

# SALES PERFORMANCE SPOTLIGHT

## Sales Needs Leadership

There are some who still insist that the best salespeople are “lone wolves” who just somehow figure out how to get the job done and the sale made. However, in past Spotlight articles, we’ve focused on MHI Research Institute findings that clearly show how important teams and collaboration are to successful selling. This month, the focus turns to management and their role in closing the deal.

Recent findings from the *2015 MHI Sales Best Practices Study* reveal that 93 percent of World-Class Sales Performers said their management team is highly effective in helping sales advance opportunities. That assistance is more than just coming in at the 11th hour to add much-needed gravitas or to offer an extra discount. According to Tom Chamberlain, Research Director for MHI Research Institute, the very best sales managers are involved at every stage of the customer’s journey and focused on five key areas: coaching, prioritization, personalization, engagement, and speed.

“World-class sales management starts with coaching excellence, and the key is to provide proactive versus reactive counseling,” says Chamberlain. “If a sales professional comes into your office asking for help at the last minute, it may be a good learning opportunity, but it’s probably too late to save that particular deal.”

The next key area, prioritization, is a crucial element of coaching. In today’s team-selling world, sales professionals will need to call on resources from outside sales to help close the deal: executives, consultants, subject matter experts, etc. Asking for help on deals that stand little chance of closing hurts credibility. Sales managers are instrumental in ensuring those opportunities that need help get it and that resources aren’t squandered on those that stand little chance of closing.

Because sales managers work with so many sales professionals, they’ve seen far more opportunities flow through the funnel than most of the individual contributors they coach. They can offer suggestions to personalize an early proposal for the customer situation to overcome obstacles. Or, they may know “just the thing” that will help the sales professional win the deal.

Of course, sales management can and should be called on to engage in an opportunity when it is warranted. “When a customer CFO wants to speak to your CFO or the customer’s VP of Sales wants to talk to the vendor’s VP, the sales rep should look upon it as an opportunity,” says Chamberlain. “The best sales professionals will use peer-to-peer selling to help ink the deal.” While the sales manager might not be the role that is needed, he or she will be closer to the executive team and can help the sales professional find time for the opportunity on the executive’s schedule.

Finally, not every department “thinks like sales,” and even World-Class Sales Performers have internal barriers and obstacles that get in the way of selling. Sales managers can be that point of escalation for salespeople needing corporate assistance. By tearing down the barriers and helping sales overcome the internal issues, sales management can speed up the sales cycle and keep the funnel flowing. ■

### About this data

Each month the Sales Performance Spotlight delves into one of the best practices of World-Class Sales Performers as revealed in the annual *MHI Sales Best Practices Study*. This research, conducted and analyzed by the MHI Research Institute, represents the world’s largest ongoing study of complex, business-to-business selling and sales management practices. Learn more [here](#).

Our management team is highly effective in helping our sales team advance sales opportunities.

