The 5 Biggest Mistakes Leaders Make with Their Sales Development Program

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Introduction

When implemented correctly, a Sales Development team can be one of your strongest assets by helping you book more appointments, create more pipeline, convert more leads, and build solid sales bench strength to speed up hiring. Most businesses would like an optimized Sales Development process that produces a regular sales pipeline with an improved ROI, especially when budgets are tight.

Thinking of starting or improving your Sales Development program? After many years of helping businesses improve their Sales Development programs, we've seen certain issues arise again and again. If left unchecked, these types of mistakes can sabotage your sales results which can lead to confusion and, in extreme cases, sometimes abandoning their Sales Development strategy entirely.

However, by recognizing and avoiding these mistakes, your Sales Development team will have greater ROI and deliver better results for years to come.

Here are the top 5 mistakes, along with the solutions you need to overcome them.

- **Mistake 1:** Hiring SDRs before setting up their processes
- **Mistake 2:** Hiring SDRs without an experienced Manager in place
- **Mistake 3:** Using unstructured data
- **Mistake 4:** Not having a go-to-market script or strategy in place
- **Mistake 5:** Set it, forget it, and then criticize it

Mistake 1: Hiring SDRs Before Setting Up Their Processes

Most mistakes that affect a company's Sales Development program are to do with the initial setup. For most companies, after securing the necessary budget and making the decision to get started, they immediately jump straight to the hiring stage without giving any initial thought to the underlying processes.

So those first SDRs come on board. They might get a couple of days of training (if they're lucky). They get handed some data and are set up on a sales engagement platform.

Then, they're left to it all alone.

This can result in a costly mistake. Basic training, sales data, and software are no substitute for a foundational set of processes and procedures that underpin the entire program. Without those processes already in place before your first hire, reps will inevitably waste an immense amount of time attempting to set up processes themselves. In most cases, these will be the wrong processes, usually inefficient or non-repeatable.

When your first reps are spending all their time attempting to figure out what they should do every day, they'll inevitably struggle to find and use best practices.

The Solution

Before you hire anyone, sketch out an actionable process they'll use. Think about the steps that the reps will need to follow, from identifying and prioritizing accounts to identifying personas and booking a meeting.

Document their specific responsibilities so that they know what to do daily and understand what kind of commitment and activity you expect from them. Write down a set of detailed steps and a checklist they'll need to complete each day. Finally, decide how you'll manage and monitor their work.
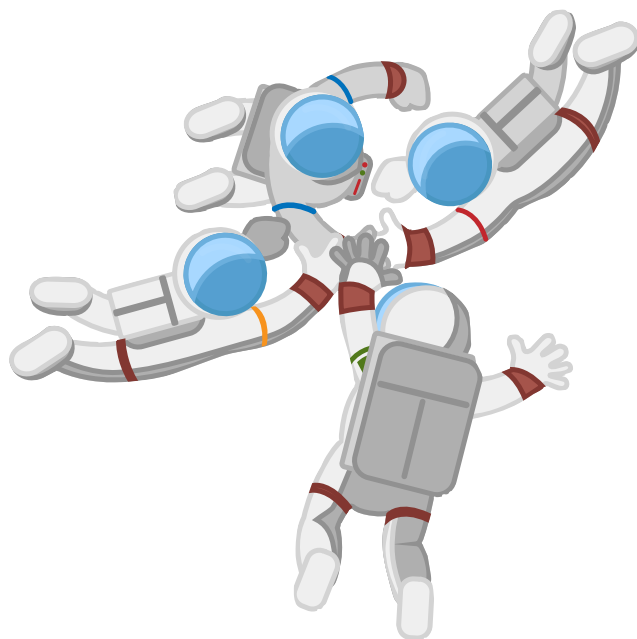
Mistake 2: Hiring SDRs Without an Experienced Manager in Place

We've just established that to be successful, SDRs need to have an established and documented process that they can follow on a daily basis. But even the best process won't be enough if there's no one in place to oversee its implementation.

SDRs need plenty of training, coaching, and ongoing support. They need someone to monitor what they're doing and how they're spending their time, which enables you to get the very best performance out of your team.

Many companies will wait until they have six to eight SDRs on the team before they even consider bringing on a direct manager. They may have a VP of Sales, a CMO, or other executive overseeing the program; but they're usually not spending nearly enough time and providing the attention needed for their team to perform at optimum level.

The Solution

Hire an experienced Sales Development Manager first. As well as setting up those core processes and getting everything in place, they can act as your first SDR, lay out your process, write your playbook and then start to hire additional reps to build your team. They are not an unnecessary expense; on the contrary, they are the foundation for your successful program.

To enhance this structure, consider your next hire to be someone who's able to handle the operations side while working alongside your manager. This next hire would be someone who is solely focused on setting up the backend processes correctly. Now you'll have your supervision and operations established. Next, when you start adding SDRs, they'll be able to get the best results without expending their time spinning their wheels with bad processes, bad data, and the wrong tools.

Mistake 3: Using Unstructured Data

Alongside your processes and your reps, data is an essential part of any Sales Development program.

Without details on potential Accounts and Leads, your SDRs can't do their job. They spend the whole day either researching contact data, or sending messages to bad emails and disconnected phone numbers.

However, despite its importance, data is usually an afterthought. Many companies just outsource the process and buy lists from the first data vendor they find on Google; then they put those names and numbers into the system and tell the SDRs to get dialing.

Unfortunately, most of the data that's gathered this way is inaccurate. These may include incorrect phone numbers and out-of-date email addresses of people who haven't worked at those companies for years.

Alternatively, some SDRs are tasked with finding the data for themselves. This typically involves inefficient hours spent going through LinkedIn and finding details for prospects one by one. Even if the data is reliable, it's a long process that takes up time that could've been better spent in actual Sales Development.

Either way, when your SDRs spend more time sifting through inaccurate data than actually reaching out to people and having conversations, it's a huge waste of their time and your resources.

The Solution

Rather than leaving something as important as your data up to chance, address any potential issues with a structured data program. By having a documented approach to the cleaning and prioritization of your data, your SDRs will have reliable data and be more efficient.

Mistake 4: Not Having a Go-to-Market Script or Strategy in Place

A focused Sales Development program can be a highly effective tool for your organization.

However, like any tool, you have to understand how to use it properly if you're going to see any meaningful results. Due to the popularity of Sales Development, companies often put an SDR team in place without first considering whether or not it's an effective use of their time and money. They see everyone else with an SDR team and figure they should have one too.

Companies need to be more strategic. Before investing considerable resources into a Sales Development program, ask yourself if it's the right go-to-market strategy for you. In some cases, Sales Development might not even be the right solution for your market.

For example, maybe you're pioneering a disruptive technology where you're trying to sell a service that isn't familiar to people. If people don't recognize that their problems can be solved by your product, then your priority has to be educating the market. That will have to be the aim of the SDR team. Asking them to set up BANT qualified leads will be a waste of everyone's time. This will be an uphill battle as people don't even know what problem you're solving or that it is actually a problem. When your leads aren't familiar with the problems and solutions you're referring to, they're not going to book a meeting.

In this scenario, your Sales Development team would have to act more as an education team. You must spend time educating the market and about this new disruptive technology or service of yours. However this won't necessarily lead to meetings. Rather than having booked meetings as your goal, you need to prioritize getting people into an education funnel. This could be encouraging them to sign up for webinars, building up an email list, or some other top-of-funnel content activities. In this case, the SDRs would be acting as a marketing and awareness engine.

On the other hand, if your business is offering displacement rather than disruption, then your SDRs don't have to worry so much about educating the market. Instead, they can reach out to leads who are using the product or service you're displacing and be confident that they understand it and the problem that it solves. They can then introduce your superior solution, the "better mousetrap." That opens up an opportunity for your SDRs to find out when the lead's contract is up and secure some time on their calendar. In this case, the goals for the Sales Development team will be booking meetings and getting leads into the pipeline, perhaps even to BANT stage.

The Solution

Stop thinking about Sales Development as a "one size fits all" solution. To get the kind of results you're looking for, you need to understand the purpose behind a Sales Development program and how it can be structured to meet your unique requirements.

Think carefully about what specific activities need to be carried out in the early stages of your sales process, then build your SDR program around those activities. In certain scenarios, you might need to look for an alternative strategy that better suits you. In either case, being aware of this before you implement your Sales Development program is a lot easier than trying to change an existing team.

Mistake 5: Set it, Forget it, and then Criticize it

As powerful as a Sales Development program is, it's not a magic bullet that can solve all your sales problems with zero effort.

In many ways, this final mistake is the source of every other problem your Sales Development team might face, including those mistakes we've already discussed. Too many companies decide they need a Sales Development program so they hire a bunch of SDRs with:

- No underlying process
- No direct management
- Unstructured data
- No go-to-market strategy

A senior executive pays all this money for people and the necessary technology to put an SDR team together with the mentality that's what makes a Sales Development program. Afterwards, they just put them in the corner and forget about them.

When they eventually remember to review their progress a couple of months later, they're shocked to see that the team is disgruntled and confused; therefore leading to low or non-existent results. Unhappy with what they see, they begin criticizing: fingers are being pointed, SDRs are threatened with firing, and there is talk of abandoning the Sales Development program altogether or outsourcing it to a third party.

Even if the Sales Development program survives, it will struggle to recover and results will suffer.

The Solution

You need to have the right foundation and support for your Sales Development program from the very beginning. If you already have a program in place that's struggling, it's no good just throwing money at the problem and hoping it'll get better or, even worse, threatening to fire everyone. You have to go back to the start, then work through the steps of building a sustainable solution.

Yes, it will take effort. You need to put hard work in if you expect the program to produce results. You need to get your hands dirty and get into the details, working out every aspect of how your team will work and making sure there's a solid playbook in place for the program so that you can start to be successful.

Rather than leaving your SDRs to their own devices, get involved. If you're still not seeing the results you're expecting, you'll be in a far better position to analyze what's going on and how it can be improved.

Final Thoughts

Sales Development is increasingly popular and an essential part of many sales organizations. It still needs to be implemented properly to get meaningful results. By taking the time to put in the proper processes, the right management structure, structured data, and a strategy that fits your organization, your team of SDRs will be able to focus on their core tasks of generating leads and booking meetings.

It might mean more work up front, but the benefits of an optimized Sales Development team will make it a worthwhile investment.

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