



# Channel Sales Management – 9 Ways to Get Promoted



## Undisclosed Facts on Individual Growth

Over my three decades' experience in channel sales management, I have watched some people rise to the top, while others just don't know why they are not getting promoted. Based on from-the-trenches observations, I have some suggestions about how to break the deadlock if you feel you haven't achieved the recognition you deserve. I have identified nine typical behavior patterns that our organization has consistently observed to be drivers of individual growth and promotion by effectively developing core channel sales management skills.

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## 1. Integrity Comes First

We are all under pressure to perform, but it is absolutely vital to avoid the temptation to take shortcuts. We have all heard hair-raising stories of attempts to trick the system: fake invoices sent to fake email addresses to book fake revenue; asking a partner to buy product and side-sell to another to make profit and share commissions; having a partner buy at the end of the quarter and then return via another service provider. In the end, whatever the pressure or the short-term justification, it rarely works out in the long run. These practices all eventually come to light. Once anyone's credibility takes a hit, the word spreads fast, and reputation repair is a long and tough process. No matter what, put your reputation first. Your professional reputation is your key to success in channel management.

## 2. Focus on Relationships

Channel sales success is built upon relationships. Before a channel partner cares about what you know, or what you need to close your quarter, they first need to know what you can do for them. I can't count the number of times channel partners have told me, "I never hear from my channel rep till the end of the quarter, when they want me to buy something immediately so that they can meet their quota. And you know what I do then? I ask for deep discounts because I know their backs are against the wall and they end up selling product to me at whatever price I want. If the rep really cared about me and had shown they were going to help me grow my business, I might not only buy at full price, but possibly do something more ambitious."

If you figure out how you can integrate your priorities with a strategy to help your partners grow, you will be able to work towards mutually beneficial end results.

## 3. Feed the Run Rate

Channel sales is a run rate business. There is very little you can do this quarter to impact this quarter's numbers. Yes, of course you need to support your partners to drive deals, but use automation as much as you can to analyze and strategize for the future. Chances are you have a CRM system, and if you do then use it! Figure out how best you can leverage it to track what is going on a day-to-day basis with your territory or region, and what needs to change. Partner profiling tied to dynamic analytics and reports can greatly enhance your insights about your run rate business. This will give you a clear picture of who is performing and who is not, and will give you insights into patterns and trends that require further investigation and resolution.

## 4. Build A Bridge Towards Future

While you feed your run rate business, you also need to build a process for understanding your partner base. This is achieved via partner profiling to work out who has the potential to move up to the next tier. You can do this by sending a simple survey asking about their concerns and needs.

This allows you to identify the high potential and high-risk partners. You can then actively plan ahead, working with select sets of partners to address their issues, which may vary from technical support (our article on *Are You Relevant To Your Channel Partner?*), sales support, marketing support, etc. It is incredibly important at this stage to prioritize, take a structured approach focused on your channel sales management goals, and not get sucked into the day-to-day crisis management cycle, which tends to be very common in the channel – something is always blowing up somewhere.

## 5. Build a System

For you to effectively build pipeline, you will need to depend on a system so you not only have deal closure, but a pipeline that is constantly growing. This is where Channel Marketing Automation comes in. If your organization has a Partner Marketing Management or Partner Relationship Management platform then exploit it fully. Learn it, use it, and promote it. It will help you to build your system very quickly.

We have repeatedly seen that channel sales reps and managers who use automated platforms effectively are by default two to three times more effective than those who don't. How do we know? Our platforms can track results by territory, so we have been able to track how partner productivity grows in one territory versus another simply because of effective use of automation. This is not a conjecture; this is based on fact and proven by results. So if your channel team is not currently using automation, be proactive and vocal and promote the use of such a system.

## 6. Build Your Internal Network

Your relationship with your internal colleagues in product management, marketing, engineering and technical support is critical if you are to be effective in getting things done for your partners. When you know from which partners your growth is likely to come and understand the technical or support issues, you can be specific about areas that need work and on which you will need help from your cross functional colleagues. And, in the same way that your relationship with your partners is closely tied to your ability to help them, your relationship with your internal colleagues is a two-way street. For them to go the extra mile for you, you need to relate your requests to their most important priorities.

Be specific. Gather data. Product managers are trying to grow their product lines. They are your best allies. Support Managers are trying to improve customer satisfaction rate, they are your best advocates. Don't just send emails stating what doesn't work – although you have to do this from time to time to get things fixed and done – but also let your colleagues know what does work. Share success stories from your partner base. Build your internal relationship equity to make things happen and solve problems. Happy customers enhance your image – and your colleagues' – internally and externally.

## 7. Know Your Products

Most articles on sales efficiency focus on product expertise as a critical factor, but if you have been around in a channel sales management role in your current company for a while you probably know the existing products. But most technology companies are constantly introducing new products and pricing, so staying ahead of the curve is important. It is important that your internal network perceives you to be knowledgeable and don't think you are reaching out for information that you should know. Familiarity with your solutions will make it easier for you to distribute relevant content to your partners.

Most large companies have enormous amounts of information in their partner portal which makes it is very difficult for partners to find the information they need. Be your partners' short cut. Get familiar with the portal and save links to the portal by product category that you can easily text and email information to your partners.

## 8. Be Organized

For you to effectively do the seven things listed above, you need to be or become highly organized. There are plenty of self-help tools out there on how you can do better at managing your time and getting more things done. Personally I am a big fan of David Allen's book, "Getting Things Done". We are all different, so analyze the times and activities at which you are most productive. If you are a morning person, figure out how to make the most your morning and factor in your less challenging tasks for afternoons. If you are more of a late night person, perhaps that's when you schedule complex reporting, planning or research. The key is to plan every day, every week and every month – in short, become a list master. Write it, track it, and update it as you get it done using whatever system that works for you as long as you commit to having a system, because you will always have more than you can handle in a day in your channel sales management role and a system ensures that you will stay on track even though the list keeps on growing.

## 9. Stay Healthy

As Steven Covey said "Sharpen The Saw", health covers both emotional and physical wellbeing. Over the years I have consistently seen that channel account reps, managers and leaders who are physically and emotionally fit will always outstrip their peers by effectively managing stress, planning ahead and executing day in and day out. It's all about building run rate from within – not just controlling external factors, but managing what drives you so that you can drive what is important in your channel sales management role.

You will notice that nowhere in these nine critical points have I ever mentioned meeting your numbers. Why? It is a given. You are a sales person in a channel sales management role. You have a quota, so you must meet that output. If you manage these nine key input drivers you will make your numbers happen, not by magic but through logic, and – not for just one quarter, but quarter after quarter after quarter.

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