

# Motivating Sales People through Accountability



Improve Performance.  
Drive Revenue.

## About The Naro Group

The Naro Group specializes in helping technology companies capitalize on their investment in sales process and sales training. Contact Jim Naro, President, by email at: [jnaro@TheNaroGroup.com](mailto:jnaro@TheNaroGroup.com).

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*By Jim Naro, President of The Naro Group*

Motivating sales people is a key challenge for sales managers and I consistently am asked for insight on this. Managers share that when times are tough, it's difficult to lift the spirits of their team and at other times, people just don't do what they are suppose to do. In either case, managers are looking for ways to improve how sales teams listen, take direction, and are inspired to improve performance.

A simple, actionable process I recommend provides a structure for holding sales people accountable while empowering and motivating them. It starts with four key questions based on insights in the book, "[Why Employees Don't Do What They're Supposed To and What You Can Do About It](#)," by Ferdinand Fournies. I've adapted Fournies' advice and developed these questions that I share with sales managers:


- *Do your sales people know what they are supposed to do?*
- *Do they know how to do it?*
- *Do they know why they should do it?*
- *Do they think they are doing it?*

This process assumes that you have already assessed the aptitude of the sales people on your team and you are willing to invest time in improving their performance.

## **Do they know what they're supposed to do?**

On a day-to-day basis, does each of your sales people know what activities need to be executed to achieve the objectives that lead to the results you are trying to achieve? Without this awareness, it's difficult to hold people accountable. I recommend that sales managers leverage the use of a company sales plan and break it down into strategies, tactics, and specific day-to-day activities for each sales person.

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Equally important, sales people need to take ownership by providing input to the planning process. One way to do this is by asking sales people to identify their own goals and objectives and define their plan of action to meet their quota. This is also an opportunity for you to ask how you can best support them in executing their plan. This will help you build and reinforce a coaching relationship with the sales people by helping them assess risks in their plan. Part of that assessment may just be asking what each sales person needs to get stronger at in order to achieve success in executing the plan.

### **Do they know how to do it?**

The sales training industry gets a bad rap for not delivering results. Some of this is well deserved, and some is not. The bottom line is, selling is a set of complex skills, and selling complex things is even more complex.

Unfortunately, when we train sales people, we assume that a knowledge transfer for effective selling equates to a change in behavior, and hence should yield a change in performance that leads to better results. However, the reality is that behavior change does not happen unless there are three key elements in place: practice, practice, and practice. You must provide practice time for your team that is accompanied by feedback and coaching. This can be done one-on-one in preparation for a sales call, or after as a review. It should also be part of conducting an effective sales meeting. Based on feedback from other sales managers, the use of role plays is by far the most powerful way to develop selling skills.

### **Do they know why they should do it?**

As sales managers, you want to be cognizant of the correlation between the skills you develop in sales people and their day-to-day activities. It's imperative for you and your sales people to understand what leads to revenue results and the successful achievement of quota and commission payout. If you don't help sales people connect the dots, they'll look around to figure out what's the best way to achieve their quota, whether it aligns with the overall sales plan or not. Sales people want to know how to be successful and sharing how others have met their quota and contributed to the sales plan is a key part of your coaching responsibilities. It's a powerful way of linking activities to results and reinforcing the behaviors you want.

### **Do they think they are doing it?**

And finally, sales people are just going to assume that everything is okay and they are doing what you want them to do if you don't communicate otherwise.

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So continual feedback that is timely, specific, and focused on behaviors (and not the person) is important. If you haven't been providing this on an ongoing basis, it's best to start from "now" rather than go back in time. Start from scratch and begin by setting expectations moving forward and holding people accountable to those expectations.

You also want to provide a development environment where feedback is a key component. You can even ask sales people one-on-one how they would like to be held accountable and how they would like to have you approach them when they are not performing up to their potential.

The basic premise of feedback is very powerful in modifying behavior – positive feedback is used to reinforce behaviors we want repeated, and negative feedback is used to decrease behaviors we do not want repeated. Applying these concepts ethically and effectively in human behavior can be tricky. Too much, too little, not specific, not timely, and feedback can be very ineffective. In fact, negative feedback can bleed over to behaviors we want to reinforce and make sales people apprehensive and dependent on the sales manager for constant direction.

I suggest what I call a balanced assessment, which gives the manager an opportunity to provide positive reinforcement and constructive feedback. This can be done while motivating the sales people and getting them to do a self-diagnosis and to take ownership for their own performance. You'll find the process relatively easy after implementing it a time or two. After a call or a role-play skills development session, first ask the sales person what they thought went well, what they thought didn't go well, and what they would do different next time. If you have to add anything to correct their behavior, first start with what they did well and what they can try to do better next time. Then give them a vote of confidence regarding improving their performance and provide follow up as needed.

By providing clear direction and holding sales people accountable, you should see rapid improvement in the team's motivation and performance.

If you have any questions on implementing this process, send me an email at [jnaro@TheNaroGroup.com](mailto:jnaro@TheNaroGroup.com) or call me at 603-881-7712.



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