

## Sales success

How to motivate and retain a talented Chinese sales force

**D**ue to rapid economic growth, the demand for talented white-collar staff in China exceeds the supply. The result is that many multinationals are forced to hire and train under-qualified workers. Once you snag (or train) a winning employee how can he or she be retained in such a competitive environment? Morry Morgan tells us how to rethink management strategies and motivate a Chinese sales team, while global consultancy Booz and Company offers advice on retaining good employees amid an environment of short-term tenures.

According to Booz and Company, the shortage of white-collar workers is identifiable, and so creating steps to countering what they have termed "the China Syndrome" of middle management disloyalty is possible. They suggest pushing employees by offering more challenging roles and continually adapting the employee's roles to include more responsibilities.

But Morry Morgan, co-founder of ClarkMorgan Corporate Training and author of *Selling Big to China* said that, "We the expatriates are part of the problem. This is mostly due to conditioning about what qualities are important in a leader" in the Western world. Those notions don't necessarily hold true in China. ClarkMorgan surveyed 206 white-collar workers across China's first-tier cities and discovered that the ten traits they look for in a leader fly in the face of Western leadership practices and education. Toss out your MBA and rethink everything you know about management, leadership and motivating a sales team, and reprogram your brain with the Chinese methodology in order to be successful, Morgan advises.

ClarkMorgan's research revealed that the two most sought-after leadership traits were compassion and authority. "In many ways, these are bi-polar qualities," said Morgan. "Chinese look to their leaders to be a kind of teacher - tough and caring at the same time."

Morgan said that Western leaders are not necessarily expected to be the smartest in the room, which is why so much emphasis is placed on hiring experts to surround decision makers. In contrast, the Chinese leader is expected to be the most intelligent, which means Western methods of voting, group discussions or suggestion boxes are uncomfortable for many Chinese employees, who may feel that such methods reflect incompetent leadership.

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Morgan points out that one of the key problems in motivating sales teams is a lack of engagement by employees. In terms of employee engagement, China ranks very low compared to other countries in the world. This means laborers are less likely to manage themselves or be creative in terms of problem-solving.

"This is particularly true for the 80s and 90s generation, who have had life pretty hunky-dory, many with three sets of caregivers (four grandparents and two parents), and an education system that encourages rote learning, rather than independent thought," said Morgan. You can't rely on the same style of employee as you'd find in the West, and good leaders will adapt to motivating a team of rote learners who need micro-managing.

Morgan outlined how their firm trains other Western managers to motivate Chinese sales teams through a combination of Chinese leadership tactics and the five principles of sales motivation.

First, product knowledge is key to a successful sales team. "I am amazed at how little some

salespeople know about the products and services that they sell," says Morgan, who surprises his team with pop quizzes on their products from time to time to keep them on their toes.

Second is goodwill. Morgan believes charisma can be learned by mirroring good sales people. A shy salesman isn't as profitable as an energetic, charismatic one. Good leaders set an example and then pair shy salespeople with charismatic ones so they have an example to follow. Be compassionate about the shy person's discomfort, but authoritative about their path to building a charismatic sales persona.

Third, an effective sales team needs to uncover the needs of the buyer. This isn't an easy task because most Chinese sales people are taught to hammer in their ideas (rote memorization) rather than listen for openings.

Fourth, Morgan keeps his sales team on their toes by clearly defining success. He requires a certain number of points per month and then awards points for each bit of legwork his salespeople do, for example five points for a cold call, or 20 points for a face-to-face meeting. In this way, he is challenging his employees, motivating them with awards for achievement and requiring a minimum amount of work from them.

Finally, where many companies in China count on new customers instead of repeat business, Morgan stresses follow-up as a key point for any successful salesperson. "It costs five to 20 times more to secure new business than simply maintaining a pool of delighted customers," he said. And this is true of retaining and training new employees as well.

A recent study conducted by Booz and Company showed that 68% of employees interviewed left their last position because of a lack of promotional opportunity and career development. Once you hire, train and build up your sales team, how do you keep them interested? Creating a small business feel, even within mega companies, satisfies the entrepreneurial spirit of most job-hopping workers, while creating clear-cut merit-based evaluations at all levels of the company creates a clear path for success. Tackling the problems of poor promotional opportunities and career development are key to retaining good workers, so your investment in hiring and training good employees isn't a squandered one. • Lauren Johnson