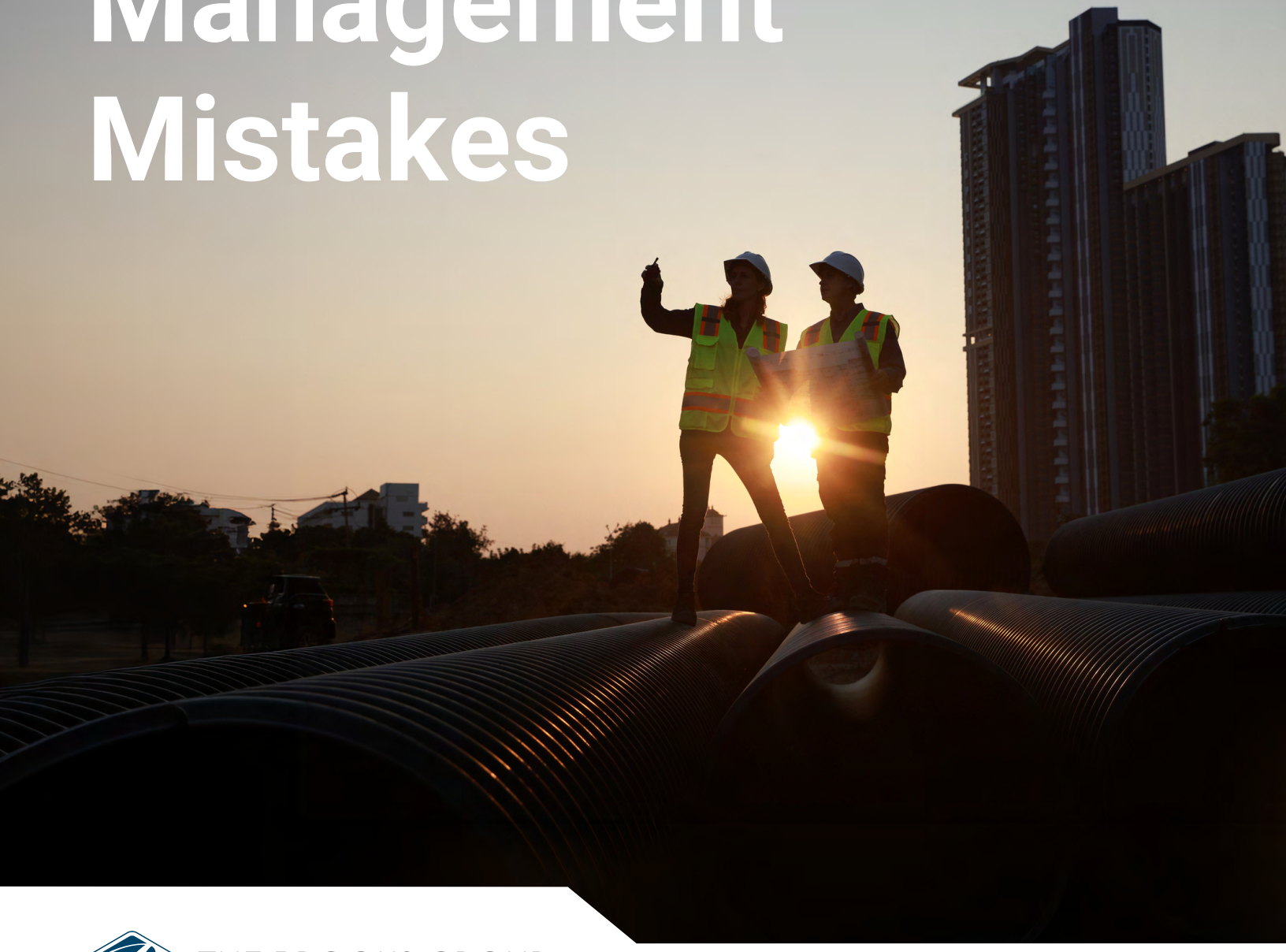
Industrial Sales Guide

How to Avoid the Top 10 Sales Management Mistakes



THE BROOKS GROUP



Industrial Sales Management: How to Avoid the Top 10 Mistakes

Far too many industrial organizations promote their top-performing salespeople to sales management. Others hire someone for the sales manager position and say, “Go do it!”

Neither approach works. More often than not, we see sales managers (rookies and veterans alike) making the same mistakes.

Just like sales, sales management requires training. Without it, leading a successful team can be an uphill battle. Balancing technical product training, selling, and coaching can be almost too much for many industrial sales managers.

But with the right training and a customer-centric approach, new sales managers can start strong and build high-performing teams.

Here are 10 common mistakes industrial sales managers make and how to avoid them.



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Mistake #1

Changing pay plans or making quotas impossible to achieve.

The quickest way to upset any sales team anywhere is to mess with their pay plans. Most—though not all—industrial salespeople are driven by income. That's what motivates them.

At the very least, an abrupt change in a pay plan places an emotional barrier to a sense of accomplishment. Don't ever diminish that. If you decide one day to adjust, reduce, make changes, or otherwise alter a pay plan, problems will arise.

You'll need to determine the best sales compensation plan to support your company's strategy. Instead of making unannounced changes, get support from the team. Plant a seed of change by asking for input. Don't ignore your team when it comes to their pay; they may have some great ideas.

How to Avoid

Seek input or ideas from your reps to ensure you have buy-in and a plan that motivates your team.

Mistake #2

Having pay plans that are confusing and/or are designed to reduce a salesperson's income from its current level without astronomical growth.

It's not overkill to say something so fundamentally important twice: The quickest way to upset any industrial sales team anywhere is to mess with pay plans.

Here's the caveat: If your pay plan is so confusing that your sales team focuses on how they get paid instead of how they sell, you've got a problem. No matter what you do, your salespeople will spend a chunk of their time calculating commissions. You might as well make it simple for them.

How to Avoid

Maintain a simple, easy-to-understand pay plan that works with (and for) your sales effort.



Mistake #3

Failing to provide sales skills training regardless of experience.

In most industrial sales organizations, it's common practice to hire salespeople with an engineering-related background due to the highly technical nature of the products they're selling.

Unfortunately, strong technical expertise usually doesn't translate to strong selling skills. Just because your reps can recite in-depth product features doesn't mean they know how to position the strategic benefits of that product for the customer's overall business strategy.

Many sales managers also believe that industrial salespeople who have a few years of selling under their belts don't need any training. Another mistake is to assume new hires will pick up the skills they need from their more experienced mentors.

The truth is that all industrial sales reps—regardless of experience or age—need to keep their skills up to date.

Competitors, markets, and selling environments are always evolving, and sales skills require constant refinement.

Ironically, it is often the experienced pros who rely on the way things have been done without updating their approach. In many cases they have built their book of business and neglected skills that are now essential for contemporary selling or in winning new business.

Too often, they simply rely on outdated and ineffective selling techniques when they really need to turn to strategic, consultative, and current sales practices. That's where professional sales training comes into play.

How to Avoid

Train both new and experienced reps on fundamental selling skills as well as product knowledge and sales process.

Mistake #4
Not allowing salespeople to finalize transactions.

Some industrial sales managers don't let their salespeople complete transactions. But reps are professionals and should be treated that way. They must have the ability to usher a sale from beginning to end.

This mistake is like being a football coach who has a player carrying the ball up and down the field and then takes the ball to score from the one-yard line. In our sports analogy—and in the world of sales—that leads to frustration and demotivation. You've got to let your players continue to drive for the goal.

How to Avoid

Learn how to coach from the sidelines and determine the point at which salespeople can carry the ball themselves.

Mistake #5
Spending too much time with sub-par performers.

In many cases, industrial sales managers find themselves spending all of their time working with sub-par reps and ignoring top-tier sales professionals. It's easy to get dragged down helping the poorest performers, but the highest returns come from working with the best on your team.

Top performers want your attention. They want to be told they're successful but also want to be coached to improve. They need you to help them get better. You will see greater impact from your efforts spent coaching your "A" and "B" players than you will with your "C" and "D" players.

How to Avoid

Develop your underperformers but invest more time coaching your high achievers.

Mistake #6

Relying on “end-process measurement” rather than “in-process assessment” when evaluating industrial salespeople.

Measuring performance based on pure sales results doesn’t tell you where a salesperson needs to improve or what drove the numbers.

That’s an important distinction to make. It’s harder to measure performance throughout the sales process, but it gives you more insight into your team’s ability and shows you exactly where improvement is needed.

Each member of your team has unique skills compared to the others. By understanding where those skill sets lie (and where they don’t) you can coach your team more effectively. If you focus on specific weaknesses at the beginning or the middle of the sales cycle, your team will see better end results.

How to Avoid

Assess your team’s selling skills at each stage of the sales process—from prospecting to close—to see what skills need development.

Mistake #7

Providing inadequate training for new product/service releases.

There’s nothing worse than being caught flatfooted in front of a prospect when describing a new product or service. Make sure your team has sufficient knowledge about any new offerings or updates so they can present them to customers successfully.

Without training, a new product launch has the potential to be an expensive disaster. Years of research and hundreds of thousands of dollars may go into new product or service—but it’s all for

naught if the sales team isn't brought up to speed.

Your reps are the ones in front of the customers explaining this exciting new widget. Your job as sales manager is to ensure they have complete product or service expertise before they find themselves in front of their first customer.

How to Avoid

Deliver continuous sales training on products/services to keep your reps up to date.

Mistake #8

Lacking a sales process and/or not coaching salespeople on your process.

Too many industrial salespeople believe that technical product knowledge or the ability to connect or "close" is enough—and that they can go in front of a prospect and "wing it." What's worse is that some sales managers agree and even encourage it. That's wrong.

If your reps want to consistently make more sales with less effort and have predictable pipeline, they must follow a repeatable series of steps from initial outreach to contract signing.

Just as in a manufacturing process, a consistent sales process organizes the whole team. When everyone follows the same steps, they share a common language, follow best practices, and replicate the habits of their A-players.



How to Avoid

Install a customer-centric sales process and reinforce it in pipeline reviews, one-on-ones, and deal strategy sessions.



Mistake #9

Selling without managing or managing without selling.

The requirements for successful sales management are completely different from those for success in sales. But you can't teach what you don't know, and you can't lead where you won't go.

You've got to spend time "in the trenches" with your team. If you don't, you'll find yourself in a position of weakness. Your sales team will take advantage of you and you will become much less effective as a manager.

It's hard not to get bogged down in administrative paperwork or managerial duties, but it's essential to keep one foot on the gas. By continuing to chase the occasional lead or make a sale every now and then, you will accomplish two things:

1. You'll have more credibility with your team.
2. You'll have a better understanding of the challenges they face.

At the same time, you need to fulfill your role as sales manager. After all, it's what you were hired to do. For many salespeople-turned-managers, this is the biggest challenge.

How to Avoid

Before accepting a position as manager, recognize how your function will change and consider how you will balance sales and management.

Mistake #10

Failing to recognize individual differences within the team.

We all have individual strengths and weaknesses. Treat your team that way. Capitalize on the former to compensate for the latter.

Sales assessments are great tools for understanding individual selling skills, behavior patterns, communication styles, and decision-making processes.

Knowing your reps is incredibly important for building an effective team and developing each seller. Treating everyone with the same broad brush just won't work.

A team is strong because of the individuals that make it up. The strongest sales organizations we've seen are ones that understand the different skills and abilities each rep brings to the table—and can call on those skills when they're needed.

How to Avoid

Use sales assessments to help your reps understand their own style and recognize a teammate or customer's style.



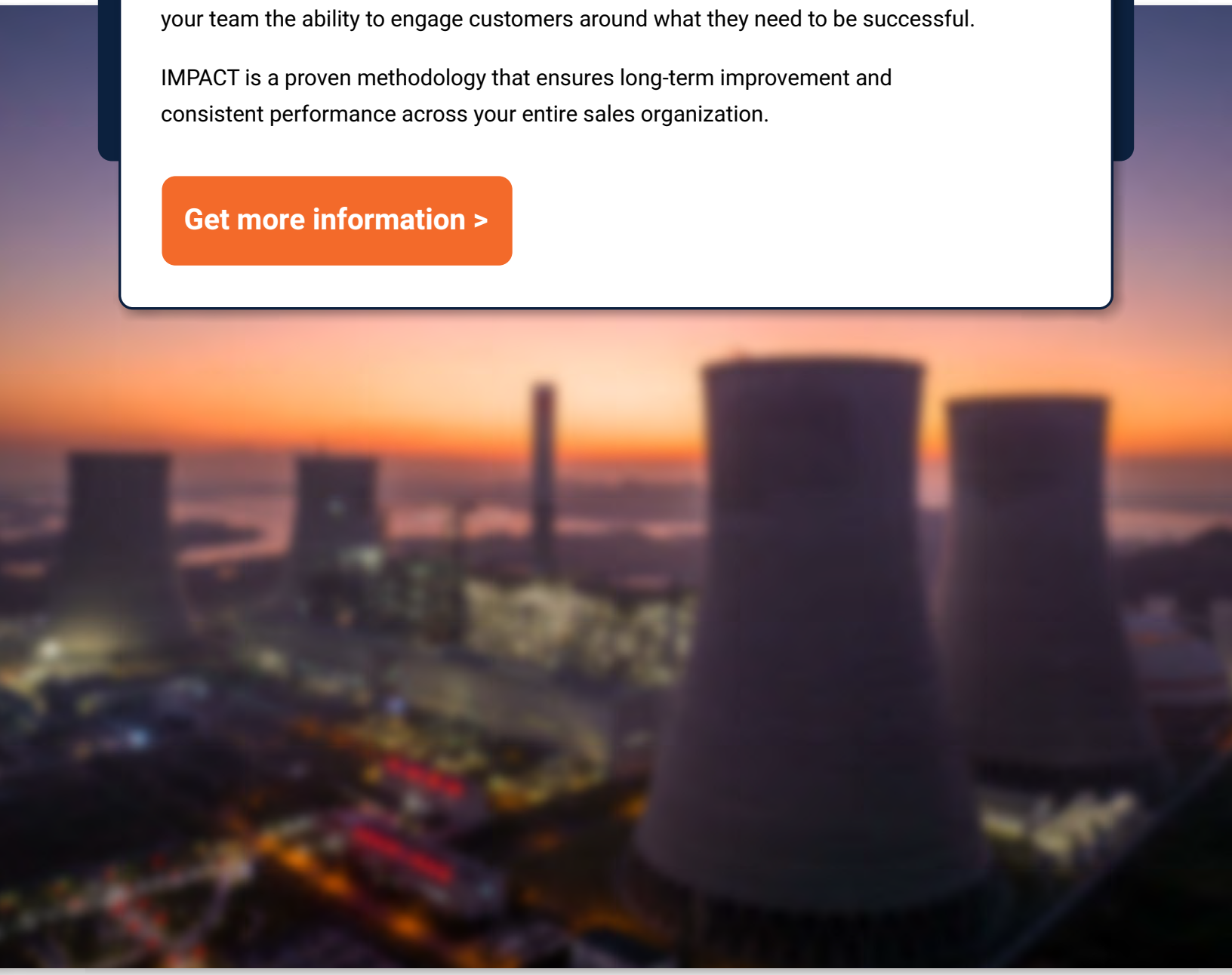
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