

Transitioning Our Most Valuable MPS Resource: Legacy Salespeople

As the industry and dealers transition to a new MPS selling model, one important group is too frequently being left behind... the “legacy” sales rep. Quickly accumulating stories suggest that many legacy reps either cannot or will not transition from being “box focused” salespeople to the broader more consultative MPS mindset and process. I believe that we as an industry owe the salespeople who have sustained our businesses during tough times in the past more than a “brush toward the door” when they don’t understand or resist the MPS transition. We owe them education and transition leadership. In fact, when these tenured reps struggle or fail during any company’s MPS conversion, then the company leadership is equally responsible for failing to do those things that could have prevented the loss of these historically valuable employees.

Change by itself is hard enough!

Human beings have difficulty with change. When we combine our natural concern about change with the following additional factors we begin to better understand why some legacy reps are having difficulty with the MPS transition:

- **Ego** – Many struggling reps have been the “go to” person on their sales team for some time. Now they are finding that the methodologies and techniques which made them successful in the past are no longer needed or even useful. It can be a difficult blow for reps to realize that much of what worked so well in the past has just been swept away in favor of a new selling mindset, process and tools with which they are almost completely unfamiliar.
- **Unconsciously Competent** – Many legacy sales reps have to learn a new way of selling. They are no longer unconsciously competent. How and who will they approach? What questions should they now ask? What process will they follow? Who or what are their support mechanisms? Who are the proven experts by which they can model themselves? Starting over is hardly ever easy.
- **Molded into the old way working** – Selling process, paperwork procedures, questioning strategies, customer service practices, interdepartmental communications, billing procedures, compensation plans, reporting guidelines... these and many other things have suddenly changed for the legacy sales rep. How many times has the tenured rep been confronted for not following

procedure? It's difficult to find the motivation to move to the new way when you've been molded into, and become attached to, the old way of doing things.

The products of great leadership are people willing to change!

In order to help salespeople through this challenging transition, managers must understand how these legacy reps got the way they are in the first place and should then utilize effective transition leadership strategies to help motivate and drive them down the newer MPS path.

Helping reps through the MPS transition is not as mystical as some might think. But it does require leaders and managers to accept 5 things:

1. Salespeople were taught to be loyal to the "old way" of doing things

Legacy sales reps have been trained, managed, coached and confronted into being loyal to the box-centric, feature, function and benefit selling procedures. We can't really blame them for being attached to what we taught and expected... can we?

2. Resistance is nothing more than loyalty to the "old way."

Leaders need to realize that "resistance" to the new way is really nothing more than "loyalty" to the old way of doing things. It needs to be made perfectly clear to everyone that hanging on or going back to the old way is not an option. Everyone must transition forward to the new way.

3. The best results always occur by plan.

It's hard to follow a leader's vision without a plan. Sales reps need to understand the required transition steps from one working and selling style to another. They certainly need to know "why" they should transition, but they also need to know "how" they should transition. Sales reps need plans, process, procedures and standards to follow if they are to effectively complete the MPS transition.

4. Communication is the seed of cooperation.

Without open and direct communication... doubts, rumors and fears begin to emerge. As fast as things are changing, many leaders don't have all the answers. To best influence employee transition, communication must flow both up and down stream. It's O.K. for a leader to say, "I don't know" but at the same time he or she should say, "As soon as I find out... I'll let you know." It's helpful to say, "I haven't decided yet" but let's not forget to also say, "As soon as I do... I'll let you know."

5. People are more likely to believe in and act on with enthusiasm what they decide is the right thing to do.

Participation creates buy-in, ownership and adaptability. Salespeople know that by asking any customer to participate in solution creation the customer becomes more likely to buy-in to, accept ownership for and be more adaptable in implementing the solution. Sales leaders need to remember that they are selling every legacy rep on a new way of selling and doing business. The more we get salespeople to participate in the creation and implementation of the MPS process, the more likely they will engage and successfully transition.

Some of the most important questions leaders will ask when helping legacy reps transition to MPS are:

1. What do you think?
2. How do you think “this situation” would be best handled?
3. Do you understand or can you improve the goal or plan?
4. Do you understand or can you improve the process?
5. Would you like to receive education and training in this area?

By engaging salespeople in strategic and tactical improvement, leaders are more likely to achieve greater levels of employee transition success.

The more driven and competitive we are... the more we need to know the score!

One final thought is that we need to consider the value and importance of sales compensation. From a leadership perspective, compensation plans change because we want to redirect sales team focus and behaviors. From a salesperson’s perspective, compensation is connected to their achievement of value. The salesperson’s perceived value of their relationship with the company is directly connected to their compensation plan and their ability to understand and utilize it. Most MPS company leaders understand that salesperson compensation is an integral part of implementation success. What some have not considered is that they are actually attempting to change the culture of the organization, right down to its most core element... wages for work!

In order to successfully create an MPS compensation plan leaders must decide things like:

1. What processes will salespeople use?
2. What are the minimum expectations for daily employee behaviors and activities?
3. What are reasonable sales and salesperson daily and monthly goals?
4. What is reasonable profit and how will it be obtained?
5. How will compensation be constructed?

6. Can we explain the compensation plan effectively enough so the salesperson can create their personal selling strategy and tactical work plan?

Making these decisions will help leaders to create, explain and sell the MPS compensation plans to legacy reps. I would be one of the first to suggest that there are many reasons that salespeople choose to work for a company. There are many factors that may influence a person's company or position choice. But we would always do well not to remember statement... Salespeople Keep Score! If you want people to learn and use a new style of selling then... at the end of the day... they want to be paid!

By considering and acting effectively on the things outlined here, leadership can begin to transition legacy reps more effectively and incorporate them more quickly into the MPS mindset and selling approach. And, there is expert help available. *Print Management Solutions Group* and its parent company *Learning Outsource Group* is the industry leader in helping sales people, managers and leaders improve their abilities and business with world class education, development and support.

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