



# Selling Points

Laurie Mahoney and Tom Martin

## Treat Employees Like Strategic Accounts



**Y**ou've done the math. Happy employees are more productive; they are your ambassadors and your best indirect salespeople. They generate more value for the company. Why not treat them as such?

Change employee to customer and what do you get? Sales managers, senior executives, and HR professionals can borrow proven methods from the arena of sales and effectively apply them to develop employees.

Just like some accounts are more equal than others, the same is true of your employees. Key employees should be treated like key accounts.

### How to Treat Employees like Key Accounts

Let's start by talking about your existing key accounts—that is—employees. While these concepts apply to all employees, a logical place to start is with employees whom you sense are at risk, or are so critical you cannot bear the thought of replacing them.

### Getting the GOODS on Your Key Employees, aka Key Accounts

When a trusted business advisor talks to his/her accounts, they do not start by telling them how great their products are. Nor should you start all of your employee conversations by telling them about your company's greatest new benefit.

To build more trust with your employees, start by asking them questions about their long-term career **G**oals, that is, their 3-5 year plan. If they don't have a clear vision, use your talent to help them think about options, and to see that longer term goals are often more qualitative in nature.

Once you are both clear about this long-term focus, you can move into a discussion about some of the shorter term **O**bjectives they need to achieve as stepping stones to their long-term goals. Objectives are generally more quantifiable and roughly 3-12 months out.

You can then segue into a question about the **O**bstacles, issues, and challenges they see in achieving those objectives

and goals. Surfacing such obstacles will help them sleep better at night.

From here you can ask them *if I could wave a magic wand, what would the perfect job for you look like right now?* The answer will help you understand their **D**esires and the outcomes they are looking for.

Also talk about what **S**uccess looks like to them. In other words, what concrete signposts will they see over the next 3-12 months that tell them they should still be working for you instead of looking for another job? Success metrics so to speak—how will they know they are successful?

Now what? As a salesperson, you now understand where this employee is, and where he or she wants to go. Now is the time to talk about potential solutions that would appeal to them and move them toward their objectives and goals, and craft a possible action plan for their professional development.

Focus on five points that would be most interesting to this one person, this single strategic account. Imagine yourself in their shoes—wouldn't this feel refreshing?

For example, your direct report is a tenured sales person who has a mix of old and new accounts. What might you suggest as a development plan over the next three quarters after you've talked with her?

- Have her attend a project management training program.
- Assign a mentor to work with her.
- Ask her to mentor a new manager in sales, marketing, or another area.
- Assign her to a key project in sales—possibly a new product rollout.

The possibilities of developing your key accounts are endless within your own organization.

Remember, happy employees are your ambassadors to the world.

**BSM**

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### My Hidden Gem

**Lamberton Conservatory**—a great getaway from all kinds of weather and moods; all you have to do is breathe—*Laurie Mahoney, President, The Mahoney Group.*