters loyalty to the company |
| 6. Perseveres                                | Cuts losses quickly   |
| 7. Nonconformist and freelancer              | Sets standards (works by the book)                                |
| 8. Doer                                      | Organizer/strategist/coach/facilitator                            |

This is a very tough transition to make, and not every new sales manager makes it.

Because, as the aforementioned paradox states, you are paid to do less of what you were promoted for doing more of. Because you are already good at selling and your natural tendency is to gravitate back toward what you are good at. While Stage 2 sales management tasks are necessary, they have a tendency to consume so much time that you don't develop your people. And employees who aren't coached and developed are great at starting fires—leaving you to put them out.

And you're trapped.

And that's where this book comes in. I focus on the sales management task and behaviors that will get you out of the Sales Management Trap and bring more meaning and satisfaction to the job.

Here are a five ways to plot your escape from Stage 1 and 2 sales management tasks to the higher level and higher leverage ones:

### **Escape Mechanism 1: Plan Higher Level Tasks First**

Plan your week by scheduling Stage 3 tasks first, and setting aside time to coach and train your people. Talk to your boss about one or two items in Stages 3 and 4, and make these activities a priority. There will be even more fires to fight if you don't make time to coach and develop your salespeople.

### **Escape Mechanism 2: Quit Fighting Fires You Didn't Start**

When complications do arise, don't immediately jump in to save the day for your salespeople. Instead, encourage your employees to come up with a game plan for solving their own problems. Then, let them execute the plan. This teaches your salespeople how to prevent and put out their own fires in the future, while freeing up more time for you to complete Stage 3 and 4 tasks. Yes, I know you can fix it for them. But doing so teaches them to bring you more problems to solve and do even more of their jobs for them. (See "Who's Managing Whom?")

### **Escape Mechanism 3: Get On the Same Page as Your Boss**

Your boss needs to be clear about what's expected of you. Does your boss see the importance of developing the sales team while achieving this quarter's sales results? Or is hitting the number the only thing that matters? Does the boss expect you to be the top producer and the sales manager? Does the boss plan to coach you through your transition or are you on your own? Has the boss done your job before so that you can tap into some tribal wisdom? Are there things on the sales management trap form that the boss wants you doing more of, less of, or none of? I'm guessing your boss wants you to do everything on the list. What you want to do is manage expectations and find out which five to seven things are most important to him.

After all, it is impossible to meet expectations if you don't know what they are. The Sales Management Trap is a mechanism to help you have a very focused conversation that answers the question, "What's my job? And how am I doing at it?"

And that might be a good thing to know, don't you think?

### **Escape Mechanism 4: Don't Get Too Attached to Your Desk**

Get out into the field with your salespeople. You'll be able to coach and develop them better once you've observed them in action. Before a critical customer meetings, go over the salesperson's pre-meeting plan; then review the meeting based on the plan and the results. *This* is what coaching is all about. Don't be tempted to let them wing it and then bail them out—or worse, chew them out in the car after the meeting. I have always found it better to coach before the call so I can

influence the outcome rather than do a *post mortem* on everything that went wrong.

## Escape Mechanism 5: Cultivate the Right Relationships

Understand the following major working relationships for the salespeople and sales managers. Salespeople succeed by spending time with these people in this order: (1) Customers; (2) Managers; (3) Colleagues. Sales *managers*, on the other hand, succeed by spending time with these people in this order: (1) Subordinates; (2) Superiors; (3) Customers; (4) Colleagues.

### Who's Managing Whom?

Believe it or not, many of your salespeople will come to you and ask you to do their jobs for them. That's a trap.

Jim Lobaito—founder and president of The Performance Group in Des Moines, Iowa—describes how he gnawed his way out of the Sales Management Trap and made the transition without having to change locations:

I learned the hard way that there is a difference between generating revenue—what a salesperson does—and driving revenue—a sales manager's responsibility. I vividly remember the exact moment when I made the transition from a salesperson who managed people to a sales manager. It was 5:05 P.M., and a salesperson stopped by my office and said, "Now don't forget, you said you would get this done for me tomorrow." She threw it on my desk, and I replied, "Of course, yes."

She proceeded out the door. [All of a sudden, it was] seven o'clock at night, and I looked up to realize that I was the only person left in the building that night—the only one worried about whether or not we were going to hit our revenue mark. At that point, I said, "That's it. I will no longer be the only

person who cares about these matters. I am going to share my worry with every single other team member.” And that became the pivotal event [that prompted me to make] the transition to becoming a sales manager the very next day.

I can go close any [deal for my salespeople; however, if] that’s all a sales manager is going to do, then you force the whole organization to depend on you—and you don’t really develop your people. So I had to figure out how to drive revenue into the organization through my sales team and not *myself*.

The first thing I started to do was to stop taking on more than I could handle. I quit being accommodating [and acting like] I was the only person who could [get certain things done]. [People who] first get into management [tend to] carry over the rugged individualism or Lone Ranger salesperson mentality—that attitude that I will do everything myself, and do it to perfection. But you have to get over that and accept the fact that if your team does it to 80 percent of the level that you can do it, that’s still better than the team across town; and so good enough becomes good enough. You get paid for movement and progress. You don’t get paid for perfection. I made the mental adjustment to say, “No, I don’t need to touch this [about certain topics].”

The second thing I did [was to] start making [my expectations of my employees] very tangible [and apparent] by posting them. I called a meeting the next day and said, “When your call reports come in, we’re going to post them the next day.” There was a lot of resistance [but people really had no choice].

I acknowledged that people weren’t happy, but I told them that the most competitive people keep score—and so we were going to keep track of activities, [since I knew this would] lead to results.

We started monitoring our activities, and the team got comfortable with that. [The next initiative I had to establish was to get them to] start tracking the results. Then, [we’d have to begin] raising expectations.

[I made the] transition over time [by continuously] asking myself, “What am I struggling with that I don’t need to be?”

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And, “How can I make this more tangible for the team and measure it?” And, “How can I create a structure with which I can run it without being overwhelmed?”

Lobaito started posting numbers and keeping score of the things that lead to results. He learned the vital lesson that you cannot coach the score of the game; you can only coach the things that lead to scoring.

It is very hard to change unless you are brutally honest about what is currently happening and what has to change to take your career to a higher level. Use the Sales Management Trap over the next 30, 60, and 90 days to identify what items and tasks are taking up your time and attention, what you need to be doing more of, and finally, what you want to be doing *less* of. To help you in this endeavor, there is a PDF of the Sales Management Trap available at [www.AccidentalSalesManager.com/forms](http://www.AccidentalSalesManager.com/forms). From here, you can download it, print it, and post it on your bulletin board or into your paper planning system. You can then use it on a regular basis to estimate how much time you spend on each task, and to imagine what might happen if you spent more time on the Stage 3 and Stage 4 activities.

It is hard to change a behavior until you are aware of it. Simply by noticing you spent a day doing Stage 1 and 2 activities is a start. Once you are aware that you are not getting results through others, you can consciously decide to plan a Stage 3 management task for tomorrow.

That’s your job.

How are you doing?

Too many new sales managers take way too long to get the kind of job clarity laid out in The Sales Management Trap tool. You don’t have to be one of them.