

Every so often (in this case 15 years!) you see something so unique and so special that it makes an indelible impression. That's how it was for me working with the management team and the producers at Klein Hersh International. I've had the privilege (and sometimes pain) of observing dozens and dozens of organizations, and without question, Klein Hersh has the healthiest and most powerful sales culture of I have ever experienced.

I knew that one day I'd be writing a book on sales leadership that would have a chapter on sales culture. But I never dreamed that the chapter would practically write itself and that it would be based on the culture at one company! Culture is powerful, and as Robert Klein so clearly articulated it to me: "Everything flows from culture." If you want to know exactly what a healthy, high-performance sales culture looks and feels like, read this excerpt from Chapter 18 of [\*Sales Management. Simplified: The Straight Truth About Getting Exceptional Results from Your Sales Team\*](#). Klein Hersh has the single healthiest sales culture I've ever seen in any company of any kind. It's the type of culture that most executives would give anything to create, and it's the reason that Klein Hersh is, by far, the most successful company in its space.

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### **The Healthiest Sales Culture I've Ever Seen**

After all my whining about bad sales cultures and the people who create them, I imagine you're more than ready to see a list of characteristics of an ideal sales culture. So am I. But instead of just dropping an academic bulleted list on you here, it will be more powerful and beneficial to describe the absolute best sales culture I've ever seen.

As mentioned earlier, it took 15 years and exposure to almost 150 organizations from the time I left the "sales heaven" company until I found another with a better, stronger, healthier sales culture. A couple summers ago I received a call from a CEO named Robert. I liked Robert immediately. He was articulate, passionate, powerful, direct, and funny. Robert was quick to tell me that his company was killing it. They were hitting on all cylinders and experiencing significant revenue growth. Just that week, they took the entire sales team (of over 20 people) to dinner and the Rolling Stones concert to celebrate their success. After hearing Robert speak even for just a few minutes, I immediately wanted to work

with his company. I knew I could learn a ton from him and his company. However, I had one big question.

I told Robert that it was a treat to get a call from a company that was doing so well because 95 percent of the inbound inquiries I receive are from companies and sales leaders who *need* help. With a smile and inquisitive tone, I asked, “Robert, what prompted this call? It sounds more like I could use your help with some of my hard-headed CEO clients than you could use mine.” He thanked me for the compliment and then blew me away with what came next. “Yes, we are doing exceptionally well. But we are always striving to improve. We’ve been reading your book as a sales team. Every week we review a chapter in our sales team meeting. It’s been fantastic and stirred up all kinds of conversations and ideas. When we got to the chapter on sharpening our sales story, it seemed like it might be valuable to have you come in to personally help us.”

Before I go any further recapping this story, my hope is that you are already getting a sense for the “leadership and culture” at Robert’s company. I haven’t even begun to share what it felt like when I walked through their front door, yet you already have a flavor of how strong their sales culture is from this one brief phone call: He leads. He pushes. They are serious about results and play to win. They celebrate. They have productive team meetings. They are hungry to improve. And, clearly they have great taste in books and consultants ☺

We put together a small engagement that revolved mostly around improving his team’s messaging as they pursued bigger prospects and higher level contacts, and also some coaching on best practices for prospecting and presenting.

The first 30 minutes at this company’s office was going to sales fantasy camp. It was the equivalent of how I’d expect to feel visiting Porsche’s factory in Stuttgart or possibly hanging out with Peyton Manning as he prepared for a big game. It was *that good* and that exciting. I visit a lot of companies and am pretty quick to get a feel for the emotional dynamics at play. The sales culture at this place was palpable. The energy was electric. The engaged faces and intense voices were refreshing. Everywhere I turned there were whiteboards charting some sales statistic, goal, or result. Did I mention that it was loud? That people were laughing? That I felt like I was visiting the winning locker room of a championship team. As a sales consultant, it was as if I was on holy ground. After just 30 minutes on-site, I knew I was experiencing something very special, something I hadn’t seen for 15 years.

I sat down in Robert’s office and could tell he was aware of the impression his company was making on me. He told me a bit about his past and the backstory for launching the business. I noticed his shelves were filled with leadership and sports books about iconic coaches and lots of memorabilia. Robert volunteered the annual goal-setting process he personally went through with each member of the

sales team. He talked about the importance of knowing what makes each person tick and how his management team makes it a point to manage every person as an individual. He bragged about the extreme level of success a few of his producers were having and then circled back to fill in details of the intense coaching and mentoring required to help these individuals to raise their games. Again without prompting, he extolled the value of the regular manager to salesperson one-on-one meeting where he saw it as the manager's job to better understand the salesperson, to review goals and results, to help remove obstacles, and to stretch the salesperson. He grabbed a rubber band off his desk and began to stretch it. He said that his job to find out how far he could push each person, for their own good, without causing them to break.

I'll admit it. I may have been drooling on myself just listening to Robert. I wish these types of conversations with owners, senior executives, and sales managers were more common. I really do. But they are not. It was a rare treat to be sitting with a "leadership and culture" expert who happened to be leading a sales team that was two to three times more productive per person than what is typical in his industry.

I knew that one day I'd be writing a sales management book with a chapter dedicated to the importance of a healthy sales culture. What I didn't expect was that I would get to observe all of the characteristics of an ideal culture in one client! This chapter was writing itself two years before I was ready to write the book!

I asked Robert to expand further about the power of his sales culture and shared my observations from the half-hour wandering around his office. Then I asked, "What is with the culture here? You can feel it."

Robert leaned forward toward me and whispered, "Michael, everything flows from culture. Culture is everything." At that moment, I was ready to give back my fee because I would've done this engagement for free.

Robert spent another hour sharing his perspective and spoke of how he jealously guarded the culture at his firm. He referred to the culture as their secret sauce. He went on to explain their brutal interviewing and onboarding process for new hires. The management at his company was more concerned with repelling the wrong people who wouldn't fit than with hiring the very best talent available. In fact, much of the lengthy interview process was designed to scare away candidates. I can't tell you how different that approach is from what I see in so many companies with lame cultures.

I just recently sat in a group interview for another client. Key executives and I were meeting with a candidate for whom we had mixed feelings. But 15 minutes into the two-hour interview, the CEO interrupted our questions and started selling the candidate on joining his wonderful company. I only share that here because the

contrast is so striking between the one company with a phenomenal high-performance sales culture that strenuously screened every hire and this other company with an unhealthy sales culture whose leader chose to fill an empty chair with the warm body in front of him.

I spent the balance of that first day at Robert's company meeting individually with key producers and then had dinner with their very engaged management team. It was a blast, but the experience of day one paled in comparison to day two. The following day I spent about six hours facilitating a sales team meeting that only confirmed my initial thoughts about their powerful culture. Sure, as planned, we sharpened their sales story and worked through how to incorporate elements of this improved messaging into their various prospecting and sales weapons. But what I'll never forget was the opportunity to watch their culture in action throughout the course of this meeting.

The communication in that meeting room was the most direct, transparent, blunt, confrontational, helpful, hysterically funny, loving, and healthy I've ever seen in any company for any type of meeting. This company used role play in ways I never thought possible. Sales team members were constantly needling each other and management provided brutally honest feedback to salespeople throughout the day. At first, I was taken aback, even uncomfortable, with the very direct communication style. But as the day wore on, I understood the fundamental reasons why such strong critique and tough words were taken in stride, and I gained even more clarity about why this team was so outrageously successful. The good-natured teasing and brutal feedback was so well received because it was never personal; it was business, and on top of that, there was love and trust in the room. These very well compensated top-producing salespeople knew that management had their best interest at heart. After all, these were the same leaders who were meeting with them one-on-one, helping them to plan, to overcome obstacles, and to stretch themselves to production and income levels unheard of in their space. There was no doubt in that room that everyone was on the same team – from Robert to the management team to every producer. There was no hidden agenda or ulterior motives. Everyone knew that management was *for* the sales team, not against it. Sadly, that is rarer than you'd think.

The culture at this company truly was its secret sauce. It also clearly dictated the *shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices* of the sales organization: We are elite. We strive to dominate the competition. We keep score and constantly look at and talk about the scoreboard – in the hallways, in our team meetings, and when we meet 1:1. We are loud and proud. We have each other's backs. We have fun. We are very careful about who we add to this team because we have something very special and we guard it carefully. We come to team meetings with great attitudes, expecting

to participate. We check our egos and pride at the door. We tease each other in a good-natured way because we're like family; we have very high standards and, most importantly, we want everyone to win. In fact, we expect to win. When we flop in practice we get called out because it is not acceptable to flop in the real game. We believe in pushing each other hard and telling each other the truth. And when we win big, we celebrate big.

No, "culture" is not a soft topic. As Robert so eloquently stated, everything flows from culture and, as you've read, the sales culture he's built is anything but soft.

**Sales Management. Simplified. The Straight Truth About Getting Exceptional Results from Your Sales Team** by [Mike Weinberg](#) – Consultant, Speaker and Bestselling Author

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