

## **CEO Tip of the Month: The CEO—The Uppermost Sales Representative**

by Guido Quelle

Quite a bit is expected from CEOs: They have to be able to lead, are expected to be role models, and to be brilliant strategists with a good portion of personal vision on top. And not only that: I firmly believe every CEO should be their company's uppermost Sales representative, absolutely regardless of how large (or how small) the company is.

You might say that's completely unnecessary, since you already have a well-paid Head of Sales in charge of a whole Sales team. That may be true, but the point here isn't the hierarchical structure, but a bit of corporate culture and corporate self-image. If we assume for the moment that Sales is the most important unit—and I can already hear how the representatives of other areas beg to differ—then companies need not only a formal leader, but also full support for sales-related issues and concerns at the top of the company.

Furthermore it is essential that CEOs embrace a sales-oriented self-image when they're "out there," operating outside their own corporate setting. I have met too many figureheads and corporate bosses with a major penchant for showmanship who, instead of translating their influence into sales-relevant, or let's say market-relevant power, have instead simply basked in the glory of their position. And it's understandable why: Everyone looks up to the CEO: employees, business partners, suppliers, etc.

The most effective CEOs I know—and again: I'm not just talking about Chairmen of the Board at major corporations, but also entrepreneurs and Managing Directors—have made the subject of "sales" their own; it's in their flesh and blood. In larger companies there is of course a Head of Sales in the upper management, but nevertheless the CEOs of these successful companies are always on the lookout for new market opportunities and keep close tabs on customer needs, prices and the competition. These successful and effective CEOs aren't satisfied with optimizing their largely internal duties; they also turn their attention outwards and focus on what goes on beyond the office walls.

These CEOs are also alert when it comes to internal conflicts concerning Sales, and most often decide in favor of Sales—which makes good sense, since no company has ever grown by cutting corners in Sales and internalizing its resources. Even if other departments or divisions are at times extremely frustrated by what they see as the dominance of Sales: It's the best choice for the company. It's easier to sell a mediocre product with a top Sales team supported by the CEO than it is to sell a top product with a mediocre Sales team. And exceptions only prove the rule.

The next time you as CEO, entrepreneur or Managing Director get complaints for taking the side of Sales over other departments, ask whoever's doing the complaining just where he or she thinks the company's profits come from.

Prof. Dr. Guido Quelle  
Managing Partner  
Mandat Managementberatung GmbH  
Emil-Figge-Straße 80  
44227 Dortmund  
Germany