

Invictus: the unconquered sales leader

This week, Caroline Franczia of Uppercut-First is uncovering the secret sauce of top sales leaders, with the help of one of the most outstanding leaders of all time: Nelson Mandela. Using references from *Invictus*, she'll deliver some critical advice about winning on a human level.

Many founders lack a background in sales. They can get past the MVP stage, winning their first customers, but when a startup scales, the art, passion and dedication of a CEO are no longer enough to close deals.

“Times change. We need to change as well.” – Nelson Mandela

At this point in startup life, cofounders tend to go on the hunt for an exceptional talent to help everyone deliver. But is delivering deals the only thing you should expect from a sales leader?

What are the top five things they should excel in?

Pipeline and growth

A sales leader will create a robust pipeline. They will help their team be creative and find new ways of hunting deals, whether by using their network, grabbing a few speakers at the end of an event, or spending time thinking about marketing – demand generation, the fundamentals of online acquisition, and the lead gen. process.

While your sales leader should accompany their team in meetings, it should only be to support development, never to sell on their behalf.

*“I think he wants us to win the World Cup” –
Francois Pienaar*

Forecasting

MEDDIC is not the sole methodology out there to manage a forecast. It is, however, an undeniably powerful tool when it comes to conducting a diagnostic and a checklist. You should expect your sales leader to forecast quarterly, and to update you weekly in the last month of the quarter. They should make a call at the beginning of the quarter accurate to within 5% of the actual closing.

Too often, a deal is forecasted based on a large objective theme such as ‘the prospect wishes to engage in Digital acceleration’. Although the theme is great as an ice breaker in the discovery phase, it is not grounds enough for the deal to figure in your sales forecast. Your sales leader’s role will be to understand the possible impacts of not digitalising fast enough, such as losing revenue and market share or increasing operating costs. These negative business consequences are the motivation to find a budget allocation to your solution and a date and time to buy and avoid digitalising delays and associated impacts.

A sales leader can see through fake deals and will be able to pivot back to the discovery phase, at the very beginning of the sales process, where necessary.

“You’re risking your political capital, you’re risking your future as our leader.” – Brenda Mazibuko

“The day I am afraid to do that is the day I am no longer fit to lead.” – Nelson Mandela

Define and execute on an ‘operating rhythm’

Sales are, by definition, chaos. Execution is imperative in such a dynamic environment. To prevent double booking and focus on delivering successful meetings, your sales leader must define an ‘operating rhythm’ and therefore set expectations prior to every session.

“Ah, that must be Jessie with the schedule. Come in, beautiful!” – Jason Tshabalala

A sales leader should,

Twice a week: Interact and brainstorm with peers (R&D, Customer Success, Marketing)

Weekly: Conduct a one to one with each sales representative, with KPIs (number of meetings conducted and booked, pipeline created, forecast progression and accuracy, actions around personal development, etc.)

Weekly: Conduct a forecast review (they should use a methodology and stick to it for each opportunity review)

Weekly: Organise a team meeting with a predefined and shared agenda (they should choose someone in the team to share a particular successful story – making sure peer-to-peer learning and sharing plays a part in the team meeting)

Quarterly: Organise a territory plan and a business review (holding their team accountable for the quarter number and delivery, while committing

non-sales teams and resources to support the growth and closing strategy)

Ad hoc: Participate in keynotes and PR events, and in transformational projects and technology implementation (call-recording, forecasting tools, sales automation, effective content generation, management, etc.)

Recruitment

Experienced sales leaders know you need a pipeline of candidates as much as you need a customer pipeline, because:

1. You might promote someone
2. Someone might leave
3. You might need to get rid of someone performing poorly

And if you wait for one of these to happen to start looking for the perfect candidate, you will lose nine months.

Being on the hunt for the perfect candidate at all times makes someone a good sales leader. Searching should not be delegated to someone else; it should always be a shared strategy. Top sales reps work hand in hand with their SDRs, and top sales leaders work with their recruitment agency or internal HR department to identify top candidates.

Personal Development

All of this will only work if your sales leader is adaptable. The world changes at an incredible pace. This requires tremendous learning and unlearning skills.

“If I cannot change when circumstances demand it, how can I expect others to?” – Nelson Mandela

How can you tell others what to do if you are not yourself willing to learn, not ready to dedicate time to becoming a better version of yourself?

A sales leader should take time to read up on what others are doing; attend webinars and watch videos from their peers; and ask to be mentored. No

matter what your background, there is always something new to learn. They should expect all this from their team as well.

“How do you inspire your team to do their best?” – Nelson Mandela

“By example. I’ve always thought to lead by example, Sir.” – Francois Pienaar

Caroline Franczia is a regular columnist for Maddyneess 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.

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