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# When Salespeople Fail, Blame Management

by LANDY CHASE

**Question for you business executives: Who's responsible for the behavior — and professionalism — of your salespeople in the marketplace? If they don't represent you in the way you would prefer, is it their fault, or yours? Perhaps the answer lies in a recent personal experience I can share.**

**M**y neighbors, a very nice family we'll call the Joneses (not their real name), acquired their first pet, a Labrador retriever we'll call Spot (not his real name) last year. Spot arrived in the neighborhood with impeccable credentials — AKC, good pedigree, etc. As the owner of a Lab myself, I can attest to the breed's intelligence and its ability to be trained. In spite of his pedigree, however, our friend Spot has developed the following habits in his first year of life in our neighborhood:

- Barking, loudly and incessantly, at all hours of the day and night.
- Making daily trips to my front yard to use the bathroom.
- Digging holes in said yard on a regular basis.
- Periodically knocking over my trash can to rummage for groceries.
- Ignoring (read: doesn't understand) basic commands such as "no," "stop" and "down."

Recently, Spot moved from "misdemeanor" offenses to two "felonies," at least in my book. They were:

- Grand Larceny, i.e., the theft of a freshly cooked 22-pound Christmas turkey cooling upon my patio deck on the evening of December 22, 2002 (for reasons I don't understand, friends seem to find this extremely funny), and

- Breaking and Entering, i.e., lunging through the open window of my parked car through the driver-side window to steal a bag containing my just-purchased hot lunch. (I was an eyewitness to this crime.)

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## Placing Blame Where It Belongs

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You might think that I have an intense dislike of Spot, but that is not the case. I don't blame Spot in the slightest for his behavior. Instead, I blame his owners. As in the vast majority of cases involving training, the problem here is management — specifically, a family who makes a decision to have a dog but doesn't bother to spend time training it and then leaves the rest of us to live with the fallout.

And so it is with employers and their salespeople. Most salespeople come to work with an outstanding pedigree — a natural ability to be excellent at their work with the proper training. However, as in my example, most employers even today continue to hire salespeople, provide them with woefully inadequate training, and then, unbelievably, send them out into the marketplace to represent them. What is the end result of this lack of investment? You already know the answer. As business owners, you and I see these people all the time. We see nice, well-intentioned in-

dividuals who know just enough to be “dangerous.” So they struggle unnecessarily and work hard and don’t see results and get discouraged and quit. Six months later, the company who sent them sends out a new fresh face and the cycle repeats itself. We see people who have everything they need to be successful, except for the fact that they work for an employer that doesn’t understand — or accept — the responsibility for training their people. In short, we see a person who needs to hitch their wagon to a winner, not continue wasting their time and talent with a loser. If you’re training your people properly, this won’t happen to you. If you’re not, and you probably aren’t, you’ll be poorly represented by an individual who — like my canine friend Spot — wants to do well, but just doesn’t know how.

### Seeing the Value in Training

Many privately-owned companies make the statement “we can’t afford the investment” when the topic of sales training comes up. This usually translates to “we could afford it, but we don’t want to spend the time and money required.” For those of you who adhere to this lame excuse: I could make a strong argument that it is ethically wrong for you to offer employment to an individual without having made an adequate commitment to train them properly. How does that sound?

What does it take today to properly train a salesperson so that they will represent you well — and not be an embarrassment to the neighbors? It needn’t require a huge investment on your part. Some fundamentals:

- Treat product (technical) training and skills training as two separate and independent learning centers. Get the salesperson up to speed on technical expertise before focusing on sales skills. They will learn how to sell what you market much more quickly

***For product training, consider partnering your new salesperson with some of your technical support or service people for a few days.***



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if they understand what it is first.

- For product training, consider partnering your new salesperson with some of your technical support or service people for a few days. If appropriate, let them go into the field on some service calls. In addition to giving them a good basic indoctrination into your product or service areas, it also does wonders for building relationships within the company.
- If you cannot afford to hire a qualified outside resource to come in and train your salespeople, send them to public seminars that are offered in your area. Attend with them, and have a debriefing session following the event to discuss and implement new ideas. (There is absolutely no excuse for not making at least this level of investment in your people.)
- Start building a “corporate library” of audio and video programs on selling skills. Some of the best minds in this profession, for a few dollars, are willing to give you their very best ideas to use over and over and over. There is a wealth of material in the marketplace on topics such as selling, marketing and time management.
- Finally, and most important, “inspect what you expect.” Get out in the field with your salespeople and work with them. Show them how you would handle a sales call. In other words, show some leadership.

I would like to continue this column, but I’ve just been interrupted by the doorbell. It turns out that the Joneses daughters have come over to our home with a surprise to show my kids — a brand-new, cute-as-a-button second puppy! This one is a Golden Retriever.

I can hardly contain my excitement. □

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