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Overcoming Barriers to Sales

By Richard Gorham

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Ever thought to yourself, "If only my team members would complete the tasks that we mutually agreed to in our action plan."

Most managers have felt this way about certain employees at some point in time.

Let's face it, some employees have a very hard time consistently executing tasks that "should" be relatively simple to complete.

So what are the barriers getting in the way of their success?

Actually, there are several types of barriers – but perhaps not the typical sort of barriers that you may be thinking.

Barriers can be classified in three major categories. Each category identifies strong barriers that, if not quickly identified and corrected by the team leader, can negatively impact the progress of your team.

The Three Major Types of Barriers are: (Hint: Remember A, B, C)

- A–ttitude Barriers
- B–ehavioral Barriers
- C–onceptual Barriers

Attitude Barriers

Every employee must take ownership of his or her own attitude.

A manager is NOT in charge of anyone's attitude except her own. If an employee has a poor and non-productive attitude and is not willing to correct it, that is a personal choice and that person needs to be held accountable for that decision.

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Quite simply, there are too many quality people who are willing to learn and add value to an organization, for a leader to invest time and money on anyone who makes the conscious "choice" to portray a poor attitude.

Keep in mind, if a leader does NOT hold team members accountable for non-productive attitudes, then he/she has in essence told the team "it's ok".

Employees' displaying poor attitudes is NOT ok. A leader should never allow herself to be seen as "sanctioning" this kind of behavior.

Here is a great way to communicate expectations about "owning your attitude" to your team.

Go to any hardware store and buy the largest coat hook that you can find. "The Hook" will be a visual reminder to your team members that you expect them to leave any personal issues or poor attitudes on this hook prior to beginning their day.

(Suggestion: You might want to paint The Hook a bright silver or gold color, and perhaps even mount The Hook on a nice piece of stained wood. Hang The Hook in a common area, away from customer view, where employees will see it often and be reminded throughout the day about your expectations of leaving poor attitudes on The Hook – as they do not belong anywhere in the workplace.)

When you introduce "The Hook", and your expectations relating to attitude, you might say something like:

"Rest assured, if you each will make sure to leave all your personal issues on the hook each morning when you arrive, I will take personal responsibility for guarding it on your behalf. I will watch over it for you throughout the day, and I promise that every night when you are ready to return home, it will still be there – just waiting for you to take it back home with you. That is my solemn promise to each of you." J

Behavioral Barriers

Behavioral barriers equal actions not taken or completed, which hinder the achievement of maximum results.

Behavioral barriers refer to an employee not completing critical sales management tasks as expected – despite having mutually agreed to do so.

Managers spend most of their time coaching to behaviors – working to increase results of the mid-level and low-level producers.

Examples of behavioral barriers include techniques, strategies and skills such as:

Prospecting
Profiling

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Telemarketing/scripting
Overcoming objections
Asking for the business
Closing the sale
Following up and managing the relationship

Leaders who are very successful in overcoming behavioral barriers follow this three–step approach in this sequential order:

- Managers must TEACH employees what behaviors (actions) are expected
- Managers must COACH employees to build their confidence to master sales management behaviors
- Managers must EXPECT and hold employees accountable for completing the desired behaviors on a consistent basis

Conceptual Barriers

Conceptual barriers are the absolute most difficult barriers to overcome.

Conceptual barriers are the barriers that are right behind the eyes, DEEP within the brain. "Beliefs" which were planted at a very young age and re–enforced over a long period of time – which is why they are so hard to "dislodge".

Here are a few quick examples of conceptual barriers:

(Think back to your own childhood. Were you ever taught any of the following rules?)

- Don't talk to strangers
- It is impolite to talk about money
- Never interrupt important people
- Wait to be asked

Now think about what you are asking your sales people to do.

- Telemarket (cold call)
- Profile/Prequalify based on ability to buy
- Create new relationships

Do you see how many of the things we were taught as children fly directly in the face of today's daily sales management expectations?

It is no wonder why some folks have such a difficult time adopting certain routine sales management practices. They are quite literally "handicapped" by a belief system that limits their potential for success.

As a leader it's your responsibility to approach performance issues with a clear understanding of these

predetermined belief systems. Armed with this knowledge you can more quickly address issues in a way that can help both the sales rep and your entire organization.

Richard Gorham is the founder and President of Leadership–Tools, Inc. His web site, <http://www.leadership–tools.com> is dedicated to providing free tools and resources for today's aspiring leaders. Offering high–quality tools in the areas of Business Planning, Leadership Development, Customer Service, Sales Management and Team Building.

Creating Unlimited Belief for Success!

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What's holding your team back from experiencing "breakout performance"?

It may be those Old beliefs and Personal Insecurities (aka: conceptual barriers)?

Conceptual barriers are the barriers that are right behind the eyes, DEEP within the brain. "Beliefs" which were planted at a very young age and re–enforced over a long period of time – which is why they are so hard to "dislodge".

Use the following exercise to help your team members identify their limiting beliefs and feelings. Then explain how those beliefs and feelings directly impact (positively and negatively) their bottom–line results.

Before we proceed, keep the following quote in mind – it's a powerful reminder of why it is so important to complete sales management activities.

"Successful people DO, what unsuccessful people are not willing to do."
– Unknown

Here are the Four Steps to Overcome Conceptual Barriers:

Step One – Uncover Negative Self–Talk

Ask the employee to tell you what he or she "least" enjoys about each step of the sales management process. Follow up by asking how that particular aspect of the process makes the employee feel.

For example:

- Prospecting/Cold Calling – (feels like I am intruding)
- Asking for the Business – (feels like I am being pushy)
- Cross–Selling/Up–Selling – (feels like I am taking advantage)
- Assumptive Closing – (feels like I am being presumptuous)

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Step Two – Identify Beliefs that are the root source of negative feelings toward sales management practices.

Go back to our prior examples of Old Beliefs that get in the way of our progress in the sales management process:

- Don't talk to strangers
- It is impolite to talk about money
- Never interrupt important people

- Wait to be asked

Help the employee understand and be aware of why it is that they may feel the way they do.

Employees should understand that they feel the way they do for a reason. Once they understand this it can be much easier for them to make a decision to overcome their old belief(s).

Step Three – Turn Limiting Beliefs into Unlimited Possibility!

Illustrate the following to your employee so they can clearly see how their beliefs and feelings ultimately "pre-determine" their outcome.

On one hand:

Positive Beliefs » Positive Feelings » Actions » Positive Results

And on the other hand:

Limiting Beliefs » Negative Feelings » Inaction » Negative Results

So based on the preceding, it's obvious which hand offers the most value – correct?

Step Four – CHOOSE a path together!

Obviously, if an employee is unwilling to work to overcome conceptual barriers, then you should agree that a sales position is not the right fit.

You should either find a more suitable role for the person, or part ways so he/she may pursue a more rewarding opportunity somewhere else.

Let's assume however that the employee seeks to overcome their conceptual barriers and is willing to take ownership of their plan for improvement.

As the leader, you have an important role to play in your employee overcoming their limiting beliefs.

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You are responsible for supporting the employee in three key areas. Once again, they are:

- TEACH – lead by example, reinforce positive actions and behaviors
- COACH – help to improve technique, debrief progress, track results, ensure employee stays on task
- EXPECT – inspect what you expect, hold yourself and your employee accountable for continued improvement and increased results.

In conclusion, ask yourself the following question.

Can you name one person who is a top performer that:

- believed he wouldn't be successful?
- feels she shouldn't be successful?
- does not take the actions necessary for her to become successful?

The answer to each question? "Of course not!" Right?

So by default we must agree that in order for anyone to be successful, he/she must understand what is holding him or her back.

Then, she must be willing to work to overcome obstacles, and choose to proactively follow a corrective action plan.

Finally, he must "execute" the plan.

Through this process he will build new beliefs that will enable him to discard that old and tired, limiting belief.

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