FOUR KEY QUESTIONS

Consider the following questions as you make your plans for a truly accountable team that avoids the "Big Brother" myth.

Question One: Is Your Accountability Program Excuse-Proof?

Put an intelligent animal in a new enclosure, and one of the first things that happens is the animal tests for weaknesses that would allow escape. Put an accountability program in place for your salespeople, and basically the same thing occurs. They test the system by trying to find an exception. They try to create a precedent that suggests this "flavor of the month" will pass.

The testing usually takes the form of "special" situations employees toss your way. Here's a quick, but not exhaustive, list of special situations I've encountered (and you have too).

- Child sick
- Spouse sick

- Parent sick
- Pet sick
- They're sick
- Client "emergency"
- Need time to "maintain current accounts"
- Don't know how to use the CRM effectively
- Need admin help
- Not sure how to stick to the program
- Afraid to "do the wrong thing" (analysis paralysis)
- Don't have enough leads to meet prospecting targets
- Need a bigger territory
- Need to drop prices to compete

Lest you decide that a meaningful accountability program would be just too draconian to implement, consider the most obvious trait these "special situations" share. Most of them are *excuses* in disguise. The few that do have some shred of legitimacy (illness, say) will eventually present themselves as excuses *after* you ask your employee why he or she didn't reach the targets for the week or month.

You will notice, once you implement a real accountability program, that your "A" players, the ones you want to keep on your team, will be right up front when an issue arises in their personal or professional lives. They'll tell you ahead of time.

Your "B" and "C" players, on the other hand, will deal out these special situations like a Vegas casino worker whenever you shine the light on their lack of performance.

Question Two: Do You Set Accountability Targets Monthly — and Manage Them Weekly?

We recommend accountability targets be set monthly and managed weekly. One good reason for this is that unexpected situations do arise when we need to be away to take care of a personal matter like an illness. If the absence is short-term, then that individual still has time to make up the target. If an absence is long-term then your human resources policy takes precedence over your accountability program.

Actual client emergencies can be managed with a couple of quick questions to the client. Examples: "When were you hoping we could fix this?" and "If we can't until later today or tomorrow would that be OK?" After a few such questions, designed to take your client from an emotional "HELP ME NOW" state to an intellectual "Actually, this isn't so bad, we can wait" state, your employee can schedule helping the client out into their day and refocus on meeting their accountability targets.

In the case of a true client emergency, the rep can typically either figure out a solution quickly or hand off finding a solution to a representative of the appropriate department (for instance, customer service), who keeps the rep updated on communications with the client.

Special situations are best dealt with up front, at the time your accountability program is implemented. Use the list of common sales "emergencies" you read above as a starting point for an in-depth discussion with your team. Set up procedures for specific situations. Close all the loopholes ahead of time! Then set accountability targets monthly — and manage them weekly.

Question Three: Do You Give Your Team Members the Tools They Need?

Providing your employees with the tools they need to succeed could mean giving written highlights of your program to certain employees who need a little more time to process changes. That way they are comfortable when the full program rolls out. You could also recruit specific “champion” employees to talk up the program and share appropriate resources prior to roll-out.

In addition, providing your team with the proper tools means providing the right administrative support, not necessarily by adding new members to your team, but certainly by giving your people the proper training on how to track their own accountability targets. Quick-reference charts or FAQ documents that help create self-sufficiency in your team are also helpful.

Question Four: Do You Stick with the Program When It Hurts?

Set strong, clear up-front contracts with your employees … then stick to your accountability program even, and especially, when it hurts. One of our clients had a problem with late arrivals to their weekly meetings. The manager started locking the door to their conference room at the minute the meeting was booked to start. Within three meetings, late arrivals dropped to zero!