

FOR: Bank Sales Managers

7 Tips for Remote Sales Management

Woody Allen once said, “Life is 85% being there.” Life as a Sales Manager in today’s sprawling banking organizations is often leading from a distance. While managing a team of commercial bankers physically domiciled with you isn’t always a bed of roses, it’s certainly easier than leading from a remote location.

There are obvious challenges because the normal cues, controls and opportunities to interact face-to-face are either limited or significantly reduced. Remote Sales Managers end up asking themselves “What are people up to? Are they managing their time well?” Long distance coaches find themselves missing out on the chance to strategize about a new prospect or make that deal-clinching joint call or chew the fat at the end of a long week with a team member.

Many of the Sales Managers I have worked with struggle with managing remotely. What can they do to provide the level of guidance, feedback and coaching that their teams need? Here are some things to focus on:

1. Use different modes of communication. Conference calls can be invigorated by web-based presentation support. (If your bank doesn’t use Webex or Microsoft Live for presentations, do some research on your own and test it out.) Consider broadcast voicemail as a way to get a message out quickly and consistently to the whole team. One successful Sales Manager I know created a monthly 15 to 20 minute CD that his roving reps could listen to while driving. Be creative.
2. Plan your communication. Think about what you’re trying to say. It’s too easy to react in the heat of the moment without thinking, particularly in replying to an email. Every conference call should have a clear written agenda—email them before the meeting (even five minutes before) with the four things you want to discuss plus relevant attachments.
3. Be accessible. Give your sales people your cell and home phone numbers and encourage them to use them. Schedule 20 minutes each for people every week to review what’s going on. If there’s nothing to talk about—which is unlikely—spend the time catching up on personal matters.
4. Use every chance to recognize people—remote employees need as many if not more strokes than their peers. Quick emails recognizing high performance can pick people up—particularly if you copy the right people up the chain of command.

5. When you're together, really work to get to know people. Use the drives to visit customers to talk about more than sports. Find out what makes your people tick.
6. Don't let headquarters products specialists and senior managers forget about your remote staff. Involve them judiciously in teleconferences and sales meetings. Make sure they get in front of your people (and more importantly, their customers and prospects) as needed—which is always more than the head office types believe.
7. Spend money on team meetings. Don't let anybody talk you out of eliminating the budget for the quarterly sales meeting. (It's possible you might cancel the meeting yourself but let that be your decision, not your CFO's.)

For a remote Sales Manager, out of sight does not have to be out of mind. If you apply these principles in your ongoing communication with your team, everyone will be more effective.

