



Saving Time  
Change your thinking  
about what you need to  
know



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If your boss comes to you and asks about a particular account, do you feel inadequate if you don't know the answer?

There seems to be a disease that sometimes hits front-line managers that is called You-Have-To-Know-Everything. It hits every level of management, actually --- the level of detail just changes.

With the front-line sales manager job, this disease is especially stressful and unproductive, burdening managers with unrealistic expectations of themselves. They can spend their days asking questions, holding meetings, requiring reports and spreadsheets, and pouring through information. This process wastes their time and, more importantly, steals rep selling time.

At this point you might be asking, "But isn't it a manager's job to know what's going on?" No, it isn't. A manager's job is to drive behavior that drives results. And yes, a manager needs quantitative and qualitative information in order to drive the right behaviors and results.

The critical question becomes what information, and how much of it, do we need? Additionally, what is the most time-effective way to get it?

I recommend first taking a quick inventory of all the information requested of reps.

Then, figure out what you need to know from a big perspective. For example, in addition to sales results, you want to know:

1. How well reps are prospecting and how much.
2. How well reps consistently follow your sales process.
3. How well reps sell all your products and increase your market share.
4. How well reps implement and service customers, without wasting time and money.
5. Where you need to provide help or guidance or managerial decisions.

Now re-look at number five above. It's the only reason you're doing the other four items!

Next ask yourself to reevaluate how to easily find out what you need to know. Challenge yourself here, be creative and throw out all your assumptions.

For example, if a rep is surpassing quota as well as bringing in enough new accounts each month, do you really need to know precisely how many cold calls he made each day and with whom?

One effective managerial strategy is commonly called the "helicopter approach." It might help you get information as needed. With this approach, you are the helicopter, flying around looking for problem areas or areas that need improvement. Every once in a while, especially when you have an indication of something needing improvement, you swoop down into detail, identify the cause, fix it and go back up in the air to keep surveying.

In real-life terms, assume you looked at a revenue report and find that Sally met quota, but barely. You also know she sells only her "favorite" products and doesn't sell many niche products. Rather than requiring everyone to report everything they're recommending on every proposal, you swoop down into Sally's terrain.

Your swooping could involve several fronts: riding with Sally, reviewing proposals with her and asking key questions after each needs analysis she does. Your goal is to uncover and then solve the problem. She could need help on anything from needs analysis to recommending based on potential, not the prospect's stated budget.

And when your boss asks if anyone is working on a specific account, you can feel comfortable saying, "I don't know, but that's a good idea. I'll find out." It's indubitably better than admitting, "I don't know. I'm not swooping there today."

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