

**Patsy Pritchett
Sales Manager
AT&T, Dallas, Texas**

Job Description

The *Sales Manager* supervises sixteen sales executives who manage business accounts with "global-sized" customers, that is, customers who bill at least one million dollars in net new revenue per year. The AT&T sales executives meet face-to-face with potential customers to sell AT&T's services and subsequently manage the accounts. The Sales Manager ensures that customers are matched to the appropriate sales executive, based on the executive's sales expertise and specialization. The manager also manages problem resolution in case of conflicts, and works with the sales executives to develop their career paths within AT&T.

CONCEPT: Reading literature

I blame my mother for that [a broad background based on reading] and I also *thank* her for that gift. My mother is an elementary school teacher, so I was brought up in a household where you were made to read. You read every day...I thank her tremendously today for all of the times that she made me sit down at a table and read a book.

So I think my flexibility in dealing with people, particularly international, is because of those many hours that my mother made me sit and read books, different cultural books, to enhance my knowledge of different people [so] that me--as a woman of color--was not the only type of woman that I would ever be exposed to in life.

CONCEPT: Foreign languages

Well, if I had given a little forethought to that, back in high school I would have taken lots of different languages instead of just Spanish, because I do deal extensively with international countries. We have what we call language line where we can incorporate people within the organization nationwide that can translate for us. Norwegian, Belgian, whatever the case may be.

But very often, in fact a couple of weeks ago, I was not able to get through to the language line rep in time, and I had a call that I had to deal with Mexico, and it was, of course a conference call, and I kept beating on myself because I kept thinking, if I had paid more attention to that basic Spanish class that I had in high school, then I would be able to sit through that conference call and not need a translator at all. My basic knowledge right now is counting from one to twenty and I think I'm accomplished when I can do that and someone else can understand it.

But I think that's an experience where I really regret not taking full advantage of something that was given to me basically free of charge and I did only the necessities of getting through that class. I regret that tremendously.

WORK SKILLS: Dealing with irate customers

One of the very basics that I use all the time is, you allow the customer to vent. You sit back, you relax, you look them straight in the face, and you say, what is the problem? You allow them to rant and rage and you allow them to say exactly what it is. I often find that once you allow the customer to tell you exactly how he feels, a lot of the rage, a lot of the anger is gone because they have openly expressed their concern to you.

My second step is always to apologize. I am so sorry for the inconvenience that you have experienced. Let me fix it for you, or what can I do? What can I do to help you so that this will never happen again? So aside from allowing them to tell you in their terms--whether that may mean-- with a few curse words here and there, you apologize, and then you ask how you can fix it. Nine times out of ten, the customer will tell you how can you fix it, how you can make it right with him or her.

I think the most important thing at that point is whatever you tell the customer is the means that you're going to take to fix it, that you follow through with that. Your commitment to the customer at that point is to deliver what you have promised. That builds credibility with your customers.

WORK SKILLS: Networking

Well, other than the two things I've already mentioned, I think one's network has a tremendous [role in] your success. By your network, I mean your cross-industry knowledge [and contacts]. I've been pretty fortunate in that I have worked not only in the sales arena, but I've also worked in the service arena. I have sold PBXs which helps me on the technical side of the house to know exactly what type of terminating equipment is needed with the network service offerings that we have in our product line.

You meet people along the way. You attend training classes with them. You attend product service offerings with them. Trade shows. Customer forums. You trade cards. You talk to people. You build up a network. These are network people that you can constantly call upon to help you out in situations, to help you in any given situation. It helps you broaden your horizon.

I think being on the job helps you tremendously—being surrounded by your peers. There's conversation constantly. One picks up things. One shouts out things. One can talk to a customer on the telephone, hang up that telephone and go visit with someone else in the office. You communicate. You openly ask and you'll get responses.

WORK SKILLS: Solving a problem: Connectivity

Here's a problem that we encounter on a daily basis, and it happened even today. One of my customers phoned in--a multi-million dollar customer. The account bills over \$30 million annually in net new revenue, so they require and they demand, and I respond appropriately to their every need. The customer phoned in. He had a service problem. One of his international circuits had died. Basically what had happened was at the central office there was some construction work that was going on. Someone back-hoed and uprooted the cabling that connected the international circuit. At that point my sales executive could not finalize exactly what was the root cause of that particular problem. That necessitated some calls to not only the central office, but I had to go even further. I had to deal with some of the local Lex. Lex in our terminology means other vendors. Most commonly in an international circuit there's more than one vendor that is involved with the connectivity of that circuit. AT&T may have the circuit to the domestic bridge, and then it may be carried by Southwestern Bell or MCI or Sprint.

So my basic responsibility here at this point was to coordinate the efforts of the many Lex that were involved to resolve the problem. Customers don't understand why there is a delay in isolating and repairing their services when they have multi-million dollar worth of batch information that they need to transmit over that circuit.

WORK SKILLS: Writing a brief

Unfortunately, [restoring connectivity on this international circuit] took a bit longer than our normal turnaround. My objective in any case that deals with international services is two hours or less. This one took a total of two hours and 45 minutes. When something like that occurs, I do require the sales executive to write up what I call a brief.

In communications terminology a brief is basically, state what the problem was, state the cause of the problem, state the steps that were used in resolving the problem and the turnaround time. And I do require one other thing in these briefs, and it is, what can we do to avoid running into this situation again? And if it does occur, how can we resolve the problem quicker?

WORK SKILLS: Relationship with customers

Because they are global accounts and because they do bill over one million dollars annually in net new revenue, that justifies a dedicated sales person responsible for their account. Several accounts, according to the size and the net new revenue that they generate, require sales executives in many specialties to support their account. [One company], for instance, has three international sales executives. They have two corporate net sales executives, and they have two data sales executives. So a sales executive basically marries. There is a union between the sales executive and the customer from start to finish and they're dedicated to that account for their tour with AT&T.

Documented evidence does state that people buy from people. You are more apt to open up, tell what your goals and objectives are, tell what your problems are, the obstacles that you may encounter as a customer in achieving your own goals. The responsibilities of the sales executive is to help that customer achieve those goals. It's mutually beneficial--beneficial for the customer as well as AT&T.

WORK SKILLS: Communication

I think a great communicator is just someone that is flexible enough to talk openly to anyone, whether it's a customer, a neighbor, or even a stranger--in language that they understand. Flexible enough that you don't talk over a person's head or below them. You have to be able to talk to them openly and honestly and be understood in what you say.

During college days or university days I think one of the basic courses or one of the fields that one must pursue is some type of communication and some type of presentation. I think these are the basic foundations of becoming who you really want to be. My mother used to tell me all the time that first impressions are always lasting impressions. So I think when a person looks at you for the very first time, that impression that they get from you initially is sometimes very difficult to overcome, especially if it's a negative one.

WORK SKILLS: Using math

The math classes that I took in high school are the basic foundations of what we call fact finding and data gathering. By that I mean, a customer will come to you and say, I want a cost per minute of eight cents and I am now billing \$10,000 a month. There is your equation right there. To find out what the customer's present cost per minute will be is you divide what he is paying presently by the number of minutes that he is billing on his invoices. That gives you his present cost per minute. One would never think that you digress to the point of simple arithmetic that you learned back in elementary school. So I cannot stress enough the importance of an education. No one as a small child loves to go to school. I don't know any. I didn't grow up with any kids that wanted to go to school, but I find myself all the time relying upon information that I just take for granted. I know things that I don't even know how I acquired them, but I know it had to have been through some training class or through some basic classes that I took in elementary school, high school, or college.

JOB/CAREER: Job overview

My present job title is multi-sales manager. Basically what that equates to is, I am responsible for the supervision, maintenance and guidance of 16 sales executives. Sales executives in our sales center are those people that are responsible for going out, meeting face to face with a customer and basically trying to sell them our product line.

These are all global-sized customers. Global meaning they have to bill at least one million dollars in net new revenue per year.

My primary responsibility as a sales manager is to allocate the appropriate resources for every account that comes into our sales center. I have to match up the sales expertise and the specialization that each one of the sales executives has to each one of the customers' requirements. A prime example would be, we service and maintain a multitude of international customers. I have three sales executives on my staff presently who are responsible for those international customers. If perhaps their bandwidth does not allow them to maintain or respond to the customer in what I feel is an appropriate time frame, I have to search my entire sales center to make sure that I have that resource in another person and allocate that resource to the customer's immediate needs.

Bandwidth in the communications industry means the time. Do they actually have the time to go out, work with the customer--and you have to hold the customer's hand in some instances from start to finish. In fact, my sales executives are responsible for servicing the customers' requirements up until the issuance of the first bill.

Guidance in my terminology basically means that I am the person that each one of my sales executives looks to for any type of problem resolution, any type of conflict, and I am also responsible for their career path.

JOB/CAREER: Career path

I started with AT&T in 1976. I started out in west Texas, in Lubbock. I started as a executive secretary. It was my first professional job straight out of college, so man, I was really, really excited. They slapped me behind a desk and they gave me all of these personnel files.

So I was ultimately responsible for rating everybody's increases, documenting their salaries, and I tell you what, some of those sales salaries were just overwhelming. I could not believe one particular individual could make that much money. So pretty soon I got a little greedy. I wanted to be on the other side of the fence. I didn't want to be sitting behind a desk answering a telephone all day.

So I went through an assessment process that AT&T has in place to qualify you to tell whether or not you can become a sales person, pretty extensive testing. But since I'd been in the communications industry for a year, I felt like I was ready. Took the tests, successfully passed them, and I was placed in a sales support role.

A sales support role within AT&T means that you are not in the forefront. You do not basically have to go out and talk to the customer first, but you come as a backup person. You're responsible for making sure whatever was sold is technically feasible, that it will work when it's connected, and it will fulfill the commitments that the customer and the sales person have made between the two of them. I liked that role. That was very interesting for me. It was also on the technical side of the house, and I felt like that was the wave of the future. There would always be a need and a call for all technical expertise, no matter what the area was.

I stayed in that job for a year or two, started seeing other people drive new cars that I could not at that point afford. So, I thought, ah hah, the light came on again. It's time for a career change. Took some additional testing and I was in the right places at the right times, and I moved up the ladder within AT&T rather quickly. But I've always had sales support roles on the technical side of the house, and I've enjoyed them tremendously. So therefore, that has been my focus, my goal, and my ambition is to stay on the technical side of the house.

The natural progression from sales person is to sales manager, again, in the technical role but supervising technical people. I qualified for that job and I've been in this particular job for about five years. I feel like I've been very, very good. I think I've been excellent, by the way. Some of the skills that I've acquired along the way that have helped me tremendously: I feel like I'm a great communicator. I feel like I'm personable. As I said, customers buy from customers. I have a face, I think, that customers trust, and I say things confidently, and I never open my mouth and say something that I cannot support. And I think customers admire and respect that as well.

JOB/CAREER: Education

I think some of the qualifications that one would need if they are interested in any sales position within AT&T in a management position would definitely be some type of degree, whether that is your basic bachelor degree or if it's an advanced degree. The education is a focus of AT&T. We promote education to continue even after you've acquired and become very skilled in a job. AT&T encourages one to pursue not only outside resources to educate themselves, but internally as well.

JOB/CAREER: Typical day

Typical day at AT&T for Patsy Pritchitt starts at 7:00 a.m. I unlock the door to my office and I'm usually the first one there, so I make a pot of coffee. All of my sales executives really tease me about that because of all of the people in my group, I only have one female sales executive, and the other ones are men. So they say it's my job and my responsibility to make the coffee. That's a jab [a joke], by the way, and I make them pay for that.

I then retrieve the messages that I have received from the previous day that I did not have an opportunity to return calls to. I'm usually here from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., and oddly enough, people still call you after 7:00 p.m. So if I do not have an opportunity to retrieve those messages at night at home, I do that first thing that next morning. By then my phone is already ringing. If it's not from a sales executive, it's one of the other sales managers here in our office. We have five other sales managers, and we usually work in unison because our band width [time available] is a little stretched at this point. The last quarter of the year is usually very intense for AT&T, and I'm sure that's more common throughout the communications industry because most customers are gearing up for the new year and they want to make sure they spend all of their communication dollars that were allocated to them in 1998. So they find all these new applications. Price this, do that, work this, install that. So it's a very demanding quarter for us.

I'm also receiving calls simultaneously from customers either wanting to see me or they have a problem. The problems have to be resolved quickly. They are either allocated out to a sales executive with the expertise that has the knowledge base to attend to these customers, or I do them myself.

By then it's usually 10:00. There are numerous executive meetings that I have to attend throughout the day. Those that are called by our branch manager are mandatory. And we've just today had two meetings on our budget.

People are constantly knocking on my door. They either need help or guidance or they need some additional assistance on an account that they are working on.

So that brings us to mid-afternoon. I usually sit at my desk and gobble down a sandwich. I eat lots of Tums. By then I've probably received several other phone calls. I respond to those phone calls. Some of them are sales leads, so I don't want to give you the impression that my day is humdrum. It is not. I think it's very exciting. You definitely have to have a love for people to be in a sales position. I think that comes through in your voice, also, when you're on the telephone with a customer. Customers very often say, describe yourself, or come out; I want to meet you because nobody can be as happy and excited about their jobs as you sound over the telephone.

The day continues along those same lines. Constant telephone calls, customer contacts in person, some drive time. There's also time for administrative work. There are letters to be written. There are memos to be issued, and then we have a group meeting at the end of the day. It's a progress report. I want to know how well each person did, if they feel good about what they accomplished that day because I don't want my sales executives to walk out of the door feeling like they have not accomplished anything. And everybody needs a pat on the back, so I take some time out to do that as well. No matter how bad your day has gone, certainly we can find some high point in your day where you deserve some commendations.