

8

Characteristics of Highly Successful Independent Sales Teams

For companies that are
preparing to contract with
independent sales
representatives

*What you absolutely must know to create a
highly successful independent sales team*

A L I C E E R R E T T

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Contracting with Independent Sales Representatives

Lots and lots of companies want independent sales representatives to sell their products and services. Great independents sales representatives are approached regularly by companies who want to engage them for the rep's selling expertise. So what are the characteristics of a company that has a great independent sales rep program? We'll assume that the product or service is top notch; that's really a discussion all on its own. But if there's something great to sell, then here are our top 10 characteristics of great independent sales rep programs.

RepRight can help you build a successful independent sales team. Visit us online for details.

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Characteristic # 1

You're looking for a partner, not an employee-sans-salary.

Here's why

The company is looking for a partner, not an employee-sans-salary. Some companies really want a sales employee, but that's expensive. So they 'settle' for bringing in independent sales reps. Other companies prefer working with independent sales representatives. Be clear; the sales reps can always tell the difference. If you were going to 'settle'...then don't. It will just waste your time, your reps' time, and not deliver the sales you need.

Characteristic # 2

Commissions are straightforward and preitable.

Here's why

Commissions are easy to compute, easy to check and validate, and come as regularly as any salaried employee's paycheck.

Commission are paid on the same day of the month, every single time, just like payroll. No exceptions. Ever. Ever. Ever. Better yet – pay real-time via direct deposit.

Remember, your reps are trusting you with their time and expertise. This is your first way to prove that you're holding up your end of the bargain.

Characteristic # 3

Your sales rep training is well thought-out - not just a copy of client materials.

Here's why

The training program for the independent rep must consist of more than some product samples and company literature. What's unique about your product? Who are our best targets? What are great ways to get by the gatekeeper for this product? How about a few testimonials?

In addition, help your reps with training about your competition, pricing structure, and common objections and how to answer them.

The better you arm your reps, the more likely they are to sell well for you.

Characteristic # 4

Your sales team should be able to focus on sales, not on other company functions.

Here's why

Great independent sales rep programs remember that the independent sales rep is 'all about the sale' not 'all about the company's back end processing of the sale'.

Independent sales representatives are paid for the sale. They are not paid to come to your weekly staff meetings, work your booth at a trade show, or share their own leads in your leads management system. If you need those things, then you need a paid, salaried employee to do those things. You don't ask your accountant to run by your bank and make a deposit for you. Don't ask your independent sales rep to do things outside of the scope of the sale.

Characteristic # 5

Your bridge program is strong, well thought-out, and designed to help your reps make money quickly.

Here's why

Companies that have highly successful independent sales representative programs usually also have great bridge programs for the first few weeks of territory selling. A bridge program is the temporary assistance that you give to a new sales rep who is just learning your product or service, making first calls, closing first deals. Your bridge program may include accompanying the rep on sales calls, review of sales call activity, help with initial proposals and contracts. Your bridge may even include a temporary stipend while the rep becomes established. A bridge program that helps to prepare and support the rep with calls, emails, follow-up...even a little motivation...can make all the difference.

Characteristic # 6

If it's not working out, you'll need to cut the cord quickly.

Here's why

Great companies are ok with cutting the cord. Quickly. Definitively. If the independent sales rep isn't working out for whatever reason, then it's time to change the relationship. Unlike working with salaried sales reps, commission-only sales reps need to come to the opportunity ready to sell. If it doesn't work, for whatever reason, cut the loss, stop the pain. Move on. Cutting the cord is an infinitely easier process with independent sales reps than employees.

The truth is, it's likely that not all of your independent sales team will be successful. That's ok. Plan for that.

Characteristic # 7

You offer both aggressive goals and big payouts

Here's why

Great independent sales rep programs have aggressive goals with great payouts. Independent sales reps are in general, a really competitive lot. Set the carrot high, but fair. And make it a big carrot.

Characteristic # 8

You need to make sure that the independent sales culture fits with the rest of your organization.

Here's why

Here's the granddaddy of all independent sales rep program rules: Great independent sales reps sell a lot. That means they earn a lot. Sometimes they earn more than the company's top officers. This can cause strife in the upper ranks. Great companies get this worked out early on and are completely comfortable writing big checks to INDEPENDENT SALES REPs. Writing big INDEPENDENT SALES REP checks means that the INDEPENDENT SALES REPs are producing well. And that's the whole point.

I hope you find this
booklet helpful.

I've been working with independent sales - as a sales rep, a sales recruiter, a sales director, and small business owner for many years. Companies with independent sales teams that embody those eight characteristics do very very well. I wish you all the best.



Alice Errett owns RepRight, a company devoted to improving pay-for-performance representation.

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