



Don't Starve Your Racehorses

By Bette Price, CMC

Imagine the owner of a horse ranch who purchases the only finest thoroughbreds in an effort to maximize his chances of developing a stable of high performance winners. Then, the same owner decides not to feed these thoroughbreds regularly with quality food. Imagine further that the same owner limits the exercise of these fine horses and deliberately confines them to small, isolated quarters. What kind of impact do you think this would have on the thoroughbreds achieving their greatest potential?

As ridiculous as this scenario seems, this is exactly what happens in business. A company hires bright, talented salespeople whom they believe have the potential to be high performers, only to starve them in the employment process by failing to regularly feed them, exercise them and expand their vision of what could be. True leaders take steps to ensure that this doesn't happen by implementing the following steps:

 **Feed them.** High achievers never stop learning. Training should be continuous and varied. Off-the-shelf programs are basic and tend to be best for the early stages. Managers that want to encourage the best in their sales team will provide a mix of internal and external customized training that goes well beyond the basics of standard sales techniques and delves deeply into the understanding of human behavior which is really what's a stake.

 **Feed them special food.** Smart managers understand that different people need help in different areas, and they accommodate those individual needs by *not* treating everyone on their sales team the same way. Instead, they really get to know their sales team as individuals and tailor some of the training to meet each individual's respective needs.

✍ **Exercise their minds.** Real growth only happens when stretching occurs.

Great sales managers know that only by giving their sales people the opportunity to test new waters with a challenging new client, will they experience the chance to stretch and grow. Give them small, new challenges so they can stretch their minds with fresh ideas. Never let them get too settled in their comfort zone.

✍ **Expand, don't confine.** Managers who have the ability to create an environment of trust will provide open forums in which each sales team member will be able to talk about his/her concerns, challenges, even failures and receive collective feedback. Sharing removes the sales rep from the confinement of their own situation and allows them to expand their horizon hearing the feedback and experiences of others. In an arena of trust, everyone grows through the process.

✍ **Show them.** Be sure that you, as the manager, are modeling the performance behaviors you expect from your people. Coach them collectively and respectfully. By demonstrating consistency in what you say and what you do, you will show your own commitment of what you ask from them.

✍ **Show Time.** Recognition is integral to continued performance. The rewards don't have to be major and they don't have to be all about money. Plan fun recognition activities and mini celebrations to maintain the momentum—this is your team's show time. Show time can also be a time to show your overall commitment to your thoroughbreds. If you have people on your team who continually prove they are not the thoroughbreds you

believed them to be, and you can honestly say you've given them all the care and feeding possible--take action. Pasteur them. It sends a clear message to your true thoroughbreds that you value true thoroughbreds. That you appreciate them, and will continue to feed and nurture them as they grow and will not discourage them by supporting those who have demonstrated that they are unwilling to grow too.

As we know, even the finest thoroughbreds don't win every race, yet they stay in the race with dignity and pride. With quality feeding and nurturing of your fine thoroughbreds, they too will perform with consistency, quality and pride.

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Bette Price, CMC, is a certified management consultant and author of True Leaders: How Exceptional CEOs and Presidents Make A Difference by Building People and Profits (Dearborn Trade Press). She writes, speaks and consults on marketing, management and leadership issues and may be contacted at www.PriceGroupLeadership.com. Sign up for her True Leader Letter.