

Put the team first

KELLY WALSH describes five characteristics of high performing sales teams



In these very tough economic times, sales professionals are under constant pressure to perform at the highest level in order to meet targets. In this climate, it's easy to see why individuals might focus on their own performance rather than that of their team.

But the team should be the focus. Our research into high performing teams in sport and business identifies the following five factors that distinguish the high performing teams from the 'also rans':

Team mind

Team mind refers to the shared knowledge of team members. In a high performing team, members know how they work best together, with each individual able to adapt their behaviour to different demands. Players on a football pitch or members of a sales function need to know each other's strengths and weaknesses so they can anticipate each other's actions and react accordingly. One sales performer may be fantastic at generating an initial lead but less well equipped to close the deal. Being aware of this will allow somebody else to take on the deal at the right time and ensure the best outcome for the team. Being clear about roles and boundaries will also allow individuals to be personally accountable for their contribution.

Team emotion

How team members feel about each other, and their team as a whole, determines how they will behave and how effectively the team will perform. High levels of mutual trust, team spirit and the ability to resolve conflict are critical for high performance. This can be difficult if salespeople are protecting their turf and keeping their ideas and techniques to themselves. Lack of trust could mean they are holding onto their accounts,

unwilling to share knowledge, with the fear that someone else could take over the account. In high performing teams, individuals will put the goals of the team ahead of their own goals and so must be able to trust their teammates implicitly.

Team process

The ability to consistently produce the most effective outcome with the greatest efficiency is a common feature of high performing teams. They are able to adapt quickly to rapid changes and unpredictable circumstances and still perform to a high level. They provide regular feedback to each other and seek it from outside the team.

Team leadership

Effective leadership requires a specific set of behaviours. Leaders of high performing teams will set clear direction by communicating a compelling vision, so that the individual understands what is expected of them and how it will contribute to achieving the vision. An effective leader will also create appropriate challenge, setting high expectations of members and encouraging continuous learning by reviewing their processes and performance regularly. Finally, leaders will create an environment of support, allowing autonomy and a sense of belonging, which can be lacking in some competitive sales teams. Leaders need to understand that a pressured environment affects people differently – so whether they withdraw under pressure, thrive or panic, they must support them appropriately. Feedback is vital, both motivational and developmental.

Team psychological edge

A team's psychological edge refers to a team's mental toughness and its ability to utilise psychological momentum, in other words 'being on a roll.' Psychological edge is particularly important to recover quickly from inevitable setbacks. In business, this could be losing a valued client or customer, or hearing that a rival company has secured a deal that you were pitching for. This can be a make or break moment – whether the news debilitates you, or pushes you to work harder. High performing teams recover from setbacks quickly, dealing with any mistakes and learning from the feedback.



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