

# GROOMING THE TRIBE

PERFORMANCE ENHANCING TOOLS FOR SALES MANAGERS

EDITORIAL | JEFF THULL





## JEFF THULL

For the past 22 years, **Jeff Thull**, CEO/President of Prime Resource Group, has gained a reputation for his expertise in the arena of sales and marketing strategies for companies involved in complex sales. His wealth of real-world experience has made him a leading authority and valued advisor for executive teams of major companies worldwide. Contact Information: Prime Resource Group, Inc.; **800-876-0378**; [primeresource.com](http://primeresource.com).

When was the last time you:

- ✓ Received an account update full of glaring generalities?
- ✓ Gave in to a salesperson, lowered the price and still lost the business?
- ✓ Counted on the 'superstar' to hit a home run and found out he struck out?

Most of us have experienced these frustrating situations and have had to deal with the consequences. In today's marketplace of increased complexity, constant pressure is placed on the sales team to deliver the numbers, but too often sales managers are expected to select, shape and coach their team to excellence, with few tools.

As a result, they often fall short of giving the quality support that is required to develop a **team of top-performing professionals**.

There are many challenges in leading a winning sales team. Our research has identified some of the key challenges that sales managers commonly face. Take a look at the list, and ask yourself: How are you currently approaching these situations and are you getting the results you are looking for?

### Reversing the 80/20 Rule

"The sales results of my top performers run significantly higher than those of my average producers. Our team pretty much reflects the '80/20' rule."

It may be a challenge to build a sales force of all "20 percenters" but doubling this group is certainly within reason. The good news is that the top 20 percent are not doing anything superhuman, and their behavior patterns that impact their success can be defined and replicated. Accepting that 20 percent of your salespeople bring in 80 percent of your revenue is like accepting that 80 percent of your manufacturing machines are, on the average, producing one-fourth of your most productive products. That output level would never be acceptable — it would be absurd.

Building a uniform selling system is required in order to define the quantity and quality of activities for individuals to produce at top performing levels. This system will enable managers to monitor and measure improvements in the team's performance.

### Severe Pricing Pressure

"Even though we provide a highly technical and complex solution, we find that our prospects, and even our most knowledgeable customers, are forcing us to compete as a commodity with severe pricing pressures."

The more complex the situation becomes, the more customers and salespeople alike try to simplify things. To the customer, the simplest differentiator is price. And in the absence of a quality decision process to help them understand the value of your products and services, they will tend to focus on price and use it as the criterion when making their decision. Your customers should be looking at their situation in ways they have not previously considered, and quantifying the consequences of not incorporating your solution. Your role is to guide them through a collaborative decision process, much like a doctor would do as they diagnose a patient. For example, if you help your customer/patient come to an understanding of the severity of their situation, they will be willing to invest in resolving their problem.

### Resistance to Changing Behavior

"I realize that I'm supposed to be the coach, but even after repeated coaching sessions, my salespeople keep bringing issues to my desk that should have been easily handled without me. They just don't get it!"

They get it, but if you keep doing it for them, they have no incentive to change.

Go beyond proactive to interactive. A proactive manager gives the salesperson direction and a plan, assumes the salesperson will execute effectively, and waits for the results to roll in — management by assumption. By the time the results are reported, it's too late to provide productive guidance. It's like an athletic coach handing out the game plan, asking if there are any questions, and then heading back to his office to work on administrative details as the team takes the field.

To use an interactive approach, first, reach agreement with the salesperson on an action plan that defines specific behaviors in terms of the quantity and quality of their sales activity. Then interact with the salesperson regularly and "course correct" as you move forward.

Sales leaders who can meet these challenges will replace frustration with confidence and direction, not only for themselves, but for the individuals on their team. The result — a high-performing team producing more profitable and predictable revenue streams. 