



# HOW TO CREATE AN INSPIRED SALES CULTURE



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A WHITEPAPER BY THE BROOKS GROUP

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As I tell friends and acquaintances, there is nothing boring about my job. Getting to work with sales leaders from some of the biggest and most successful sales teams in the world brings plenty of action and adventure. But only my fellow “sales nuts” truly understand this obsession with profitable growth and the thrill of the hunt. Hitting a number amid tumultuous and difficult circumstances: ahhhh, how sweet it is.

Okay, so not everyone is wired to view extreme pressure to hit tough targets as “thrilling,” which is why good sales managers are such an asset. In my travels I get to observe, interview, and collaborate with these folks. I’ve noticed that the best-of-the-best managers and leaders do something that others do not. They inspire their teams. These people understand that culture eats strategy for lunch. Creating a sales culture that inspires requires intentional and thoughtful culture building. Sales leaders that build inspiring cultures tend to focus on things that others ignore or miss. Here are a few of the things I’ve picked up along the way.

### Is Your Sales Culture INSPIRED or BROKEN? Questions to Ask...

As a sales leader, are you the chicken or the egg? More specifically, do you allow sales culture to “happen” or do you create it with intentionality and purpose? Following the line of thinking that culture eats strategy for breakfast, this is a question worthy of consideration.

Sales culture is a bi-product of many factors: history, tradition, personalities, executive leadership, habits, performance, or market pressure to name a few. Often these factors just happen, for better or for worse, but good sales leaders know that building a strong culture contributes to better results. Sales culture impacts key indicators such as attrition, revenue, pipeline, and productivity per rep. Culture can be an enabler or a barrier to results that make-or-break our future.

While working with some of the largest and most successful sales teams in the world, I have noticed that the best sales leaders have lofty aspirations when it comes to culture building. Great leaders seek to inspire, and they build an infrastructure and culture with intention and purpose to accomplish superior results.



## Do I Think About PURPOSE?

According to Lisa Earl McCleod, “Money is actually, and there’s a lot of data on this, a good short-term motivator for some salespeople. But what we discovered when working with salespeople all around the globe... is that at a certain point, that ceases to be a primary motivator.”

When it comes to finding purpose, one size does not fit all. Understanding what drives and motivates the individuals on our teams and our customers provides great insight as to how we behave and why we make decisions. Adapting our coaching and selling to inspire purpose is a worthy cause. Recent research suggests that millennials care more about purpose than any previous generation, and ultimately it is what drives our success.

**As sales leaders, we want to first understand drivers and then clearly develop a mission and roadmap that connects to purpose.**

## Is My Team LOYAL?

I once caught myself telling a friend that I would stand in front of a truck for my boss or my team. But it’s certainly not a majority of sales reps who feel this way about their managers and situation. What inspires this level of commitment and loyalty? Safe to say, it starts with genuinely caring about the people on our teams. Being intentional about the culture that we want to create is also a good start. A previous boss and mentor once said that his expectation for our team was to give 120%, 80% of the time. His message, of course, was to work hard and also take the time to care for our families and passions. When a boss takes the time and care to understand what drives and motivates the individuals on their team, and then coaches in a manner that enables, this level of connection yields high engagement and productivity.





## Are We ACCOUNTABLE to the Right Triggers?

Are we driving our sales team toward activity or results? Are we “inspecting” or “enabling”? Too many sales managers push for activity that doesn’t actually lead to top performance and sales results. **Establishing a clear set of expectations is paramount to creating a high performing sales culture, and those expectations should drive visibility into leading behaviors.** After all, it is the leading activity that drives the lagging results.

By hard wiring our sales meetings and one-on-one discussions with questions that measure leading action (How many new opportunities have we identified this week? How many opportunities have moved from one stage to the next in the pipeline?), we influence the right activity to drive results. Leading results such as pipeline velocity, deal expansion, and even disqualification of the wrong deal focus are great examples of this. Too much attention on lagging indicators and tactical activity drives the wrong behaviors, and misses valuable growth opportunity. Think GPS vs. a rear view mirror!



## Do We Practice HIGH-YIELD COMMUNICATION?

High-yield conversation is intentional. Let's face it, as human beings we assume too much and validate too little. An inspired sales culture must be built around clear, concise, honest, and safe communication. The quality of the questions we ask (and the intention behind our questions) carries an opportunity for deep understanding of our team and our customers. Think in terms of "validation." Develop coaching questions that help to understand the why behind the why. For example, when deal coaching, be alert when the answers include any of the following: "I think," "I assume," or "I imagine." Create a safe zone – "I don't know" is not a bad answer, but rather an opportunity to expand our strategy to learn more. Aim to understand the real issues behind the issues. Elevating the quality of the questions you ask will prompt your team to provide answers that bring real insight into the customer, the account, and your team.

*Note: A common sales language is a must have. Without a tight common language, the effectiveness and time-to-benefit of deal coaching runs astray.*

## Do I Break Down BARRIERS That Get in the Way of Selling?

Let's face it – salespeople hate administration, but also we cannot function without it. It is a necessary evil but as sales leaders, we can question, protect, and insulate our teams from overkill. Making efforts to streamline the process and burdens that get in the way of customer-facing time is a must. Keeping a finger on the pulse of how time is spent in the field provides insight as to what to expand vs. sunset regarding process and reporting.

## Do I Encourage VULNERABILITY?

We are human, and therefore most of us are not comfortable feeling vulnerable. Especially so in the company of our bosses. However, being vulnerable is the space where we grow, learn, develop, and improve. Top performers and bottom performers benefit from being self-aware regarding areas of improvement and opportunity. Inspired sales cultures create a safe environment to expose what we don't know. This applies to deal coaching (red flags are good, not bad, because they lead us to answers) as well as people coaching to develop skill and acumen. Honest one-on-one conversation provides an opportunity for leaders to partner with their team, and drive a mutual commitment to continuous improvement.



## Are We CLIENT-FOCUSED?

Inspired leaders think about the internal supply chain and ask the following question at every touchpoint, “how does this impact our customer”? Often companies build business process from the inside out, without enough conscious consideration as to how it impacts the customer. This is a key area of burden or differentiation. Understanding that large organizations cannot change business process on-a-dime is of course a reality, but great leaders challenge bad process. Thinking about it from the customer’s experience can, at a minimum, bring insight and even sanity into the conversation. Although not always easy, it is a differentiator when companies build process from the outside in. Honest evaluation and developing a “client focus” meter, to expose areas of strength and/or weakness is a valuable exercise.

## Is My Team Fully ENGAGED?

Inspired sales culture drives high engagement, and as a leader this is critical to achieve top results. Many sales teams never accomplish this and function in a disengaged and disjointed manner. **A highly engaged, passionate, and loyal sales team is your biggest differentiator. Everyone benefits from a sales inspired culture – you, your team, your organization, and your customers.** Conducting a periodic engagement survey is worth the effort. Make the survey anonymous, and open. For example, provide a list of words and ask them to choose those with which they resonate. Do they relate to words like engaged, collaborative, passionate or stifled, uninspired, depleted?

## Am I an EVANGELIST?

Inspired sales culture root best when the leader doubles as evangelist. Communication and repetition of a clear vision across a team and organization is not a lost effort. Your team benefits the most by you breaking down barriers that get in the way of selling, while pulling your organization along for the ride. And a great ride it is for those lucky enough to experience an inspired sales culture.



## Key Takeaways:

- Do I think about purpose?
- Is my team loyal?
- Are we accountable to the right triggers
- Do we practice high-yield communication?
- Do I encourage vulnerability?
- Is my team fully engaged?

## About The Brooks Group

With nearly 40 years of industry experience, The Brooks Group achieves sustainable sales culture transformation for clients by delivering targeted training that becomes operationalized by threading into an organization's existing systems.

The Brooks Group takes a holistic approach to practical culture shifts and focuses on customized "street smart" sales and sales management programs, with a high level of relevance and practicality for the individual learner. Training gets reinforced with an industry-leading cloud-based sales and sales management coaching platform.

### For more information

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