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Passing the Torch

SALES FORCE: YOU'VE FOUND THE RIGHT PERSON TO REPLACE YOU. BUT COULD THINGS HEAT UP WHEN YOU INTRODUCE THAT PERSON TO YOUR SALES TEAM?

FOR YOUR BUSINESS TO THRIVE, YOU may need to relinquish the reins of sales force management to new blood. But turning over control of the team you've nurtured for years can be a thorny exercise. To extricate yourself from your sales role gracefully and effectively, follow these solid steps to hire and introduce your replacement:

- **Identify the skills you seek.** Be careful here—it's the nature of many a manager to look for a replacement who mirrors his or her own strengths. But bringing in fresh talent is a fine occasion to complement your talents rather than hiring a clone. "Find someone who'll add a level of leadership to your company," encourages Patricia Gardner, CEO of Maximum Sales Inc., a sales executive

management consulting and training company in Skippack, Pennsylvania.

Also, don't be afraid to hire a manager who may one day eclipse your management prowess. Says Gardner, "The best CEOs in the world aren't afraid to be surrounded by greater talent than their own."

- **Screen, interview, hire.** Sort through resumes and settle on a handful of applicants for interviews. An initial phone discussion can save time and eliminate applicants who aren't an automatic "yes" for a faceto-face meeting. Compile a list of questions about the applicant's experience, track record and style.

According to Joanne Sujansky, founder of KEYGroup, a Pittsburgh company that helps leaders increase productivity and inspire loyalty, managers

should quiz the interviewee on "building a sales force, [his or her] specific track record [including sales and volume], previous instances of motivating reps, and how he [or she] developed and maintained a sales system."

- **Introduce the new manager to the sales squad.** This may be the trickiest part of the process, as building trust and rapport with the troops takes time. Set the tone from the get go—Sujansky recommends that the introduction include clarification of the manager's role and the role of each team member. "It's the entrepreneur's job to pave the way for the new manager."

According to Gardner, the smoothness of the transition will hinge on how well the new hire fits into the company culture and how different her management style is from that of her predecessor.

- **Ease the getting-to-know-you phase.** Bette Price, co-author of *True Leaders: How Exceptional CEOs and Presidents Make a Difference by Building People and Profits* (Dearborn Trade Publishing), suggests emphasizing the characteristics that make the new sales manager a great fit for the company and the team. Price advocates allowing time for the new sales manager to address the group from both a business and a personal perspective. On the business side, Price says, "encourage the manager not to speak [about] changes, but rather [about] her excitement about working with the team." The new boss may also share a few tidbits about her life outside of work, perhaps about hobbies or family. It helps reps connect emotionally when they know they share something in common with the manager.

- **Avoid potential potholes on the new management road.** Sales reps can be a stubborn breed and may be less than hospitable to someone who could interrupt their way of doing things. Woe to the new manager who gets between a sales rep and his commission—so be careful about any changes that affect pay scales right off the bat. Be prepared for a rep to even quit as a result of a shakeup in the ranks. Says Price, "Sometimes they need to."

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