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It can take months to find a new hire, but just minutes or days to lose them. Poor retention is a direct result of a lack of proper training and support, inconsistent or poorly functioning systems, and a few fixable errors that business owners and their staff make when a new hire enters the industry under their leadership. Let’s talk about the 10 biggest mistakes company owners make in their business when introducing brand new salesmen into their organization and explore exactly how to increase retention and boost immediate sales success with new hires to mitigate these costly mistakes:

1. Not ensuring new hires first master the basics.

If you own your own company or you hold a position as a general manager or sales manager, it’s probably safe to say you were once a salesman, and probably a really good one. The problem is, when you’ve gotten to a point in your career where you’re a highly skilled salesperson with a rapier wit and your own “flavor” of selling and your own “style” that has been developed over time, when it comes to train a brand new person, it can be extremely difficult to “go back to basics.”

Remember that a brand new person is completely ignorant. They know nothing. We take for granted that for the first several weeks, they genuinely don’t even understand exactly what their job is or why they are important in the claims process. The point is that, while a highly skilled salesperson or manager has all the best intentions when they start to educate and instruct the new person, they have a tendency to dump a TON of scattered “tricks” and “tips” on the rookie, usually all advanced material that they aren’t ready for yet. New hires need to first master the absolute basics before they can start to implement advanced techniques.

They need to walk before they try to run. They don’t need to learn how to handle objections at the door; for instance, until they’re fully capable of delivering a flawless door-knocking approach first. You don’t start a brand new skier on a double black diamond when they’re barely comfortable on a green because they would break their necks. The same is true for rookies. Trying to tell them how to do something that they aren’t ready for because they haven’t mastered the most basic fundamental that must come before it will just send them crashing and burning.

Focus on ensuring your new reps are absolute pros at the basic fundamentals before you start adding to their repertoire. When a relatively new salesman comes to you and says they need help because they’re running into a particular challenge or objection, before you give them the “advanced solution,” go BACK to the basics. For example, if a rep comes to you and says they need to know how to handle it when someone is just asking for a bid, do not answer under the assumption that they did everything right up until that point to handle a bid request before it came up. Remember – they’re new! Before offering an advanced solution, go back to basics.

Think about it: if they had actually delivered the sales presentation correctly and covered “how insurance companies used to pay versus how they pay now,” a request for simply an estimate should never have come up in the first place. Instead of jumping to giving them a new way to handle that objection, you must first ensure that they are doing everything right to handle that objection before it ever comes up.

Have patience. Even though you feel like “you know a better way” to get inspections that the “plain” door knocking approach, before you start teaching a new hire all the fancy tricks, they need to have mastered the most basic approaches and methods first. Then you can build their skills from there.
2. Putting the cart before the horse.

The other mistake owners and managers make with new hires is teaching things in an ineffective order. For example, a new person doesn’t need to know how to calculate an estimate or write a roofing order until they have jobs to estimate or order. In order to have said jobs, they need to have signed deals. In order to have signed deals, they need to have learned to close. They don’t even have any opportunities to close deals until they’ve generated leads.

Consider the chronology of activities that make up the typical job cycle, and teach those skills in order. Teaching them sections at the end of the cycle when they literally just started, such as estimating, invoicing, or supplementing, is a waste of your time for two reasons: 1) what if they decide the job was not for them and they quit two weeks later? Now you spent a bunch of time and energy on them that was for nothing. 2) by the time they finally get to the point where they have jobs to estimate, invoice, or supplement, they’re going to have forgotten everything you had taught them weeks ago, because between then and now they had to generate leads, complete inspections, sign deals, get them approved, and then turn them in.

3. Not continually recruiting and hiring.

Recruiting and hiring is a never-ending process, just like continually generating leads is an ongoing process for your salesman. If you want to maintain your company like a well-oiled machine that is constantly growing and producing, you have to fill your pipeline with great people. Salesmen aren’t permanent, no matter how amazing of an opportunity your company provides them, no matter how loyal they may be to you now, and no matter what kind of commitments you think they’ve made. Anything can happen, and the only way you can continue to expand, grow, and evolve as a company is by continuously adding great candidates to your sales staff.

4. Focusing on the backend technical aspects instead of the frontend sales aspect.

This is a really common one. Far too often we see managers and owners training heavily on the technical aspects of storm restoration instead of focusing on the sales skills first and foremost. Almost all of their energy is spent focusing on teaching new hires how to measure and estimate, how to use Xactimate, etc. and spending money wrapping their truck, getting them fancy fliers and business cards, and so on and so forth.

While those are important components of the job, keep in mind that truck wraps and fliers don’t sell jobs: skilled salesmen do. And your salesman isn’t going to reach the point of even having to know how to use Xactimate or calculate a work scope until they’ve closed some deals, going back to the “not putting the cart before the horse” thing. Without a strong, effective frontend sales skills set, what use is a strong technical background? Your guys need to be good salespeople before anything else matters. Teaching technical stuff is easy. The sales skills are what require the most time and experience to learn, so tackle that first.

5. Skipping the “rapport.”

Any good salesperson would never walk up to a homeowner’s house, knock on the door, and immediately ask them to sign a contract. Why not? Aside from the fact that they’re skipping crucial steps in the job cycle, they haven’t built any rapport whatsoever. It wouldn’t work out.

It’s easy to take for granted that, as a company owner, when you hire a new person and recruit them to work for you, you actually have to close them on why working for you and your company is a good decision for them, and why the can be a great opportunity for them! Just because someone shows up to Day 1 doesn’t mean that they’re fully bought into you or the position yet. Essentially, recruiting and retaining a new hire
is a sales pitch. And before you can effectively “sell” anything to anybody, you must first give them a chance to decide that they like and trust you. This is accomplished through rapport.

The entire first day of training in the Roof Sales Mastery new hire program is essentially built around building that rapport, trust, and confidence in your new hires. It might seem like “fluff,” but it is fundamental in making sure your new hires feel comfortable buying into you, your company, and the position you’re offering them.

It reassures them that they are going to be supported by a good company with a great staff who will help them every step of the way, support them behind the scenes, and give them the resources they need to succeed at the position. It instills confidence in them that you are providing them with the skills, approaches, and sales techniques they need to do well in the field so they can feel confident that as long as they follow the program, they will do well. It builds confidence in their own capabilities by hammering home that as long as they put in the effort and focus on their actions, not their results, that they will do great. It gives you a chance to share your personal story with them so they are able to relate to you and buy into you and your vision. All these elements are crucial to developing confident, capable salesmen who trust you, respect you, and are willing and eager to listen and learn from you.

6. **No solid structure.**

This applies to several areas of the position. For one, daily scheduling and time management. Brand new salesmen do not inherently understand that their time is best spent doing specific tasks during specific time frames, for example knocking doors is best done in the evening hours. Without being taught to follow a structured daily schedule, your guys will find themselves not knowing what they should be doing far too often, and will spend a lot of energy in the wrong place at the wrong time, getting frustrated when they’re not getting results.

Part two of the negative effects of no solid structure to follow when it comes to time management is that your salesmen will lose momentum very quickly. If they do not set aside times each week exclusively for lead generation and exclusively for inspection times, they will spend one week generating a ton of leads, the next week completing all those inspections, the week after that completing all the paperwork and estimates, and then suddenly they’ve got nothing in their pipeline and they have to go back out and start all over. “A body in motion tends to stay in motion.” Teaching them how to best manage their day-to-day and weekly activities will keep their pipeline full and their momentum going so they never come to a screeching halt and have to put forth an exhausting amount of energy to get their pipeline filling again.

Another area where many owners fall short is not having a solid, well-defined staff structure. Nobody knows who should be doing what. If you have people with positions such as “production manager,” “sales manager,” and “office manager,” these individuals must have explicitly defined roles. Each of those individuals must know exactly what their responsibilities are, otherwise you’re going to face a lack of productivity and a lot of “he said/she said” in the form of, “Well I thought that (name) was supposed to do that!”

When your new salesmen see things falling through the cracks due to miscommunication of who is responsible for particular parts of the job, or when they are not being fully supported by the staff behind the scenes, how do you think your company looks to them? A poorly managed inside staff reflects poorly to new hires, and they are likely to bail. Nobody wants to be working for a company that is poorly run.

7. **Not setting functional expectations.**

Remember that your brand new salesmen have no frame of reference for how this position goes. They don’t
know what’s expected, what’s good, bad, average – they have no idea. This is actually positive, because it means you’ve got a clean slate to work with, and you’re able to develop highly productive, responsible, accountable salesmen IF you set the proper expectations.

The way this industry is now, new hires are sent out into the field to just “go to work.” While some salesmen are really hungry and ambitious and start producing like crazy, most guys wind up turning in a job here, turning in a job there, doing 2 or 3 inspections a week. What if, instead of just sending them out there to “get after it,” we prepped them with the expectation that reps do 2 or 3 inspections a day? If your guys go into the position with the understanding or impression that completing 10-15 inspections a week is normal and expected, how much more productive are they going to be? Here’s a hint: a lot.

8. Trying to please everybody.

Sometimes managers and business owners, in an effort to not lose somebody, try to play down their expectations, lower their standards, and alter the way they train and manage, based on concern that a certain individual in the group may not respond well or buy into the topic, approach, or plan because it’s challenging, or maybe they think it’s a little cheesy, or they aren’t a team player. Remember: the way you run your business will attract and retain the people who are right for you and your organization. Do not stray from your plan, vision, or the program to suit the preferences or limitations of one or two salespeople.

You are no longer going to operate in mode of “desperately trying to keep anyone and everyone.” Run your show and this program with 100% confidence, commitment, and dedication to those willing to follow it. The people who stick around are the ones you wanted to keep. Let the others weed themselves out. It’s like dating: if you pretend to be someone you’re not, the girl might stick around for the first few dates, but eventually she’s going to see who you really are, and if she doesn’t like it, then it wasn’t meant to be.

9. Treating it as a “sink or swim” situation.

If you want to develop a highly productive, firecracker sales force that is continually evolving, improving, and growing, then education and training needs to be an ongoing agenda. If you compare maintaining a solid sales team to running a sports team with your salesmen as the players and yourself as the coach, you can see how ridiculous it would be to have a few days of training at the beginning of the season and then virtually nothing afterwards, and on top of that, then expecting great results.

If you want a lead generating, deal closing, job producing sales team that hustles week in and week out and gets great results for their efforts, then ongoing training and skills-honing is a necessity. How surprised would you be if you had a houseplant that you gave ample sunlight, fed and watered for the first two weeks you had it, and then just let it go and it shriveled up and died a few weeks or months later? Probably not very surprised at all! Correlate the same results with maintaining a solid sales staff, and you’ll get the idea.

Weekly sales meetings should involve practicing, studying, and discussing sales strategies and approaches so that your team is always picking up tips, new information, and methods that will help them improve incrementally every week. Remember: we are always developing killer salesmen, not “catching” them.

10. Investing more in marketing materials than in their salesmen.

Too many company owners will comfortably stroke checks for several thousand dollars on fancy truck wraps, eye-catching business cards, and glossy tri-folds with a smile on their face, but have a heart attack when faced with an opportunity to invest in continued education or training for their sales team. Here’s some food for thought: everybody has business cards. Everybody has pamphlets. Everybody has nice
Dri-Fit polos with their company logo and literature to leave behind with their customers. Those items are table stakes at this point. Those who rely on their appearance alone are using those items as a crutch to compensate for a weak sales staff.

The fact of the matter is, truck wraps and nice tri-folds don’t close deals. Your salesmen do. First and foremost, invest in your salesmen. They will make or break your company, not your yard signs or business cards. You can either spend even MORE on telemarketing leads and advertising mailers, or you can invest in your salesmen to improve their skills so they sign more of the leads you’re already getting. Which makes more sense?

Take some time to really assess your organization right now and identify areas of opportunity in which you can systematically improve upon. By recognizing the weak links within your company, you can begin improving your systems, approaches, and methods to increase the efficiency, retention, and quality of your sales team.