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Success Story

Profile VP/Sales & Marketing
Manager CEO Europe Id # : 9393

Restructure the sales operations after an acquisition

Hummingbird used to be a very successful company in the area of connectivity software. In the 90's the company made a few acquisitions in different business areas to expand its offering. The company decided to merge all businesses to provide one relationship with customers, assuming that they would prefer to have one supplier for all their requirements rather than having various companies to deal with.

In charge of the French operations, I followed the corporate guidelines and merged all French subsidiaries that Hummingbird had just acquired. I very soon realized that the difficulties were not generated by the financial and legal side of it, but by its impact on people.

The initial perception from people was positive as they had the feeling that something new was going on. They could take advantage of it. Unfortunately, people started to be confused with the new messages. One of our best sales executive showed a strong interest in the new acquired businesses thinking that he could be more successful with more products to sell. He hardly tried to push the new businesses and realized that the sales process was different from what he was experienced with. He lost focus. Eventually, he lost revenue instead of expanding his sales figures.

Having one group selling a full range of solutions to customers was a wrong decision. We reversed the wheel and created three independent sales divisions allowing people to sell what they were good at. We created an extra incentive for everyone in case all groups would succeed. As a result, we recovered business focus, leveraged some extra business because of the communication between groups and created a coherent vision.

The lesson learned from this experience :

- The sales process limits the revenue that a sales executive is able to generate. Giving him more product to sell will not make him more successful. It can create the opposite effect because he gets distracted.
- You will get the best performance of people if you push them to do what they know and what they are good at.
- Leverage the business will dependant on how good you create a communication between the groups without distracting from what they are doing.

Merging two separate businesses and get more than if they were separate is a difficult and long term process. We have to make sure that people focus on what they know, while providing the right path to make them feel part of the new company's mission.

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