

Sales team missing growth targets?

Perhaps goal management software can help

by Shawn Chambers

At a time when social networking during business hours is costing the economy billions of dollars in lost productivity, sales managers are no doubt struggling to attract and maintain their salespeople's attention on the business at hand. In fact, the *Gallup Journal* suggests that upwards of 75 percent of your sales force is hanging about without much concern for the health of the bottom line let alone reaching sales targets.

These folks are the *disengaged*. And, believe it or not, almost a third of that group, the *actively disengaged*, has made it their mission to get in the way of the remaining 25 percent who genuinely desire to earn their hero status for the day. Of course, these statistics aren't representative of all businesses. But, if you do have a concern about one or two people that might be straying from the path of optimum performance then what can you do? And, how can technology help?

There's a little-publicized genre of tech-tools called *goal management software* that could be very useful in your quest for improving employee productivity. But, before we explore the *how*, we need to understand a bit of the *why*.

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The mind is an amazing, all-powerful goal-achieving machine but, unfortunately, it's attached to a reptilian-esque brain that is pre-programmed for conservation and procreation. Without any other instructions planted firmly in its reticular activating system (RAS), then the brain's goal is to simply survive the moment and derive some pleasure along the way. Without any goals beyond maintaining its current physiological balance then it has no need to expend any resources other than to avoid predators, hunting and gathering to feed itself, and pursuing the odd mating prospect.

But, what if we could shift the brain out of a survival state and create a desire to move up Maslow's ladder toward a need for greater social acceptance and self actualization — where the brain interpreted *failure to achieve* as a threat? Where hunting and gathering was replaced with pursuing prospects and developing relationships? And a rush of pleasure was derived from closing a sale? This is the power of setting and achieving goals and goal management software is the key to making it an all powerful experience.

Goal management, as a process, can be likened to project management in that you identify a destination, develop a road map of movement and deadlines, head out on the journey, and then make adjustments along the way to keep yourself pointed in the direction you need to go. But, where the genre comes into its own is the pre-planning components where the individual works through a process of defining their values — what's important to them — and then articulating the principles by which they agree to conduct their lives.

This is a rather enlightening experience for most when they suddenly realize that where they are heading is 180 degrees from where they want to go! With this insight they now have the power to change their future and it begins by organizing their time and scheduling their to-do's in alignment with these new priorities.

Now, it's been my experience that there are three kinds of people: those that buy into the whole achievement lifestyle waking up each day as a *meaningful specific*; those that value it as a process but not necessarily as a lifestyle; and those who have no problem living life as *wandering generalities*. Disengaged employees will probably fall into the latter category so you're going to have to put your salesman's hat back on and go a little old school on them: *create a compelling, urgent problem for your customer and have the solution in your back pocket ready for when they ask for your help*.

How to get the disengaged employee re-engaged

First, we recapture the attention of our disengaged salesperson by helping them identify the problem, “Kelly, I see that you've been struggling in saving up for a new car.” Then, we point out the pain and offer a remedy, “It must be tough spending 8 hours a day here and never seeming to get to where you want to go. If you'll let me, I can help. I have a couple of ideas on how you might hit a few of our bonus programs that could provide enough money for you to finance a new car. Now would driving your own car and avoiding 2 hours on the bus each morning be worth 5 minutes at the start of each day with me?”

From here on in, you let the software do the heavy lifting. First, you identify the things your salesperson wants to accomplish in life. Then, you align their values and principals with those of the firm so that what's important to the firm becomes important to the individual. Next, put the big goal right in front of them and break it down into tiny, incremental steps and schedule those activities onto their calendar. You meet each day for 5 minutes to re-vision the end goal while making sure that the individual has the knowledge, time and resources to complete the day's tasks. Then, you let them get on with the day.

It's important that you are there to remind them of the little achievements because they probably won't have the self awareness or confidence to acknowledge them on their own. And, should they begin falling into old habits then put the goal firmly back in front them while stimulating their brain with as much information about it as possible using as many senses as possible.

In the example of Kelly, you might take her down to the car lot at lunch and let her touch the car, let her hear the engine, and let her smell that new-car interior. This is what it might take to train her brain into believing that she can, in fact, achieve what she once believed she couldn't. And, yes, it's going to take a lot of effort on your part to make this happen but if you believe in the individual then this is an investment that's going to pay out for you time and time again over their career. And, when others see that such a program can help them get to someplace different than where they think they're capable of getting to then you'll see a steady stream of people coming to your door

for help. And, that's when the magic happens — when everyone wants to be a part of something bigger and taking personal responsibility for its achievement.

Software tools

As far as software options, there's quite a lot when you start looking for it. My research has led me to two workable choices: Success Studio's *GoalPro* and FranklinCovey's *PlanPlus*. For those who accept personal achievement as a lifestyle, then the Success Studio product has a lot to offer. For those who work in a team environment where shared goals, delegating tasks and interchanging information is part of the requirement then *PlanPlus* might be the better option because it sits inside of *Microsoft Outlook* which allows you to access some very powerful groupware features.

GoalPro's strength lies in its ability to personalize your working environment to reflect who you are, as an individual. It's easy to move through with great attention to the little things. And, you can integrate success imagery into the process to help you really visualize your destination and the journey in between. All of the content that you build inside the software can be easily printed and carried with you for convenient reference. When you come home at the end of the day you update your strategy; tick off completed events; attach useful documents, articles, images or other files for future reference; drop a few notes into your daily journal; and then quickly get a sense of progress as well as insights into where you might want to tweak the plan to realign with real life.

PlanPlus is a different animal altogether. It is an industrial strength machine designed and developed for people whose activities intertwine with those of others on a day-to-day/hour-by-hour

schedule AND it sits right inside of your *Microsoft Outlook* client. Its lifestyle integration is heavily structured around philosophies developed by Stephen Covey. I do recommend that you read his book, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," to help maximize the experience and the value of the tools this package offers. You'll find it very easy to break down a goal into tasks that can be easily scheduled into your calendar, and, in a group environment, you can delegate them out for monitoring the progress of larger sales projects and marketing campaigns. The other advantage of *PlanPlus* is that, by integrating your goal management efforts with *Microsoft Exchange*, you can sync tasks and calendar events effortlessly with your smart phone or other PDA — something most other goal management systems lack.

Conclusion

Regardless of which tool you choose, understanding the power of what goal management software has to offer is the important lesson, here, especially as new hires within *Generation Y* continue to evolve team building dynamics. Managers will have to invest far more into value alignment and mentoring than ever before in order to maximize the gaming generation's productivity, and goal management software could be that go-to solution that fits your needs. There are lots of options to choose from and almost every vendor offers a *try-then-buy* version so set a goal to try one out today! ■

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