

Setting Goals and Building Your Sales Action Plan



There's nothing quite like the energy, enthusiasm and anticipation of a new year. We get the chance to begin again with a fresh start, high expectations and our intentions set.



We're ready to roll up our sleeves and tackle those big ambitious goals. All too often, though, that purposefulness is short-lived. A few weeks into the new year and the urgency of the now takes over. The whirlwind of the everyday consumes us. Old habits creep back in.

Just look at New Year's resolutions: Studies show that about half of the people in the United States make them, and **almost 25%** of those resolutions will be broken within the first week. As you read this now, it's a good reminder for salespeople that setting goals is only the beginning. The real work comes in actionable, incremental steps that will help them see them through.

In fact, there's a big difference between setting goals and writing your goals down, getting clarity about what they entail and having a plan to achieve them. Having a goal to increase your quota or business by 15-20% isn't a plan. It's an arbitrary idea or an ambition; it doesn't tell you how you're going to get there- or why it's important.

Hopefully your salespeople put the work in at the end of last year to set their goals for this year. Now is the time to make sure they're allocating the time and doing the work it takes to hit those goals.

Goal Clarity and the Importance of Writing it Down

Our research into the inner dimensions that drive top salespeople's behavior and beliefs has found that goal clarity — along with achievement drive, emotional intelligence and social skills — is one of the four traits of high producers. It's also consistently rated as one of the areas salespeople have the most trouble with.

Goal clarity means having clear, specific, written descriptions of what you want to happen in your future — and "written" is key. One study into the art and science of goal-setting found that people are **42% more likely to achieve their goals** if they write them down on a regular basis. Yet many salespeople never take the time to sit down and put pen to paper. No matter how skilled the salesperson is or how well-intended they are about their goals, if they don't have a clear view of exactly where they need to go, they'll wind up wasting a lot of energy on nonproductive activities.

Goal-setting is about more than just the end game; it's all the steps along the way. By writing it out, your salespeople have the opportunity to break the big goal down into daily and weekly actions so that, every day, they know what activities they're going to do to move themselves closer to achieving it.

The value of this process is rooted in the way our brains work. If you just think about closing 20% more business this year, you're only activating the imaginative

center of your brain. But if you then write it down and describe that future, you're activating the logic-based area of the brain as well. This ignites a goal-seeking mechanism that allows you to see things you might not have seen before or had never paid attention to. It also helps you filter out the noise and "activity for activity's sake" that is distracting you from your stated purpose.

Goal Achievement: More Than Know-How

While clarity and a plan are essential, reaching goals isn't just a matter of knowing what you need to do. Process — the what and the how of it — is relatively easy. The problem comes in actually doing it. Do you have the discipline and the motivation to see it through?

Especially in the world of sales, there are many inner dynamics and external distractions that often get in the way of goal achievement. Salespeople typically know intellectually what they need to do, but if they don't feel like doing it, they probably won't. They'll procrastinate or spend time on 'busy work' or other activities that aren't as important and won't move them close to their goals. The task here is understanding what's holding them back. Some common inner barriers include:

- **Fear of going beyond their comfort zones:** Salespeople can get comfortable in their routines, and ambitious goals often require moving outside those comfort zones. The prospect of upending familiar routines can lead to procrastination, avoidance behaviors and busywork.
- **Negative beliefs about abilities:** If, deep down, a salesperson believes something's not possible for them to accomplish, then there's a good chance they'll make that prophecy come true. Insecurity can lead to unconscious self-sabotaging behaviors that further deplete confidence.
- **Lack of ownership:** Particularly when goals are "handed down" by someone else, salespeople might find it hard to motivate themselves to put in the

effort. If the goal isn't meaningful to them personally, they will struggle to have passion for it — and probably won't perform to it.

Coach Your Salespeople All the Way to the Goal

Without clarity, inner belief and meaning around their goals, salespeople will struggle to stay committed to seeing them through this year. As a sales leader, also play an important coaching role in helping them stay on track:

- **Focus on the "why":** Sure, a salesperson may have to hit a million dollars because it's their quota. But hitting a million dollars because it will allow them to send their child to a university, take a big family vacation or spend more time with their kids is an entirely different "why" — and probably a lot more personally meaningful and motivating. Help your salespeople discover their passions and drivers for reaching their goals.
- **Help them see the possibilities:** The salespeople who are willing to push outside the boundaries of the familiar and stretch to new levels of achievement invariably have coaches who see more in them than they see in themselves. Show your salespeople you believe in their potential, and they'll be energized to do the work to live up to those high expectations.
- **Let them do the talking:** Facilitate, ask questions, and then give them the floor. For them to commit and own their plan, they need to build it.

The goals are set. Now the real work begins. Make sure your salespeople have the motivation, methods and support in place to get where they really want to go this year. ■

Mike Esterday is CEO and Partner of the award-winning sales training and coaching firm Integrity Solutions in Nashville, TN, USA. Find out more about them [here](#)