



## The Frontline Sales Manager: Dual Personas

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### Strategic Decision

Frontline sales managers have the toughest job in sales. They are the critical juncture between the customer, the salesperson and the organization. Success demands that they wear many hats: mentor, trainer and business manager. Structured sales management training that focuses on sales management competencies is often required.

#### Strategic Issue:

What are the attributes, competencies and skills required for sales management?

*Strategic Issue: A complex question that requires research, data, perspective, knowledge and context to answer*

### Different Skill Sets

Rub your stomach and pat your head. Sounds simple, but it requires the brain to simultaneously perform two very different functions. Being a frontline sales manager is like that. Developing salespeople requires one set of management skills, while being a business leader demands an entirely different set.

### A Rock and a Hard Place

The frontline sales manager has long been recognized as one of the toughest, yet most critical jobs in B2B sales. These sales managers are caught between the political rock of management and the hard place of field sales. They are at the “front line” where salespeople and customers meet and where the major work of the sales organization happens. Effective frontline sales management is key to many crucial functions: sales performance, strategy execution, employee development and retention, customer satisfaction, loyalty and revenue growth. The frontline sales manager is the last stop for communicating strategy and enabling employees to succeed. Their strategic position makes them the main driver of business results.

As if their roles weren’t challenging enough, organizations often promote their top performing salespeople to management while doing little to train or develop them. Consequently, sales managers are left to figure out how to succeed on their own. They may replicate how they were managed or rely on informal and inconsistent mentoring by their managers. While most companies acknowledge the critical role of the frontline sales manager, few companies excel at management development. The frontline sales manager must be able to develop customer relationships, optimize territories, manage budgets, select, train, lead and reward their team. As a conduit for information flowing



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between sales leadership and the field, they keep the sales force aligned with company goals.

## Dual Personas

The successful frontline sales manager has two distinct personas, one as an expert in customer management and the other as a business leader. While customer management comes more naturally for managers because they were often successful salespeople, becoming a business leader requires that they learn new competencies.



*Customer Management Expert:* Frontline sales managers must be viewed and respected by their sales teams as masters of customer management. That’s why most managers come from the ranks of successful salespeople. However, as a sales manager, they are responsible for developing their sales teams’ skills and promoting the consistent use of defined sales processes. This includes capturing and reporting opportunity status in the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. Managers who fail to follow the process or refuse to use CRM encourage those behaviors in their teams.

Frontline sales managers also must maintain and improve their product knowledge if they are to be viewed as a knowledge asset by their team. The introduction of new products or capabilities requires the manager to learn them and help the salesperson master these capabilities as well. Managers who do not emphasize their own product knowledge and market intelligence can’t expect their salespeople to excel in these competencies either.

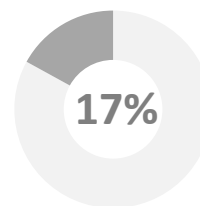
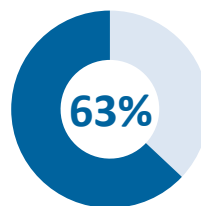
In complex sales, relationships power the connections between multiple decision makers and the sales team. Just as sales needs to have multiple relationships within a customer’s organization, buyers want multiple relationships within a provider. This usually starts with the sales manager. When buyers have an issue, they want someone who is responsive and has the authority to act. Without getting caught up in day-to-day customer management details, frontline sales managers must be connected to the organization’s most important customers and engaged with their team’s top prospects.

*Business Leader:* The frontline sales manager often needs to learn new competencies to perform as a business leader. In addition to managing their organization and providing sales support, they are called on to execute management processes

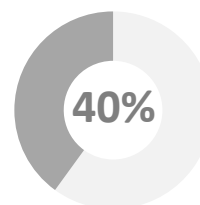
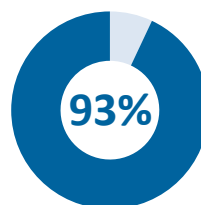
## Strategic Data

-  World-Class Sales Organizations
-  All Respondents

*“In an average month, our sales managers definitely spend adequate time coaching each individual on the sales team.”*



*“Our sales managers are always held accountable for ensuring the accuracy of our sales forecast.”*



World-Class Sales Organizations recognize the importance of frontline sales managers and their role in coaching and developing the sales team. Just as the salesperson follows the behaviors of their sales manager, frontline sales managers follow the lead of sales management.

SOURCE: 2013 Miller Heiman Sales Best Practices Study



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such as funnel analysis, forecasting and other aspects of business reporting. These are activities they may have watched their former managers perform, but they usually don't have the experience of direct involvement.

Managing people and maintaining a balanced set of territories are new competencies for the frontline sales manager. The recruiting, hiring and on-boarding of new salespeople often requires them to collaborate with HR and learn how to screen, interview, select and onboard new salespeople. Being a frontline sales manager may also call for putting a salesperson on an improvement plan or replacing a chronically poor performer. This is an area in which the high-performing salesperson is unlikely to have experience.

Frontline sales managers are responsible for maintaining a balance between territories in both revenue and opportunity. While they may not be involved in the creation of the compensation plan, they must leverage it to drive behaviors and results from their team. Local discretion regarding quota allocation gives the manager the ability to smooth territory inconsistencies, but they must avoid any appearance of favoritism. No one is closer than the frontline sales manager to the opportunities and risks associated with each territory. Working with salespeople to develop a plan to achieve quota requires looking at territory/account opportunity, quota, compensation plan and activities required to achieve their goals. They must set and enforce the standards and expectations for performance, activity levels, sales process utilization and CRM compliance.

Management execution is a new requirement for the frontline sales manager. Each month, as part of the sales cadence, they must review the performance and determine the forecast for each salesperson then submit their team forecast/funnel to their direct manager. A thorough review of each salesperson's opportunities and their progress towards their goals challenges the manager to objectively assess opportunities and the salesperson's ability to close them. The political realities of being a frontline sales manager now come into play. As a top-performing salesperson, they could stand behind their number. As a sales manager, they are held to a higher level of scrutiny. A healthy sales team achieves quota through the balanced contribution of a well-managed team, not just the performance of a couple superstars.

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## Teaching the Teacher

Frontline sales managers often must be taught how to coach salespeople, while also learning the new skills they need to succeed as a business manager. Most organizations fail to do either in a conscious or productive way. Breakdowns in forecast accuracy, concerns with funnel integrity and inconsistent performance are all indicators of inconsistent frontline sales manager performance. This is not just an issue with new managers, but a reflection of the sales management culture.

World-Class Sales Organizations don't leave frontline sales management training to chance. The success of too many

vital processes, such as a new product launch, new technology adoption and sales process compliance, relies on the performance of frontline sales managers. These managers should act as proctors in product and sales training, and special training modules need to be created to teach the sales manager how to coach salespeople in the use of the sales concepts.

In addition to sales and product training, modules must be created to teach management execution concepts and processes such as talent management, territory optimization and business management. A high dose of entrepreneurship



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is a valuable asset in a frontline sales manager, but getting the sales organization to execute consistently requires the

same degree of structured processes and training for frontline sales managers as it does for the salesperson.

*About the Miller Heiman Research Institute: MHRI is a research organization dedicated to improving the performance and productivity of complex B2B sales organizations. We help members develop and hone sales strategies by providing thought-leading research, critical analysis, benchmarking against World-Class Sales Organizations and customized insight to their strategic issues through our advisory services. Through our extensive research into the best practices, strategies and decision frameworks of World-Class Sales Organizations, we help our clients apply these insights to their organization through published research, keynotes and presentations as well as analyst inquiry.*

*Contact our Director of Member Experience or call 775-284-9035.*