

Being a Good Soldier

You have another new regional or national sales manager — and the person is a rep's worst nightmare. Whether it's your largest line or a basic bread and butter line, what should you do?

Your first instinct may be to push back. Maybe just a little. Perhaps flex your relationships with senior management a bit, or remind them they don't have authority to terminate your contract. After all, you are really irreplaceable and this person needs to find out who is top dog.

Well, you may be irreplaceable, or you may be married to the owner's offspring, in which case save yourself some time and stop reading this article.

However, if you are a highly paranoid rep like

me, I suggest you read on and most of all, ride out the storm.

What should you do? Do what reps do best, make this person your friend and build a solid working relationship. You may not feel vulnerable today, but someday your sales numbers could fall off for reasons beyond your control, or your senior management contacts might be the victim of a management shakeup. Then your introductory self-important attitude could come back to haunt you.



When the new regional or national sales manager comes on board, be the old dog who learns new tricks. Just because you always did it your way doesn't mean that new methods from the new sales manager wouldn't bring in some new commissionable sales.

Being a first-class rep in some cases means being a good soldier. The trick is to survive until the nightmare ends, so go with the flow. I believe in the old saying, "Water seeks its own level." Eventually the person who is a nightmare either comes around or goes away. In either case, the unnecessary reports, excessive travel, and other unproductive activities fade away.

And being a good soldier can pay some real rewards. That house account may one day be yours. Or you may be spared from a proposed commission rate reduction.

That nightmare manager could someday be your best advocate at the factory. After all, factory staff is in the best position to remind upper management that sales don't fall from the sky — sales come from the reps' efforts, which sometimes involve a grueling travel schedule and 60-70-hour weeks. So, taking good care of reps is good business.

That's why I treat every new regional or national sales manager as a seasoned professional with a lot to bring to the party. In most cases, they are.

Embracing change has paid real benefits to me and my firm. Most of those benefits have come from stronger relationships with my current principals.

Not embracing change, on the other hand, carries significant risk. At least that is what sales managers who have come to interview my firm for their line tell me when I ask why they are looking for a new rep.



John Beaver founded GSA Optimum, Oakdale, New York, in 1984. The metropolitan New York/New Jersey independent manufacturers' representative firm has 33 employees covering Maine to Virginia out of its four offices. The agency specializes in electrical mechanical, electronic, and electrical components. This growth can be partly attributed to his successful acquisition of six firms. In 2015 he began his tenure as a MANA Board member. He is also an active member of ERA and NEMRA. As a member of ERA he serves as a National Delegate and is the Chairperson of Metro NY/NJ ERA local chapter.



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