



Four Tips to Improve Your Leadership Succession Strategy

Introduction

The success of a sales team depends on having the right people in the right roles. It needs awesome professionals on the frontlines prospecting, closing and upselling. It also requires leaders who have the qualities and coaching skills to inspire and to get the most from sales team members.

The battle for talent has never been more intense. The findings of a [2016 national survey of 390 business owners, senior sales and HR managers by Abacus Research](#), for example, found that three-quarters of respondents suggested that the demand for qualified candidates is high.

How then, can leaders identify, train and retain those professionals in their organisation with high leadership potential?

This ebook will attempt to answer this question. Along the way, we'll share interviews which the CPSA has conducted with well-known thought leaders in Sales, Talent and HR.

Top Salespeople Don't Always Make Good Managers

Often, when promoting from within, companies select their best performing frontline sales executives to become managers of sales teams. The assumption is that team members will respond best to someone who has excelled at their level and that the promoted sales superstar will have the tools to inspire and develop their direct reports.

The reality is often very different. The characteristics that make someone a top seller - like assertiveness, autonomous working, and that 'killer instinct' to ensure the close - can be incompatible with what's needed to coach junior sales professionals and develop team harmony.

RESOURCE: [How to Develop Leaders and Bring Through the Next Generation of Sales Talent with Kristen Harcourt](#): Listen to this episode of the Sales Talent and Recruitment Show from CPSA and hear from Kristen Harcourt as she discusses the initial considerations for HR and sales managers to determine their enterprise bench strength and other factors critical to retaining top salespeople and ensuring the right candidates are in place for promotion.

Losing Your Best Frontline Talent

The other big negative of moving top sales performers into leadership positions is that they will no longer be focused on selling. Instead, their time will be split between duties like hiring, talent management, coaching, strategy and performance reviews.

Just like taking your best hockey player off the ice rink, your sales efforts could flounder without your best people in position to score new business.

A review of their performance as a salesperson versus their potential as a sales manager may help answer questions about whether to promote them. For example, some top sales reps in [mature territories produce 2-3 times the average performer's sales results](#). Depending on the size of the company and number of salespeople in the team, taking these top performers off the frontlines could mean not hitting overall team targets.

Even if you can replace them, it could take time to get a replacement firing on all cylinders. Time you can't afford if you need to continue to hit revenue goals.

To establish the return on investment of promoting the sales rep to sales manager, you should consider their potential contribution as a sales manager.

Maybe the top performer you're looking to 'move upstairs' could stimulate a big rise in performance from the team that will offset the loss in revenue they leave behind. Maybe! This is speculative and future proofing sales team success will need plenty of research, market intelligence and training.

Richard Louttet, Vice-President, Education and Certification at the Canadian Professional Sales Association [explained](#): "CPSA research confirms that we have an opportunity to match jobs with people and people with jobs through qualification programs and common standards. If the government wants to build our economy, it's critical that we unlock the potential of this country's sales force by promoting the industry and reinforcing high standards."

Regardless of your assessment, it's vital to factor in some loss in sales revenue into projections for six to twelve months following the promotion. It's important too, to be realistic about what's possible for the rest of the sales team to close without the contribution of the sales superstar performer.

RESOURCE: [Succession Planning - What to Do When Your Top Salespeople Move On with Ashley Kirkland](#): *In this episode guest Ashley Kirkland discusses what are the initial considerations for HR and sales managers to determine the factors that are critical to retaining top salespeople and ensuring the right candidates are in place for promotion or important lateral moves.*

The Qualities of Top Sales Leaders

Before we get into the process for improving your leadership succession strategy, we should establish what we mean by sales pros with 'high leadership potential'.

If those who perform the best on the frontlines do not necessarily make for top leaders or are simply too valuable as sellers to move into administrative roles, where else should you look within the company and what are the qualities required for the job?

The qualities needed for a successful leader of sales pros include:

Coaching skills: Successful sales teams are led by professionals who not only know what to do, but can teach it to others. They have the capacity to understand what happened — and why it happened — if a sale didn't go through.

Leadership: The best sales managers will [ask their team questions to help them realise on their own what they should do](#). That way they'll figure out the answer on their own, and when they do, it's ingrained in their memory.

Accountability: The best sales managers and senior leaders can keep their team accountable for their activities and coach them through each step of the process to get them to the point of closing the sale.

RESOURCE: [How to be a Leader, Not Just a Manager, of Sales Teams with Tracy Kapteyn](#): In this CPSA Recruitment and Talent podcast, guest Tracy Kapteyn answers questions on how to be a leader, not just a manager, of sales teams.

Mapping Out the Correct Talent for the Right Roles: 4 Tips to Improve Your Leadership Succession Strategy

Now that we have an idea of the key characteristics of professionals with high sales leadership potential, let's consider the four big ways to ensure that you develop them in a manner that will benefit the organisation, and the bottom line, in the medium and longer terms.

1. Align Talent Management with Sales Strategies - Integration with Performance, Training, and Compensation

Companies that understand the vital role of adopting a talent management strategy that aligns with their recruitment needs and sales strategy are better placed to be more successful in attracting and keeping the talent required to achieve their strategic sales goals and objectives.

[The 2016 national survey of 390 business owners, senior sales and HR managers by Abacus Research](#) found that 87% of Canadian firms interviewed agreed that the development and public awareness of a clear set of measurable standards for sales professionals would improve their ability to effectively hire and retain employees in their sales department.

Based on analysis of an organization's strategic and operational goals, the management team, in partnership with the Human Resources department, can find and analyse the implications on talent strategy and planning.

In turn, once the leadership team understands how the business objectives may impact the organisation's talent, they can define particular talent initiatives and create a talent strategy which may include engaging and communicating with employees, performing reviews at all levels of the organization to identify gaps in skills, and connecting performance to sales strategy and rewarding employees who meet their goals.

RESOURCE: [Bench Strength and Succession Planning with Lori Richardson](#): In this CPSA Recruitment and Talent podcast, host Kevin W. Grossman talks with Sales Leadership and Strategy expert Lori Richardson about “bench strength” and the importance of sales succession planning.

2. Identifying High Potential Sales Reps - Develop their Skills and Checking their Career Plans

So how do you ascertain who has the potential to be an awesome leader of sales professionals? Here are some management characteristics to look for:

- * They are able to delegate and let others perform the work
- * They have the organisational skills to take on more responsibility as well as to manage others
- * They have proven appreciation and competency for performing administrative work e.g. expense reports, timesheets and weekly status updates
- * They can get onboard with the vision of the company - even if they might not agree with it

It sounds obvious but it is also essential to check that the candidate really wants to move into leadership.

Having a conversation about their career goals can help you understand where they want to be and how motivated they are to move into a management role. If they are inspired to move up in the organization and take on more responsibility, then retaining them in a sales position for too long may become demotivating or result in them seeking opportunities outside the organization.

RESOURCE: [People Skills that Help Salespeople Become Leaders and Successful Entrepreneurs with Mario Martinez Jr.](#): In this CPSA Recruitment and Talent podcast, we consider the people skills that help salespeople become successful entrepreneurs. Listen to this show to hear host Kevin W. Grossman talk with Sales influencer and social selling expert, Mario Martinez Jr., about the recommended steps to recognize success in sales.

3. Cross Training High Potential Reps: Ensuring a Smooth Transition into Leadership

The sales rep you’re looking to move into management will require training and mentoring in order to learn the new position, and we suggest you commit a significant portion of your time to coaching the new manager during this transition stage.

It’s a long term commitment and requires cross-training and fitting the high potential rep into a wider network of decision makers - but one that is invaluable to the overall health of the organization.

Most organizations with a sales role engage their sales teams in some sort of sales training on a regular basis. [Roughly a third of firms interviewed](#) followed either formal

programs or courses, informal mentoring programs, or a blend of the two.

RESOURCE: [Why Invest in Training For Your Salespeople? With Evan Smith](#): Listen to this episode of the Sales Talent and Recruitment Show from CPSA and hear from Evan Smith, MD at Berenson and advocate of the power of CPSA training for his team. Learn how deep-level sales training has helped propel Berenson's sales team to achieve results.

4. Develop connections and foster growth by pairing senior leaders with high potentials (mentorship v sponsorship)

By pairing with internal senior mentors, high-potentials are introduced to years of knowledge and experience. According to [a study by the American Society for Training & Development \(ASTD\)](#), over 70 percent of Fortune 500 firms use internal mentoring programs to develop high-potential employees.

RESOURCE: [How to Decrease Sales Turnover with Jamie Shanks](#): In this CPSA Talent and Recruitment show, we'll consider some major steps to follow in order to ensure that your company doesn't lose top salespeople to the competition. Our guest expert is Jamie Shanks, author, speaker and one of North America's leading social selling experts.

Summary

The best choice for a future leader of sales teams is not always the obvious choice.

Identifying and developing internal high potentials is no easy feat. To source and nurture future leaders as part of a strong succession strategy involves understanding who has the qualities to succeed, their current value to the company, how they can help grow your company's future bottom line and their ability to then bring on the following generations of leaders.

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This ebook was produced by the [CPSA](#).

About CPSA

The [Canadian Professional Sales Association](#) (CPSA) has been there to support and advance sales professionals with tools, training, and resources that accelerate their success for as long as sales has existed in Canada.

Over the years, the CPSA has helped to transform the sales industry, bringing in rigorous standards, ethical guidelines, and recognition programs that have professionalized sales and set the bar for excellence. Today, the CPSA continues to shape the future of sales with innovative, forward-thinking programs that advance the profession and support sales professionals at every stage in achieving their goals.

The CPSA's 20,000+ members include senior executives, entrepreneurs, sales managers, sales representatives and sales agents. We support them, and the broader sales community, in many ways, including:

- Competency-based training programs that set the gold standard and take sales professionals to the next level.
- An industry-leading sales designation that recognizes sales professionals with the experience, knowledge, skill, and attitude to get top results.
- Actionable, on-demand resources that help members apply the latest ideas, innovations, and insights to accelerate their performance.
- Educational and networking events that connect our sales community coast-to-coast, live and online.
- Exclusive offers that saves members an average of \$1500 a year.

The CPSA Foundation is a registered charity that raises awareness of sales as a positive career choice for post-secondary students and recognizes and rewards tomorrow's sales leaders. The Foundation's programs, including The Sales Excellence Award for students, are funded through events and generous sponsorships.