

THE UNSTOPPABLE SALES TEAM

Sample Chapter

Chapter 1: Start from Where You Are Right Now

"The whole is greater than the sum of its parts" Aristotle, Greek Philosopher

One Thing That Hasn't Changed About Selling

When it comes to growing your sales, many of the executives I meet are under the impression to achieve their revenue targets requires several high-performing sales professionals. While I'll admit that sales superstars can be worth their weight in gold when generating new business, there are other more important considerations.

Suppose you wanted to save money on gas. You could trade in your current vehicle (likely at a loss), buy a new, likely expensive electric car, and immediately cut your fuel costs. But what would be the actual cost of making this shift to avoid paying fuel prices?

- Increased Investment: You'd invest anywhere from \$15k to \$30k more in buying a new electric vehicle, not including a potential loss of value in trading in your existing car.
- Additional Costs: If financing, you'd pay the interest on this additional investment; additionally, if maintenance is required, it is likely to cost more than on a typical combustion vehicle.
- Inconvenience: If you travel any distance, you'd need to plan to ensure you can sustain a charge in your vehicle.

My point isn't to make an argument for or against electric vehicles or the additional benefits they provide for the environment. Instead, I'm demonstrating that sometimes

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investing in the latest and greatest can lead to additional costs that aren't fully understood and that, over the long-term, can wind up costing you more.

For this reason, in my work with global organizations, I always suggest that you build your unstoppable sales team by recognizing all the factors that generate sales. For example:

- Are your sales processes effective at generating new business repeatedly?
- Do you use technology that assists (rather than hinders) the productivity and effectiveness of your sales team?
- Are you aligning the priorities between departments such as Marketing, Business Development, and Customer Service?
- Does your sales team have the skills to sell in the current economy?
- Are you measuring performance indicators individualized to each salesperson (I call this the sales math, which we'll discuss later in the book)?
- Do you have a coaching culture where your sales team is proactively coached and rewarded to elevate their performance?

Building an unstoppable sales team requires far more than hiring a few high performers; it requires the proper structure, processes, skills development, and reinforcement mechanisms to ensure you get the most from your sales team.

In the coming chapters, we will discuss how to build an unstoppable sales team and continue elevating their performance while motivating them to sell, stay, and keep selling. I'll share examples of these companies and dozens of others who use similar approaches to build their sales teams to unstoppable proportions throughout this book.

When I first entered the profession of sales in my mid-twenties, I learned a thing or two about how to build a strong sales team by my sales manager, Bob. A career car salesman, Bob had been in the business for decades, and he worked alongside the dealer principal to

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structure a sales team that was high performing. Of course, everyone in the group received the same training, but Bob treated each salesperson as a unique individual. He individualized the sales metrics, such as the number of cars to sell each month and used proactive one-to-one coaching rather than retroactive ranting (often found behind closed doors in many car dealerships). For example, after initially struggling to move would-be customers from the parking lot to my office to discuss pricing, Bob took the time to sit in on some discussions and demonstrate the best approach.

It was through Bob then I learned several lessons in leading a sales team that I advise all the sales executives and leaders I work with today to apply, namely:

- Hire for fit within the sales team and company culture, rather than strictly based on a sales track record.
- Focus your efforts and time on building up your team rather than constantly looking for better talent.
- Individualize both training and coaching to the person. Not everyone absorbs training lessons and information at the same speed or manner.
- Set individualized goals based on where the salesperson is and what they could achieve.
- Always encourage reviewing past training materials or lessons rather than constantly introducing new ideas or materials. Allow your team to get the fundamentals down before introducing new ideas or concepts.

Let's start by addressing the elephant in the room. Do you need some top sales performers to round out your team? Maybe, but before you consider making this investment of time and money, don't be so quick to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

What You Need Isn't What You Think

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While recently looking at some old photos of my parents, I came across one that showed my mother in a small metal tub on my grandparent's porch. She seemed happy sitting in the tub, even though, as the oldest of six, she was often the last to get bathed; hence the water was well-used water by the time she jumped in. Growing up in the 1940s, her parents knew that you didn't need fresh water to bathe your child if you added some warm water to it.

I'll admit that sharing bathwater is a bit far-fetched in today's terms, but there's an important lesson. We can often achieve our desired outcomes, in this case, a clean child, without starting anew.

Pick up any sales book today, and you'll most likely find recommendations to introduce something new. But, of course, this "something" is often what the author or their company specializes in or sells.

A new approach for selling to challenging buyers.

New technology that will revolutionize how you sell.

A new (and simple) sales system.

There are several vital issues these suggestions of "new" tend to miss.

1. They don't focus on the sales team but rather the "new" solution.
2. They fail to consider the skills and experience of your sales team at present.
3. They don't accommodate your industry, customers, or market.
4. They can cost a lot in terms of money and time.
5. They can be frustrating for your sales team to endure.

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They all fail to address the most crucial component of your sales team, the team itself. If improving and accelerating your sales required introducing something new, everyone would have done it by now. But, instead, I guess that as you read this, you may have just completed some sales training or added new CRM software, and yet you still aren't seeing the results you expect or need.

You need to focus on not introducing something new but instead concentrating on your sales team. Your team decides the extent to which you apply your sales training, how they use your existing sales processes, what improvements they make, and the extent to which they adopt and fit your CRM to their liking.

In my experience, working with sales teams of Fortune 500 and Fortune 1000 companies globally, there are common truths that have always been the case with sales professionals, which reinforces why hiring new talent isn't always the best approach.

Here are three common truths of sales professionals:

1. It has always been challenging to find good sales talent.

When I was young, those who entered the sales profession were typically unskilled and enjoyed working with people. They were often misfits who had tried other careers and enjoyed some of the freedoms and compensation they could achieve working in sales. Today's sales professionals usually arrive with university degrees and are more intentional (and therefore more prepared) to enter a career in sales. As a result, fewer professionals may be in the market, but those come highly educated.

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2. Strong sales performers always seek their next opportunity.

In my mid-twenties, I had my first real experience in sales when I began selling cars. I had the great fortune of working alongside Dan, who had previously worked in a purchasing role and had decided to "come to the other side." His good-natured personality, coupled with his ability to build strong relationships, never rushing the sale, meant that customers continuously came back to see him. After about ten years in his role (measurable to about 24 months in today's younger generations' job tenure terms), Dan decided he needed a new challenge and took the role of assistant sales manager at a different dealership. Good sales talent always seeks to advance their career, challenges, and income.

3. Strong sales performers are Intrapreneurs.

Suppose you've ever owned or run a business. In that case, you'll realize that it takes a particular person to maintain the drive and motivation to keep going, despite the many hills and valleys encountered. In many cases, the freedom of time to set your schedule and choose the income of your choice is a motivating factor behind being an entrepreneur. Strong sales performers are no different. They seek the ability to manage their time, schedule, and income. When any of these factors are limited, their boss or company policies tend to start looking elsewhere.

For this reason, we need to work to ensure our strong sales performers have the independence they seek. Through the hundreds of sales teams, I connect with regularly, I can tell you that this is still a driving force behind entering the sales profession today.

My point is simple. We are better off engaging with and building upon the skills and talent we already have today rather than recruiting a top sales performer (or several top performers) to join our team. Your existing team, although they may not be setting the

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world on fire, have tenure to ensure any investment in their abilities provides a significant return, for example:

- They've proven they are somewhat content in our existing culture
- The role expectations and compensation satisfy their current needs
- They have a good understanding of how we operate as a business
- We have already made a significant investment in their onboarding and development
- They have an existing client or customer base
- Presumably, they have a good grasp on our market and products or services
- We've already achieved a return on our hiring and onboarding investment
- They would be appreciative of more income

You already have a great foundation to build your unstoppable sales team for these reasons—no worries about losing a new star performer; you've invested a fortune to attract and hire. Nevertheless, there will be some points along your team-building journey where hiring will make sense.

Stories from the Sales Floor

While working with a manufacturer of the equipment, the Vice President of Sales asked me what new systems would help his team sell more.

He mentioned some of the more common CRM software brands and asked about my experience with them and if I had any recommendations.

"What you have right now is fine," I responded. He seemed a bit dumbfounded, so I continued.

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"They already have simple methods in place to track their leads and progress with each, so a new CRM at this point would only serve to add more work. So instead, let's get some simple tools into their hands have them apply some of the skills we've been working on, then measure the results."

When I later asked the Vice President why he thought a new CRM software was necessary, he said that a company had recently presented their software to him and suggested integrating it would help his team sell more. It was the silver bullet formula for more sales hard at work.

Building an Unstoppable Sales Team

Around the age of 13, like many boys my age, I literally couldn't get enough to eat. Fortunately, my mother spent weekends cooking and freezing various baked goodies, which I would slowly consume from our deep freezer. However, she always seemed surprised that half as many baked goods were in a container as she had initially packed. Not sure why that would have been.

One day, after craving some peanut butter cookies, I realized that I had eaten the last one about a week prior. Determined to satisfy my craving, I tried eating peanut butter on a spoon, to no avail. As I grabbed the jar for another spoonful, I noticed a peanut butter cookie recipe on the back and decided that making my own was a good idea despite never having done so.

I quickly began throwing ingredients into a bowl and started mixing. As I mixed, I quickly found that the peanut butter was breaking apart and not sticking to itself to form the

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cookie. I decided to drop chunks of my peanut butter concoction on a baking tray and waited patiently for the 17 minutes to pass. I could almost taste those cookies.

Unfortunately, after removing the cookies from the oven, I realized that my small peanut butter chunks had remained and looked nothing like a cookie. I realized that I had inadvertently forgotten to add an egg when I returned to the recipe. A minor oversight, but the result was not satisfying my craving. Never one to give up, I attempted a second batch, ensuring I included an egg this time. The texture seemed much better than the first batch, and convinced this time I would be successful; I began placing spoonfuls of the batter on a freshly cleaned backing sheet. Wanting to compensate for the tiny chunks I had previously cooked, I decided that the single spoonful of peanut butter was not enough to result in a decent-sized cookie, so I used two spoonfuls of batter rather than the one.

The result? As the cookies baked, they grew to a size that filled the entire cookie sheet. So, I ended up with one giant peanut butter cookie.

Building your unstoppable sales team is like baking the perfect peanut butter cookie. You will need to introduce several vital components and do so in a specific order. If you don't, you'll wind up with something that may resemble a strong sales team, but like my cookies, they won't meet your expectations.

There are many components to an Unstoppable Sales Team as we'll discuss throughout this book. The components form the foundation upon which you can improve and accelerate performance. Moreover, they are dynamic rather than static. Although you should work progressively through each stage, you can always revert to earlier stages if circumstances demand. For example, new hires, new technology, new markets, or new divisions can often require changes to your team's structure or processes.

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Let me also be the first to tell you that building an Unstoppable Sales Team is not fast work. It can be difficult at times, take unexpected turns and will likely challenge how you think and behave as the leader of a sales team. Unlike other books on building high-performing sales teams, I'm not about to suggest you can have your unstoppable sales team up and running within a couple of weeks. It takes time to build a strong team, and to evolve as a leader within the team.

The New York Yankees first won the world series in 1923. They've since grasped the title an additional 26 times, with their last win in 2009. It took years for the team to reach the performance levels necessary to win the world series. When you consider the significant turnover in players, it's not surprising (although it is disappointing) that they haven't won since 2009. The Unstoppable Team Framework provides you with all the steps and resources necessary to build an unstoppable sales team, regardless of where you're starting or what changes may lie ahead. Follow this formula, and you'll have a winning team that keeps winning. Something the Yankees have lost sight of in recent years.

Before we go too much farther, let me explain my earlier comment about the time you should expect it to take to build a sales team of unstoppable proportions.

You're In a Marathon, Not a Sprint

Nearly a decade ago, I began working with an organization to build its unstoppable sales team. The Director was desperate after trying multiple other strategies to get her team to work more effectively and generate the sales she expected. After several months of working with the team, we made several significant changes, including changing how the couple communicated, using technology to improve their productivity, and working through several process changes to drive more consistent performance. Within six months, the team had nearly doubled their results, with higher collaboration, camaraderie,

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and sales. Additionally, we put mechanisms in place that we'll discuss in this book that dramatically reduced conflict amongst the team and resulted in the Director spending significantly less time working with the team, resulting in more time available to work on her other priorities.

My point is simple. Can you build an unstoppable sales team in relatively short order, whose performance will continue to improve over time, increasing your sales results and demanding less time? Absolutely.

On the contrary, it might also take you longer. It depends on where your team is at and the degree of effort, you'll be able to expend in implementing my recommendations. The more time you dedicate now, the less time it will take to experience your expected results.

Why might it take you longer? One simple word. Change. Success in any endeavor will require change, and the degree to which you are willing and able to make the changes will determine how quickly you experience results. While recently watching my oldest son play hockey, another parent from his team mentioned how Matthew was so quick on skates, often skating around most of the other players as he rushed the other team's net. I chuckled as I recalled his early days of skating, only six years earlier, where he would lay on the ice and make snow angels, which absolutely no motivation to skate. Why such a dramatic swing from the only kid not moving to one of the fastest skaters on his team. Change. We began sending Matthew to power skating lessons; hockey schools; and encouraged him to work hard at his skating. Both my wife and I were willing to put in the time and money to try and help Matthew; he was well as amendable to the changes we introduced and continued to work hard. Today he is well on his way to being unstoppable on the ice.

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I can tell you from experience the difference between excellent and unstoppable may only be a matter of introducing and adopting changes. Of course, the changes and the degree to which the changes will impact day to day will vary for each team, but the difference is what stands between you and the sales team you desire.

Stories from the Sales Floor

A client of mine in the insurance industry has been slowly acquiring other branches. Initially, his approach was to find branches in a small market with potential that were profitable. He would then acquire them, rebrand them and continue to look for the next acquisition opportunity. After a while, however, he recognized that some branches sold more in a smaller market than others.

While discussing his observations one day, I suggested that he needed to bring the sales teams together regularly to discuss what was working. "Think of it as a sales team brainstorming session," I suggested. When he asked how this might help, I responded, "it's simple. Sales professionals are competitive, and when they hear about the successes others have, it motivates them to try new approaches out for themselves."

He began bringing the teams together several times a year, using the time to update them on new acquisitions and other updates. However, the underlying goal was to get the teams to share what's working in their market and help share best practices. Within a year of introducing these meetings, his sales had grown double digits, without any other changes.

The kinds of changes you're likely to encounter will differ from what you expect. Sure, you're going to make changes in internal and external communications, processes, skills, and technology, but there are other deep-rooted changes you'll need to address. Most

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commonly these will fall into the areas of sales culture, team collaboration and skills building.

These three areas underly your sales team's ability to reach unstoppable levels and you'll find them referred to several times throughout this book. Furthermore, they are the foundation upon which you'll build your team, as any instability or gaps here will lead to your entire effort unraveling.

When we built a new garage a few years ago, I initially focused on garage size and construction. Next, I focused on whether we'd use 2x4 or 2x6 walls to build the roof ourselves or order pre-built trusses and what exterior materials we'd use. After meeting with a builder to discuss our plans, he asked how we planned to construct the foundation. I thought about it for a minute, then said, "well, we will use concrete." He laughed and told us to call after we had a foundation in place. Although I was frustrated with his response, I realized why the contractor laughed when we met with a concrete foundation expert.

Upon meeting with the foundation expert, he quickly extinguished my idea of a simple concrete slab. Instead, he informed us of several other vital steps we'd need to take, which required more time and money. For example, we would need to pour footings before the floor, add a re-bar to reinforce the base, and add insulation if we expected the floor to maintain heat. When I told him we were going to pour a slab, he laughed (wondering if there is a trend here) and suggested a simple slab would crumble like a deck of cards at the first sign of any weight on the roof; not to mention the floor would heave and crack at the first sign of frost.

You get my point. Without a strong and adequately constructed foundation, all efforts you put into building your sales team will be futile.

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Scale Sales Faster Starting from Where You Are Right Now

It bears mentioning that if you don't put effort into building up your sales team, you'll likely continue to lose top talent and struggle to meet sales targets, if at all. So, like my parents used to say, before a challenging exam, you need to "put in the work" if you want to see results.

But don't let this deter you. You won't need to wait until you have worked through all eight components before you experience higher sales. It's the opposite. Once you start building your sales team, you'll see immediate results.

However, there's another bonus to rolling up your sleeves and working to build the team. You can scale your sales much faster. Why? Because you're starting with a team that knows you, your company, its market, competitors, and past practices. Starting from where you are, with what you have, already puts you well out in front of those who pick up this book and are starting to build a new sales team. Sure, your employees might not all be at the levels you want them to be, and there may be some debate amongst the troops, but fear not, you are in good hands and in the best possible position to accelerate your journey to building an unstoppable team.

Referring to my earlier mention around my oldest son playing hockey, he moves up a division every two years as he ages. What this means is that in some years, depending on the age of the kids he plays with, most of his team from the previous year is retained, whereas other years, he might be joining a team that is almost made up entirely of new, and not familiar with each other, players.

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Which of these two teams wins more games? It's always the team that retains most of its players as they have familiarity with the game, rules, umpires, and, most importantly, with each other. They know and play to each other's strengths. Moreover, they know the plays that the coach expects to see and the feedback he'll provide. So, in essence, starting with what you have gives you most of the foundational elements we described earlier, with the benefits of knowing what you're selling, who you're selling it to, and who else is selling something similar.

With this said, let's jump into building your unstoppable sales team. On the next page, we'll get started with the proper structure.