



It is a myth that the primary responsibility of a sales manager is to achieve targets.

◆ ROSHAN L JOSEPH, AUTHOR, *SALES PEOPLE DON'T LIE*

**TEAM
BUILDING**

Team first

Often in our sales training programmes, the question is asked, “I know what the front-line sales person is supposed to do. What, if anything, do their bosses do?”

To answer this, we made a number of field visits to observe the role of the sales boss, while travelling with the front-line salesperson. Some of the findings were:

- It was obvious that the supervisor was happy to be visiting customers again. The journey to the appointment was regaled with stories of how the customer was one of the important accounts when the supervisor was in the frontline position.
- During the meeting, the salesperson took a secondary role while the supervisor led the discussions, including the physical booking of the customer’s order.
- The ride back was a glowing account of how easy it was to book orders and a recommendation that the salesperson should get more sales.

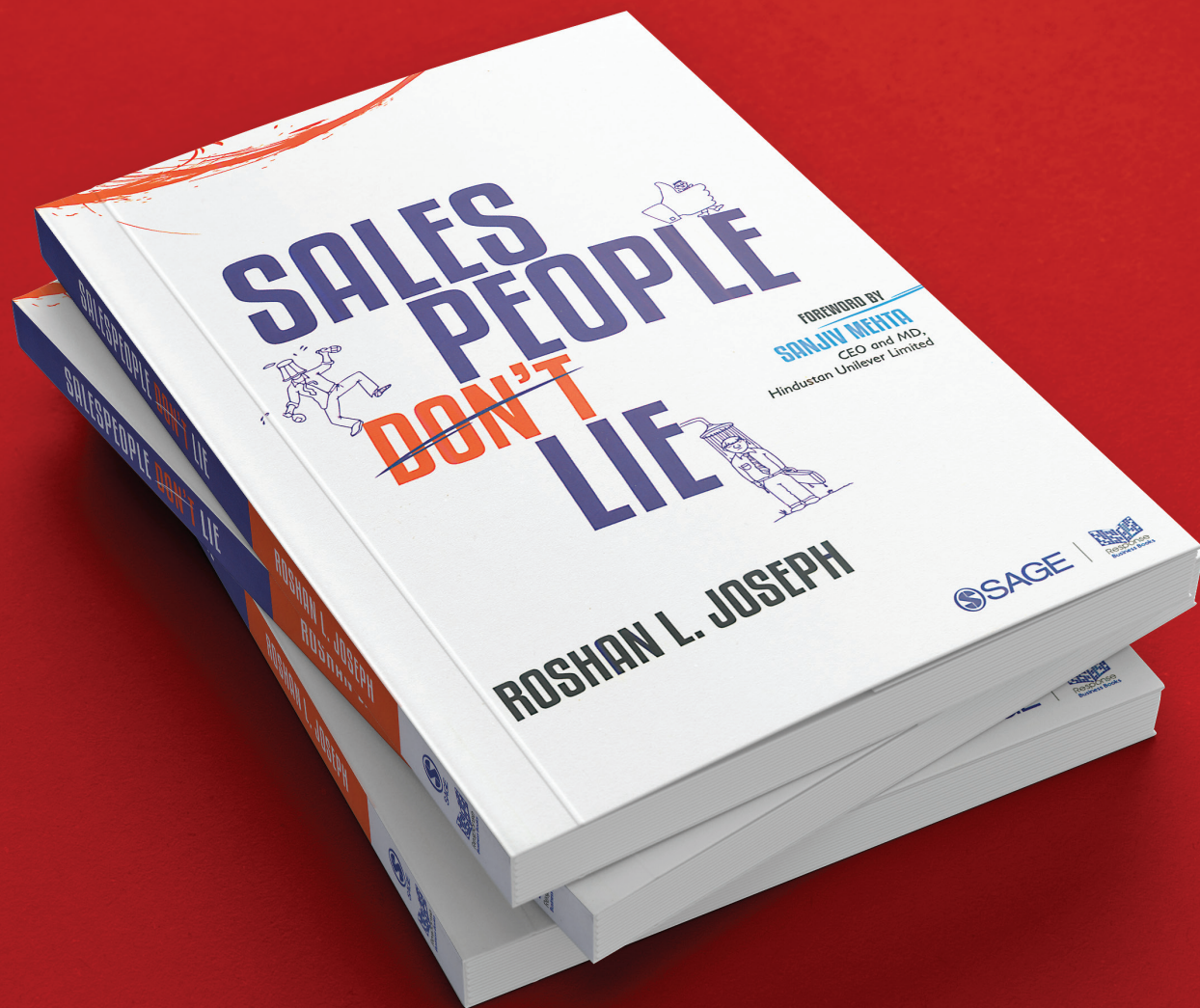
■ There was no doubt that the boss felt he was the superior salesperson. Some sales people lost no time to compliment their boss on such inimitable sales skills. The boss purred with nostalgia for a time that had passed.

So, seriously, what do sales bosses do that is unique and contributory to the success of the company?

When sales bosses were quizzed with the same question, a majority spoke about how they are pivotal to the company making targets. A minority of them spoke of team building, reviewing performance, and monitoring compliance with sales policies. A miniscule number spoke of developing their team. That is the pity. The one, non-duplicating contribution to the company is understood and accepted by few, if not none of the supervisory staff.

Interestingly, this supervisory level is higher paid than the front line, a kind of insurance to the front line, missing out on their targets.

The shift in the world view of the supervisory group from being in ‘charge of sales’ to being in ‘charge of those responsible for sales’ is the big paradigm move. This is a point Simon



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Sinek makes effectively in his leadership videos. It is from worrying about the month-end sales numbers to being concerned about the capability of the team members achieving their individual goals and targets. Put simply, developing their team to meet targets.

Easier said than done?

When teams of sales managers were polled, 85 per cent of them said they diligently developed their team members. Not one could produce any written evidence of having done this. How come, such a major input of developing a team member is 'all in the mind', while all else is put down for real-time scrutiny?

Perhaps, is there nothing significant to put down?

Developing the person for the next-level job is not a common practice. The Army has a well-designed and spelt-out system that is responsible for smooth transition between levels. Sadly, industry expects every one promoted to have watched their boss long enough to know what to do in the new job.

Most people hanker after the elusive promotion, imagining that paradise lies waiting. They say that honeymoons do not last long. Neither does the glow after a promotion. The onset of an elevation is met by strained relationships with one's colleagues, whose eyes betray that they were the more deserving. If only they had less scruples about flattery, they could well have been the lucky ones.

Before one has handled the poorly disguised hate, the new job responsibilities overwhelm the receding joys of the new position. After that, it

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becomes a series of keeping the head above water, as one emergency after another teaches lessons only life is licensed to instruct. In between all this, post promotion dissonance, one yearns to be back at the old job, where success was a birthright.

Being a boss, to those one had left behind with the promotion, becomes the hardest part. How does one develop ex-team mates without appearing bossy? The temptation is to avoid situations that might be awkward. Developing the subordinates becomes the casualty.

Most management skills are simple and do not necessarily get complex with higher levels of authority. This gives rise to a major concern of obsolescence. If the junior excels in the skills that the boss is proud of and holds proprietary, how long before the management notices the more cost-efficient option? Why develop the team and create problems that need not be?

PSR Mavawala was a sales manager who had a hard time understanding the role of developing his subordinates. He understood the power of information. He would assiduously corner all the mails he received from the head office regarding sales strategies and information on promotions and advertising. His team of sales officers were in the dark about all such matters. The sales branch was performing on life support. Competition was gaining ground. His boss from the head office called to express his displeasure. He rated Mavawala as marginal and put him on red alert.

Mavawala, in turn, rated all his sales officers as marginal too. His logic was hard to contest. "If I am rated poorly, it stands to reason that my team too performed poorly. If they had outstanding results, mine would not have been poor." Definitely, a case of not being clear about the concept of developing the subordinate.

The concept of delegation of work assumes that work delegated to a team member is to be unsupervised only once the boss has done enough hand-holding. Also, he or she has to be confident that all aspects of the job have been fully understood, and the individual concerned is competent to conduct the activities without any assistance from the boss. Unfortunately, the modus operandi in sales is often personality based. Not based on a given and accepted process.

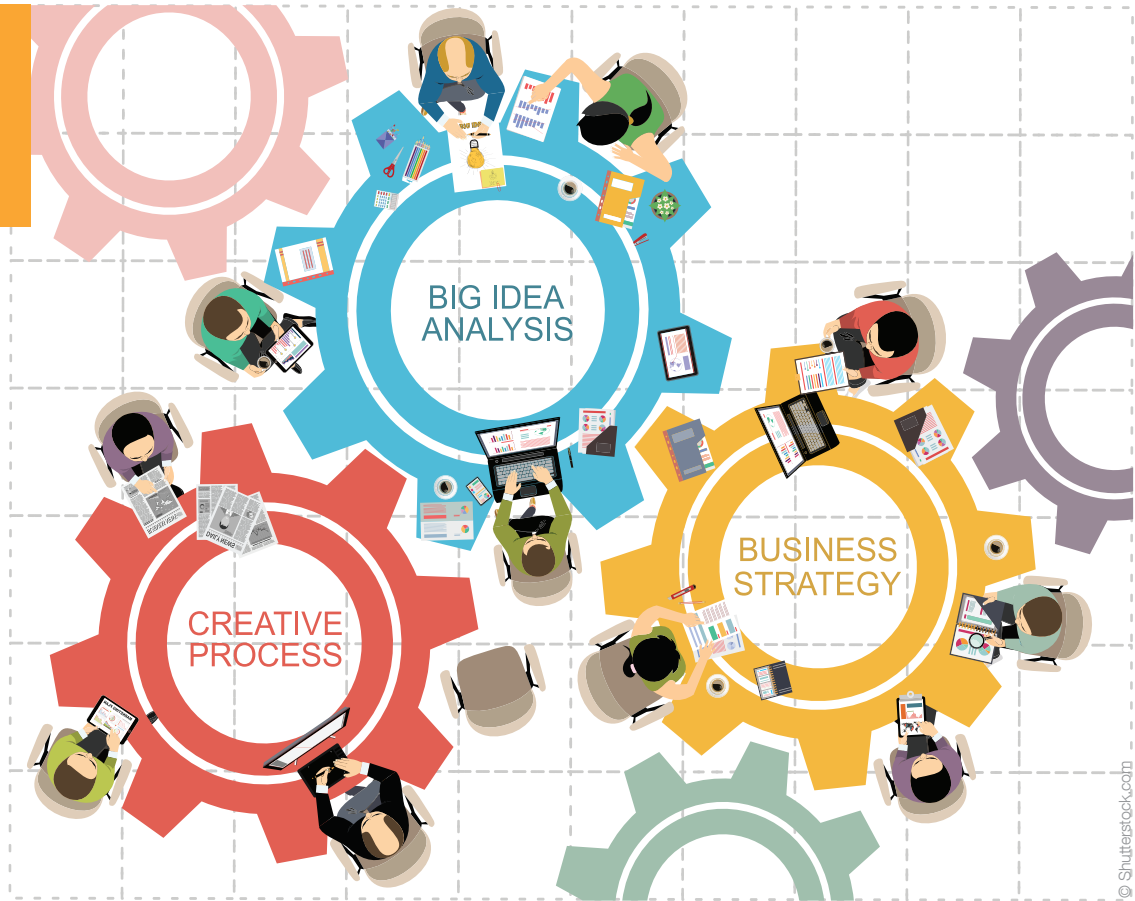
The role of relationship in aspects of making the sales is so rampant that even if the boss is to be the role model, the gap of a real-time relationship between the rookie and the seasoned customer is a long way off. The recruit is at a loss to emulate the boss' years of comradeship and the performance suffers. The boss too finds it hard to develop the gap in the team member. Development becomes an unfinished job, for a long time.

Cheeran James was a flamboyant salesperson and as a branch manager, managed to sell to unwilling distributors without any rancour. Distributors who bought excessive stock also found that James followed up the primary sales with powerful support and they were making money. Imagine when James was promoted out

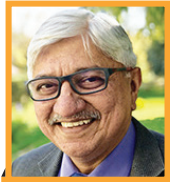


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TEAM BUILDING



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of the branch, C Ommen, who was the replacement branch manager, had a hard time getting the same distributors to place orders, even to 40 per cent of what James had sold. In frustration, Ommen raised his voice to say: “You had no problem giving huge orders to Mr James, why are you, now, resisting?”

To which the distributor responded with a broad smile, “Aah, sir, giving Mr James an order was such a pleasure!”

While there is definitely a role relationship plays in lubricating sales, it becomes contra-productive when it replaces a robust sales process. Anyone that is new can pick up a sales process in a short span of time and still do well. In time, of course, the wheels of relationship building will fall into place and the newcomer could well exceed the boss in performance.

Developing one’s junior to perform better than one could is the goal of all development.

Companies that understand this and believe they must facilitate this process provide help to ensure this happens. It is a sign of efficiency. Such firms also promote a company-wide problem-solving technique so that regardless of the level of hierarchy, the way of looking at solving a problem is uniform. Imagine if the boss and junior both approach vexing issues the same way.

Developing one’s team is not an added bonus to what the boss achieves. It is a major part of the responsibility. Meeting the consolidated sales targets of the team is really not the prime responsibility of the bosses, but a measure of how good they are in taking care of those in their charge. Potential at this level is assessed by the leadership provided to make the sales team self-sufficient and capable of meeting the performance goals.

A well-laid-out system of selling is a priority. Without it, development will continue to be haphazard and personality-based. Sales must have a discipline and be governed by a professional code. This is no age of the hawkers. **■**