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Annual performance reviews can be a stressful experience for both the manager and the employee. However, they are also a useful business process that can help the organization to increase productivity, improve employee engagement and meet revenue targets. When working on a performance appraisal for a salesperson, be sure to take into account more than just the sales numbers. It's important to consider factors such as internal sales processes and external market factors when reviewing the employee's performance. An effective salesperson performance review should not contain any surprises. Ensure that all parties involved are aware of progress and performance throughout the course of the year by keeping the feedback loop open. Conduct an informal salesperson performance review on a regular basis, such as during a monthly one-on-one meeting. Take this time to review the previous month's progress with the employee. Be sure to ask them how they felt their performance was and whether they were up against any barriers that limited their success. Provide suggestions that help the employee to overcome those obstacles during the next month. Prior to sitting down with the sales representative for their formal performance review, ask them to fill out a self-evaluation. This should include their views on how they performed during the past year, their strengths and weaknesses and how they contributed to the company. In the self-evaluation, give the employee the chance to speak to their performance against specific sales quotas they were required to reach. During the performance review with the sales representative, start by speaking to the self-evaluation. Discuss any points of note with the employee about how they viewed their performance. Look to the goals and sales quotas that were set at the beginning of the term and compare them to the actual results for this year. Have an honest but cordial discussion on why and how you think the sales representative achieved these results. Be sure to consider any internal and external factors that lead to the results, especially those outlined in the self-evaluation. For example, if the sales representative felt that they couldn't achieve their quota because of a product issue that customers wanted fixed, that could have led to a decline in sales. If the sales representative brought that issue to light repeatedly and the company didn't act on it, then this may be a discussion point with the product development group. Ask the sales representative if they feel there were any barriers that limited their success during this fiscal year. These could be aspects such as a skill set that they need to improve or additional training they require to be better at their job. It could also be a technology or a process that could be implemented to make their job more effective. Where possible, see if you're able to remove the barriers so the employee can better complete their tasks. End your performance review by creating a plan for the next period. Outline professional goals and sales quotas that the employee will be required to meet. If the employee is in a position to move up within the company, specify the next steps they can take to advance their career trajectory. Be sure to include this information in their sales performance appraisal so they can come back to it the following year to see if they met their objectives. At every step of the sales review format, it's important to include positive feedback. While it's critical to pinpoint weaknesses so they can be improved upon, it's also necessary to specify the employee's strengths so they know what they should continue to keep doing. Start and end on a positive note to lift employee spirits and help them feel more at ease during what can be a stressful meeting. What is sales performance? It's the measurement of sales activity and corresponding results compared to the sales expectations and quota. Good sales performance is highly valued but it can also be elusive to achieve for many salespeople and organizations. The key to good sales performance is consistency. Anyone can have a good sales month, but a high-performing salesperson and sales team can meet or exceed expectations for an extended period of time through different sets of economic circumstances and competitive situations. First, let's discuss ways sales reps can improve their individual performance. How to Improve Your Sales Performance 1. Start with the right mindset. Your mindset as you approach a deal can greatly impact the final outcome. If you don't think you will be successful, you will be right. It usually takes several years to become a high achiever with consistent sales performance. If you aren't there yet, try creating an annual vision board. A vision board is where you assemble pictures and phrases of what you want to achieve and why you want to achieve it. It helps you remember the why of your sales career when you run into the inevitable pothole, and is a powerful exercise for visualizing success . 2. Improve your business acumen with an emphasis on your vertical market. Business acumen, or the level of understanding you have in regards to how a business runs, gives you credibility and trust when you are positioning your product or services. When you're looking to improve your sales performance, strengthening your business acumen (specifically in the vertical market you are selling in) is critical. HubSpot Sales Manager Mintis Hankerson says: "You need to understand your customer's business before you even reach out to them or draft the first email. As a sales rep the key to success is to understand how your prospect is approaching their buying process, what their intentions are, and how you can accommodate and fit into that." You can take small steps to improve your business acumen each day. Try reading credible business publications, or digging into relevant financial reports for deeper understanding. 3. Get organized. One of the biggest factors in sales performance is ensuring you are focused on the right task at the right time. Chances are if you don't allocate time to complete work (such as putting it on your calendar) it's unlikely to happen. If organization isn't your strong suit, get help quickly. Ask an organized team member to walk you through their workflow to give you some ideas.If you are spending mental capacity trying to juggle too many priorities, it's hard to focus on your prospects, which can hinder your overall performance. 4. Review all pertinent data for your role and position. Most salespeople are assigned a sales quota and activity metrics that will help them achieve that quota. Some organizations publish these numbers so salespeople can compare their results with high performers. Reading the data and incorporating it into daily activity is key. HubSpot Sales Manager Tiki Biswal offers this advice: "Understand what your 'sales macros' are. Most people are familiar with macros, or macronutrients, in the context of healthy eating. In that instance, you track how many carbs, proteins, and fats you eat to better understand what you're consuming and help you reach your goals. This same thought process applies to sales. Think of your metrics and KPIs as your macros. If you don't understand what metrics or KPIs you need to overachieve, then you'll have a hard time gauging your performance. The metrics you need to hit could be vastly different than the other reps on your team. I once had a rep on my team that was 'doing everything right' but still missing her quota. We pulled some data and noticed that her discount percentage was 15% higher than everyone else on the team. After some coaching on negotiation and closing, she was able to steadily increase her Average Sales Price." Understand that your personal definition of success may be different than that of your peers. This is why knowing where you stand according to metrics that are most relevant for you is important information for improving your performance as a sales professional. 5. Set concrete goals above and beyond basic job expectations. Most salespeople want to overachieve their quota, so setting personal goals that exceed quota expectations provides a bit of wiggle room. If your goals are not written down they are not goals, they are dreams. Defining what you would like to achieve, how you would like to achieve it, and then sharing this information with your managers and team members can help keep you accountable. 6. Build a personal development plan. The great part about a sales career is that there is a lot to learn at every stage. The best way to accelerate your development is to create a personal development plan that defines what skills you want to improve within a specific amount of time. I suggest picking one or two specific skills to focus on each month and documenting the steps you take to show improvement over time. If you weren't given one during onboarding, you can also work with your manager to request a sales training plan to help get you to the next level – particularly if you're still newer in the company. Asking your manager to fill out this sales training template for you is a concrete way to show you want to grow in your role. Download for Free 7. Find a sales coach or mentor. Having a sales coach or confidant outside of your organization can provide valuable perspective. An experienced sales coach with relevant experience will likely have more bandwidth and valuable perspective that can support your development in ways your immediate manager might miss. 8. Track your progress in quantitative and qualitative ways. Document your success. Track your sales performance on a weekly and monthly basis so you can have evidence of your progress. Additionally, tracking your own progress can provide a high-level understanding of your performance and how it relates to your sales organization's success. 9. Take a creative approach to problem-solving. There is no singular path to success in sales, and your ability to think creatively can serve you well in the long run. HubSpot Sales Manager Tiki Biswal says: "Your ability to think outside the box could be the difference between winning a massive account, or having them ignore your call or email. I've found clients appreciate creativity no matter what stage of the sales process you are in. One of my favorite examples of creativity is during demo prep. If we are preparing to show a customer how HubSpot is going to revolutionize their blog and newsletter, why not take the time to sign up for their newsletter and receive one of their emails. This takes one minute, and provides relevant information about how we can tangibly improve their process." As a sales professional, it's your job to solve your customer's problem and help them look good. The more creative you can be in your approach, the better. 10. Celebrate your wins. Sales performance is filled with ups and downs and many salespeople focus too much on improving their weaknesses. Improving individual sales performance also means celebrating your wins — no matter how big or small they are. When you achieve a goal or improve a skill, share your success with your manager or team. Every win counts, and celebrating each one gives you the momentum you need to keep going. Now that you have a solid understanding of how to improve performance at the individual level, let's discuss some ways sales organizations can foster better results for the whole team. How to Improve Sales Team Performance Improving team performance includes some similar activities as above but has additional complexity because there are more human beings involved. The more people involved, the more variables to successful sales performance. Here are some key tactics sales managers can implement for improving sales team performance. 1. Take a people-first approach. Every business is a people business, and improving team sales performance starts with winning the hearts, minds, and trust of the people you lead. Meet multiple times with everyone on your team to get a good perspective of their sales skills, strengths, and weaknesses. Review past performance and results, dig into their self assessment of their performance, and give them time and space to share their experiences with you. 2. Create a safe space for your team. Have you fostered a team environment that is safe and accessible for people of all backgrounds and abilities? As a sales manager, it is important to constantly focus on engaging diverse perspectives and encourage open conversations in a team setting. We know diverse teams perform better, however these teams don't magically come to be — intentional leadership is critical. Managers are responsible for creating a safe space in which reps feel comfortable sharing thoughts, concerns, and new ideas with the group. Sales leaders have a responsibility to make sure everyone's voice is heard in a way that makes them comfortable. 3. Ensure that your team has a set of core values that are agreed upon by everyone. Here at HubSpot, core values are integral to how our teams operate. Here's what Sales Manager Tiki Biswal has to say about team norms: "As sales leaders we all have non-negotiables that we expect from our team, but there needs to be give and take. An exercise that has been helpful over the years, is to actually meet as a team and decide on these core values together. Once this list of core values and norms is built, it creates a system of accountability that starts with the sales leader, but gets enforced on the team level. Seeing reps hold one another accountable is especially impactful and helps the group grow together." If you're looking for some example core values for your team, Tiki recommends checking out this list as a starting point. 4. Analyze relevant team data. Emma Hogan, Sales Manager for Hubspot in Sydney Australia was a successful sales rep before her promotion to manager. Her advice for reps looking to advance is to look at the information available in each deal stage that can reveal hard to find performance issues. She says: "Get a consistent deal stage definition. At HubSpot Australia our salespeople mark their deals in the CRM as Best Case, Most Likely or Commit, and have clear criteria to help them identify the appropriate Forecast Stages. This then enables our Sales Operations teams to provide forecasting dashboards that predict where a salesperson or sales team will finish each month based on their pipeline coverage and the forecast stage assigned to every deal. What's helpful about this for a sales rep is that it gives them a clear picture in real time where they stand based on the deals they have in play so they can prioritise accordingly. They can decide if they need to focus on building more pipelines or gaining more commitment on their Best Case deals." For Emma and her team Deals Created is the most important deal stage. "It is important to know how many net new deals that a rep needs to create on a weekly, monthly and/or quarterly, depending on your business' operating rhythm, to be successful in their role," she says. If you don't have a Sales Operations team who has worked out the benchmarks for you, then prioritize the following information: Stay focused on prospecting — If your team knows how many deals they need to be created and a deadline to do so, the rest falls into place. This helps them stay focused on the prospecting efforts required to be successful. To gauge how effective reps are at prospecting, you may want to watch lead work rates and the average time to follow up inbound leads. Other relevant information can include the number of leads worked per day, average lead depth (average number of prospecting touch points per lead), and even the time of day salespeople are reaching out to prospects. Look at the close rate by rep data — If a sales rep is not closing at least 30% of the deals that are in the decision making stage, it could mean indication of a bigger problem. By closely tracking rep performance early on in the sales process, you can catch and help correct issues that can have a negative impact on business later on. 5. Have regular one-on-one meetings with each team member. As a manager, having regular one-on-one meetings with your team members is an effective way to connect with your reps, and to ensure their needs and concerns are addressed. Additionally, having one-on-one meetings can help you remind your team members how important they are to the mission of your company. HubSpot Sales Manager Emma Hogan adds: "In one-on-one meetings, when I am trying to understand what is holding someone back from reaching their goals, the right questions need to be asked to determine what the underlying blocker is to building a pipeline. Is it a motivational issue? Is it a time management issue? Or is it a skill issue? This should determine the guidance, support and coaching you provide to help the salesperson remove the blocker." Having one-on-one meetings can provide a safe space to work through these scenarios with team members who need varying levels of support. 7. Review business results as a team. Mintis Hankerson is a HubSpot Sales Manager in the North American Small Business Division. Here's her advice for reviewing sales data with your team: "Ensure the metrics that you want the salespeople to be closely tracking are communicated frequently and publicly. This might be regular emails showing sales activity leaderboards or talking through it in a team meeting. To make this work, you need to build a culture of transparency, trust and psychological safety, as well as a culture of high-performance. In this type of environment, salespeople will become used to seeing their sales activity and numbers presented in publicly available channels, and with the right people on board, it should provide a sense of healthy competition to motivate them." 8. Create a culture of peer-to-peer coaching. You as a sales manager are only one person and time isn't an abundant resource. If you have the team structure to support it, pairing up your reps of various experience levels can help team members gain valuable perspective, and it can provide people development opportunities for those doing the coaching. 9. Don't become complacent. As a sales leader, you should be staying a step ahead. Keep monitoring the business and the metrics to avoid surprises that could throw your team off track. Additionally, your reps who are not meeting their goals shouldn't be the sole focus of your attention. Continue challenging your high-performers and tenured reps to keep improving their skills and developing themselves. Raise the bar and set bigger goals, both at the team and individual level. Your team needs to know you believe in them and their success. Originally published Jun 16, 2020 8:30:00 AM, updated Jun 16 2021

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