



## Valuable Advice for Those Who Would Be Leader

Tom Gunter has spent most of his life in sales: Scott Paper, Frito-Lay Canada, Molson Canada, and now as vice-president of sales for ConAgra Foods in Toronto. Tom has eight directors of sales who report to him, and each of them is responsible for four to six account managers. Tom has lots of good advice for aspiring sales leaders. The following are some of Tom's comments:

- *Managing change.* When you must change a culture, you have to create stability and put the appropriate structures and processes in place to succeed. The biggest challenge is getting some people to understand the importance of change, and then training them so they can make the change. The ones who can't get to where you want them may have to go elsewhere.
  - *Plateaued salespeople.* Every company has a number of people who don't want to move up in the organization, and you need those steady performers as long as they are open to new concepts and ideas. But, if they have lost their motivation, you must have an open and honest talk with them about where they fit and let them decide if they want to stay or not. Some may become remotivated and get excited about helping someone else develop into the company's next senior executive.
  - *Sales meetings.* Attendees must be aware of the preparation required and the decisions to be made at the meeting. In addition, the facilitator, timekeeper, and note-taker should be briefed on their roles and responsibilities. If a meeting room is unfamiliar or there are materials to set up, the manager should arrive early to prepare. This ensures that the meeting starts on time, as starting late shows disrespect to the participants.
  - *Coaching.* You should involve the salesperson when delivering feedback. You must offer praise where due, but rather than spout criticism, you
- are better to ask questions that create a dialogue about possible ways to improve the result of what was seen or experienced.
  - *Alcohol and drug abuse.* If a salesperson has identified the problem and is seeking help to deal with it, you are required to provide employee assistance to help them to overcome the problem. If they fail to acknowledge the problem and continue with the abuse, in spite of your efforts to offer assistance, you should move to termination. It's always advisable to seek legal counsel and involve human resource professionals in these situations as they are delicate, and can put your organization in jeopardy if handled poorly.
  - *Harassment.* Personalities and outcomes of harassment are very diverse and each situation requires a different course of action. If a salesperson reports harassment, a sales manager must reserve judgment, listen actively, take many notes, and begin an investigative process. The outcome could include third party counselling, a meeting with the two individuals, a written apology, suspension of duties, or termination.
  - *Termination.* Termination should be the last step after all other options are exhausted, but sometimes it is inevitable. If the employee leaves and feels as though he was treated fairly and respectfully, even if he does not agree with the assessment, it reflects well on the company and manager. It will be recognized internally, by other staff, and externally by potential hires. Your organization will be known for its good practices.
  - *Final thoughts.* A great employee is focused on his or her own development, whereas a great leader is focused on the development of others. Some final words of wisdom: be clear and consistent, be honest, maintain a sense of humour, and most important, never ask someone to do something that you wouldn't do yourself.

Source: Personal interview with Tom Gunter, vice-president of sales, ConAgra Foods, conducted by Lisa Violo, Brock University MBA student, November 4, 2005; personal interview with H.F. (Herb) MacKenzie, August 9, 2006.

of opportunity within the company. Other frequently cited reasons for plateauing included not being managed adequately, being bored, being burned out, and having economic needs already met. These reasons were among the highest ranked regardless of whether the sales force comprised