

How should you manage your top achievers and revenue closers?

This week Caroline Franczia of UpperCut first looks into the secret of the elite Navy Strike Fighter Tactics Instructor school that opened in 1969, more commonly known as the ‘Top Gun’ training program to draw the parallels with revenue top achievers and the required skills to manage, train, develop and retain such category of risk-taking hot-shot elite.

We’re talking about that one person who blows your mind with ideas for pipeline generation, who has no fear to go after the biggest deals, the person who has enough ambition to cover the entire team and more. The one you cannot imagine to do without. The person whose self-confidence and borderline arrogance get under your skin.

Bringing Maverick and Goose to life to discuss how to handle your top sales rep, your overachiever but also, the one you don’t know how to control.

“Don’t screw around with me Maverick. You’re a hell

of an instinctive pilot. Maybe too good. I'd like to bust your butt but I can't." - Stinger

It has come to my attention that in most companies, we refer to that person as an Alpha when they are a guy, and a Diva when they are a woman. I am not even making that up. It's true. I've heard it.

In case some of you are wondering who the best is, they are up here on this plaque. Do you think your name will be on that plaque? - Viper

"Yes, Sir." - Maverick

"That's pretty arrogant, considering the company you're in." - Viper

"Yes, Sir." - Maverick

"I like that in a pilot." - Viper

Whether your top achiever is male or female is not the question but think rather how to efficiently manage that person so that they keep on consistently overachieving does require skills and talent. How do you not fall into micromanagement when you notice that to achieve, they tend not to respect the rules? Or how do you not fall into complete lack of management by closing your eyes on everything, especially when they prove that if they did not break the rules... they would not have brought you one of the largest deals of the year... or even, of the decade.

“It’s time for the big one.” – Goose

“You up for this one, Maverick?” – Iceman

“Just a walk in the park, Kazansky.” – Maverick

Often, because of their genius approach and because their numbers back them up they are quickly forgiven, even by the top management. Most of their peers forget that they don’t fit in the lines, that they don’t fill out the CRM as they should or that they have a special bond with legal and sales operations. As long as they are not toxic and people enjoy working with them everything is just fine. Until they are not anymore and risk putting the company’s future in jeopardy with a side letter or worse.

“You’re everyone’s problem. That’s because every time you go up in the air you’re unsafe. I don’t like you because you’re dangerous.” – Iceman

So how do you manage that top achiever? My advice is to go back to the Maslow Pyramid and sales basic needs: they are driven by money or/and recognition. And that’s it.

“Remember, boys, no points for second place.” – Slider

If someone steps out of line, make it have an impact on their commissions, if they share their knowledge and skills with others, give him or her recognition. Although some people may tell you to alternate carrot and stick attitude, I am a

big believer in making anyone and especially your Top Achiever responsible for their actions.

“Maverick, you just did an incredibly brave thing. (Pause) What you should have done was land your plane! You don’t own that plane! The taxpayers do! Son, your ego is writing checks your body can’t cash!” – Stinger

Now the toughest part when managing such individuals relies on retaining and developing these talents. Challenging them by giving them tough accounts, bigger quotas, pushing them to the extreme is not a way of establishing a long term relationship, in fact, it might be a way to make them leave. However, for some reason, it is often what the leadership is asking of the Top Achievers, to consistently bring more, since they are the locomotive of the revenue.

Get to know what they want to do next in their career, get to know what drives them, maybe at the moment it is just money and working tough accounts is what they like, or maybe, you could retain them in other ways. I recommend having quarterly business reviews based on current skills and gap to make it to the next level and current will to do the day to day job.

“They gave you your choice of duty, son. Anything, anywhere. Do you believe that shit? Where do you think you wanna go?” – Stinger

“I thought of being an instructor, Sir.” – Maverick

“Top Gun?” – Stinger

“Yes, Sir.” – Maverick

“God help us.” – Stinger

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Caroline Franczia is a regular columnist for Maddyess and the founder of Uppercut First. Experienced in working for large companies such as Oracle, Computer Associates, and BMC, Caroline also lived in Silicon Valley for four years before moving to startups (Sprinklr, Datadog, Confluent) where she witnessed on the ground the benefits of a well-thought sales strategy. These are the foundations of UF: a structure that accompanies the European startups in their sales strategy by giving them an undeniable advantage in their go-to-market.

Article by CAROLINE FRAN CZIA