

# Tricky Sales Team

## *Dynamics*



Five common problems and strategies for managing them effectively.

**T**here's nothing more promising than your first day at work. Everything is new, exciting and challenging – and all in a welcomed way!

People you work with seem friendly. The sales team comes across as professional and positive. Yet it's quite possible that within mere days – or whenever the “honeymoon” wears off – you'll discover that team dynamics have some issues and the people selling alongside you are anything but perfect.

“I see conflicts between sales associates quite often,” says Boaz Rauchwerger, international speaker, author, lecturer and consultant (<http://boazpower.com>). “In an

*People skills are perhaps the most important - and least taught - ability.*

ever-changing economy, and with so much retail competition online, there is a greater emphasis to get sales in other ways and that creates stress. Stress creates inter-team conflicts.”

It's a bit like any other situation where you're engaged and part of a team yet advancing your own personal wellbeing and growth as well. As a bridal sales consultant who is likely charged with both individual and team goals, you've got to do your job

effectively and maintain the right mindset for selling within the context of both dynamics. Yet, as Boaz points out, how many of us really get a solid education around managing relationships with our professional peers?

### **Getting to the Root of the Problem**

While some might blame inter-team trouble on certain business strategies or even the dresses or product lines they're selling, ultimately that's not what causes it.

Rather, blame lack of education.

“In ordinary schooling, as far as I know, there are no courses on



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how to get along with other people," Rauchwerger says. "And, where are we spending most of our time in our careers? Trying to get along with other people."

He continues: "It is not a product that gives us problems. If a product doesn't work, we can either fix it, change it, or scrap it all together. However, it's the people issues that cause most of the problems in business today. . . and so the sales associate should take the lead in becoming better educated in the area of people skills."

Given this, it's helpful to learn to recognize when conflict is afoot. Symptoms include:

- A change in everyday courtesies (i.e. a fellow sales consultant not returning a smile or greeting you in a friendly way).
- Ignoring or talking over someone else's ideas/opinions in team meetings.
- Lack of eye contact during conversations with a co-worker, particularly about differences in opinion, strategy, etc.
- Not responding quickly to work-related e-mails, texts or calls.
- Not working in a team-oriented way (i.e. you covered for a fellow sales consultant when she needed a personal day and now she won't cover for you).
- Communication with fellow co-workers, either in person or via technology, that's habitually defensive, casts blame or feels inflammatory.

*Conflict resolution should occur face to face, not via technology.*

- Difficulty coming to agreement on small issues with co-workers that weren't problematic before.
- Not being included in out-of-store activities such as happy hour, coffee or the movies.
- A gut feeling that something's not right between you and someone else.

Noticing these symptoms is always an important first step in managing inter-team relationship challenges. But then you've got to be fearless about confronting whatever is going on, and for some of us, that can be easier said than done. After all, we all have vulnerabilities, and conflict can trigger deep emotions that make it hard to speak up for ourselves. In response, we sometimes find ways to avoid conflict to protect our vulnerabilities and ego.

For example, you might find yourself using technology to address something going on with a co-worker instead of having a more productive, meaningful conversation – a habit that's become increasingly commonplace given the prevalence of technology.

However, problem-solving "behind screens" should generally be avoided, according to Doug Dvorak, founder and managing principal of The Sale Coaching Institute (<https://salescoach.us/>).

"Team dynamics and technology don't mix for problem reso-

lution," Dvorak says. "Anything of substance or interpersonal issues should be dealt with from a place of non-threatening person-to-person communications. This is very hard to do because it goes against the grain of how we work and live today. But you can't solve it through technology."

Another way sales consultants dodge dealing with conflict is by talking to the storeowner or manager instead of the person with whom they have the issue. Again, Dvorak says, this usually just prevents effective resolution. It can lead to more tension between sales team members, plus place unfair burdens on the boss who then finds him or herself allocating more time to this as opposed to vital leadership responsibilities.

"As long as it is not violent, sexual or abusive in nature, don't do a go-around with your manager," he says. "Do anything you can to be honest with your fellow sales associate first."

Use your integrity and good ethics, he says. For example, you can tell "Mary" you're sensing some angst and ask her to go to coffee to discuss it. Admit that you might be contributing to the issues. Avoid using "thou shalt" language and instead use "I" statements that progress to "we" statements. In the event that doesn't work, ask for Mary's permission to go to your boss.

That's great general advice for conflict-resolution conversations, illustrating how problem solving truly is a skill. But there are other ways to sharpen your skills with handling problematic co-workers or inter-team troubles, too. Here are five common inter-sales team

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scenarios and strategies for managing them effectively.

**1. A personality difference that creates divisiveness.** There may be times when you don't like someone you work with because of personality differences. But if you make the effort to understand different personality styles (including your own) and how to relate to each one, you can come to tolerate this person and, hopefully, develop a healthy sense of respect.

There are a number of programs, books and tools that teach about personality differences. However, one that's particularly related to team dynamics is called "disc" (<https://discpersonalitytesting.com/home/get-a-disc-work-assessment/>). The full disc assessment is designed to help teams better relate to one another. Plus, it can also help you understand your customers' different personalities better, too, giving you feedback on how to interact to be more productive and results-oriented. As well, you get insights into your blind spots and how you might be contributing to conflict in your professional relationships. This can be incredibly powerful in terms of self-awareness, understanding your habits and mindsets, and igniting and sustaining changes.

**2. Distractors who make focusing on your job tough.** People in sales tend to be social and extroverted by nature. But it's important to also be goal-oriented and able to focus on what's necessary for getting the job done efficiently and effectively. When you work with distractors, you'll have to set

*Avoid participating  
in malicious  
gossip.*

boundaries with these people – and the sooner the better.

You don't have to be unpleasant. Frame your conversation like this: "I'd love to hear more about what you're telling me, but can we catch up after work? I'm really excited about getting my orders in today." Be careful about using phrases like "I've got to get orders done or our boss will be all over me." This is about you wanting to do a good job, not the pressure of your boss.

Send the message that when you're at work, you prefer to do your work. Of course, if the distractor ignores you and continues, you'll have to have that one-on-one conversation about what's really going on, as Dvorak suggests.

**3. The rumor mill.** As tempting as it may be, the key here is to not engage in the first place. When people are stirring up

drama or maliciously talking about other co-workers, steer clear at all costs. Don't be afraid to say you're not interested in the conversation – setting this boundary is totally appropriate.

If you're not sure whether it's gossip or not, the acid test is to ask yourself if it's something you would say to that person's face. If it's not, don't speak it. If it is, discuss it in a way that promotes transparency, learning, respect and problem solving.

In regard to gossip and rumors, also notice whether certain triggers impact whether you partake in this activity or not. For example, when feeling insecure about your sales goals, do you tend to talk more about other team members in a negative, unproductive light? If so, explore this and take steps to address it. After all, this isn't helping your performance and it's certainly not supporting the health of the team either.

**4. Carelessness that hurts cred-**



*Always focus  
on the problem, not  
the person.*

**ibility.** Sometimes we work with someone who can be a bit careless, sloppy or forgetful. The reasons for this can be many – lack of genuine interest in the job, not knowing how to work in more careful ways, and even personal stress that impacts attention to detail. Most of us have worked with someone like this, and it's frustrating because it impacts the integrity of the team performance and can damage the customer's experience with your brand.

Just as you would handle any issue, if you notice a co-worker struggling with carelessness, focus on the problem, not the person. Pull her aside and ask her what's going on – there may be a very good reason, and the problem may be easily rectified. Just talking about it can shed light on the situation.

However, if it's not something that can be easily remedied, consider what baby steps could be taken toward a solution and try to help this team member by being supportive and leading by example. You are, after all, a team. Being collaborative in such ways is just part of the job.

### **5. Communication behavior that's offensive to customers.**

Because we all have different communication styles, sometimes we don't see eye to eye with how a co-worker is relating to a customer. This matters because if customers aren't feeling supported and valued, this, again, will negatively impact their experience and your store's credibility.

If you notice this behavior, be tactful about how your "help"

your co-worker. A good rule of thumb is to tell a story that shares an experience about what works (or what doesn't) and how you learned from that. Think of yourself more like a mentor. This approach will be less likely to put her on the defensive and she'll probably be more receptive to listening, learning and changing her ways. If she is not and the behavior continues to impact customers, don't be afraid to take the issue to your boss.

Do any of these scenarios sound familiar to you? No doubt, there are more situations that crop up among salespeople – the five listed above are intended to give you a sampling of the dynamics and how to problem solve as a team member yourself.

That said, it's important to know that while you certainly can play a proactive role in bettering those inter-team relationships and supporting productivity overall, it's ultimately your boss's job to address any *pervasive* or *culture-wide* problems within the workplace.

If you're doing your best, things aren't changing, and it's affecting other team members and customers alike, this could mean a serious perhaps difficult conversation between you and your boss is in order. You might need to disclose difficult truths to which she may or may not be receptive. If she's not, that may signal it's time for you to consider looking for another job. But if she does, this can become an opportunity for a beneficial cul-

tural change in the workplace. Your role in bringing this need to light will only reflect your respect for the organization and your sense of responsibility and leadership toward your team. In other words, disclosure done right can work in your favor, leading to important changes that you're your job as a sales consultant and team member more positive and productive, empowering both your professional and even personal growth.

Finally, if you want to learn more about this topic, Rauchwerger recommends reading the Dale Carnegie book, "*How to Win Friends and Influence People*"

"This is one of the best people-skills books ever written," he says. "It describes many difficult people situations and gives ideas of how to work through them. The smart person, Carnegie relates, will let the other person do a great deal of the talking."

In addition, the smart sales person will look at situations from the other person's viewpoint; use the phrase "Tell me more"; never tell anyone that he or she is wrong; when the salesperson herself is wrong, she will admit it quickly and emphatically, and will honestly use the phrase, "I need your help."

As Rauchwerger says, "The greatest honor we pay anyone, Carnegie said, was with RAPT attention – complete, total attention. That, I find, helps resolve many conflicts. How little of that is there these days? Carnegie states that everyone needs to feel important. RAPT attention makes people feel important and valued."