

Building the Right People

The Manager/Associate Relationship

Frequently for new associates, their relationship with their direct supervisor is the lifeline that pulls them through the first few months in the career. That supervisor is with the new agent all the time in those early days. As one field leader said, "The sales manager should know everything about that agent from the name of his dog to how many puppies that dog had. That's what it takes to pull an agent through." High performing-field leaders value the importance of this connection and nurture new associates through purposeful, high touch relationships. Multiline associates and others who are housed independently are particularly reliant upon their manager to provide them with the confidence and skills needed to build a practice.

High-performing field leaders use the following three methods to build relationships with their new associates:

1. Ensure daily interaction between associates and their supervisor in the early stages of the associates' careers. Daily interaction between associates and their sales manager establishes trust and demonstrates that the sales manager is dedicated to the associate's success. While the official reason for this time together may be joint work, training, activity reporting or planning, high-performing sales managers use this time to establish personal connections and bonds of trust.

What You Can Do

- ◆ Use daily meetings between associates and supervisors to establish trust. The relationship between a new advisor and his or her sales manager is a critical success factor. If the chemistry isn't right, don't be afraid to change reporting relationships. New advisors require a lot of hands-on attention, supervision and training. To ensure that they receive the level of care needed for a fast start, don't allow sales managers to hire additional associates until those under their current care have achieved reasonable levels of success.
2. Serve as a model of dependable, consistent leadership. High-performing field leaders talk of being very dedicated to their new associates and expecting their sales managers to do the same. These field leaders arrive in the office early, are willing to go on late appointments, and are available to answer questions or provide input to new agents as needed. New agents invest a tremendous amount of resources and emotion into launching their new career. To remain committed, they need to know that their direct supervisor has confidence in their success and is equally invested in their future.

What You Can Do

- ◆ Consistently model dependable, trustworthy leadership. Understand that your actions are constantly being read by your new associates for indications of your confidence in their success.
3. Use personalized interactions and support to demonstrate investment in an associate's success. Personal interactions show that you care. One field leader sends a book, based on the associate's interests, with a welcome note to the associate when he or she is attending new agent school at the home office. Another field leader invites new associates to his house for dinner during the associate's first few weeks at the agency, to begin building a personal connection. The head of a large firm makes sure his associates know he is still willing to sit down and make cold calls and go on appointments with new associates as needed, so the associates know they can count on the support of the agency head.

What You Can Do

- ◆ Use personalized interaction and support to demonstrate your investment in your new associates' success. When they are having difficulties, they'll remember your commitment to them.