

THE 15 SALES TO LEADER PRINCIPLES

Applied

A companion to OH SHIT, I'M THE SALES MANAGER by Matt Dunford

Every Sales to Leader Principle — with what it means, what it looks like in practice, and one action to take immediately.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide expands on the 15 principles at the back of the book. Each one includes what it really means, what it looks like when it's happening (and when it isn't), and one specific action you can take immediately.

Use it as a reference. Return to whichever principle is most relevant to where you are right now.

PRINCIPLE 1

Every promotion requires a new version of you.**WHAT IT MEANS**

The skills that got you promoted rarely keep you promoted. Every new role demands a new way of showing up.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

A top performer becomes a manager and keeps behaving like a top performer. They jump into every sale, answer every question, solve every problem themselves. Eventually they become a bottleneck.

ACTION

Identify one behaviour that made you successful before this promotion that is now holding your team back. Stop doing it this week.

PRINCIPLE 2

The scoreboard changes on Day One.**WHAT IT MEANS**

Your success is no longer measured by what you do. It's measured by what your team does.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

A new manager who still tracks their personal sales figures and feels pride when they outsell the team. The scoreboard hasn't changed for them yet — only the job title has.

ACTION

Write down the three team outcomes that matter most in your role. These are your new scoreboard. Review them daily, not your personal numbers.

PRINCIPLE 3

Good leaders make decisions. Great leaders build decision-makers.**WHAT IT MEANS**

The goal isn't to be the person with all the answers. It's to build a team that can find answers without you.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

A manager who answers every question their team brings them. Feels helpful. Is actually creating dependency. Every answered question is a missed opportunity to build capability.

ACTION

Next time someone brings you a question, ask "What do you think?" before answering. Do this consistently for one week.

PRINCIPLE 4

Leaders don't get to think out loud anymore.**WHAT IT MEANS**

Everything you say lands with more weight now. Half-formed thoughts become team anxieties. Casual comments become policy.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

A manager who says "I'm not sure this target is realistic" in passing. By lunchtime the team has decided the target is unfair and motivation has dropped. The manager didn't notice.

ACTION

Before your next team meeting, decide what you want people to feel when they leave. Prepare your words accordingly.

PRINCIPLE 5

Your team doesn't experience your intentions. They experience your behaviour.**WHAT IT MEANS**

It doesn't matter what you meant. What matters is what people saw, heard, and felt.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

A manager who checks their phone during a one-to-one. They're "just quickly checking something important." The team member experiences being unimportant.

ACTION

Pick one behaviour this week where your intentions and your actions might not be aligned. Close the gap.

PRINCIPLE 6

The conversation you're avoiding is usually the one you need to have.**WHAT IT MEANS**

Avoidance doesn't make problems smaller. It makes them more expensive — in time, trust, and team culture.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

A manager who knows a team member's behaviour is affecting the team, but keeps hoping it'll resolve itself. Six weeks later the problem is worse and the team has noticed the manager isn't addressing it.

ACTION

Name the conversation you're currently avoiding. Use the C.S.B.I.A. framework from the Framework Worksheets to prepare for it. Have it this week.

PRINCIPLE 7

The fastest way to learn is admitting what you don't know.**WHAT IT MEANS**

Pretending to know things you don't costs more than admitting ignorance. The question nobody else asks is usually the most useful one.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

A manager who nods along in a meeting they don't fully understand, afraid of looking uninformed. Later they make a decision based on incomplete understanding. The team pays the price.

ACTION

In your next meeting, ask the question you're afraid looks stupid. It probably isn't — and the answer will matter.

PRINCIPLE 8

You aren't the blueprint.**WHAT IT MEANS**

The goal is performance, not replication. People succeed differently. Your job is to find how each person works best — not to clone yourself.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

A manager who coaches everyone the same way they were coached. Works brilliantly for people who are like them. Fails everyone else. The team gets smaller versions of the manager, not better versions of themselves.

ACTION

Identify one person on your team who succeeds differently from you. What are they doing that you wouldn't? How can you develop that rather than suppress it?

PRINCIPLE 9

Trust grows when you step back.**WHAT IT MEANS**

Micromanagement signals distrust. Stepping back — deliberately and visibly — signals belief. People rise to what you expect of them.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

A manager who delegates a task and then checks in three times before it's done. The message received: "I don't trust you." The result: the person stops taking ownership.

ACTION

Delegate one task this week with a clear outcome and a deadline — then don't check in until the deadline. Trust the process.

PRINCIPLE 10

You can't want it more than they do.**WHAT IT MEANS**

The moment you're working harder on someone's success than they are, you've stopped coaching and started carrying. Support has to be matched by ownership.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

A manager who spends hours preparing for a one-to-one with a team member who arrives unprepared, disengaged, and unchanged afterwards. The manager is exhausted. The team member is comfortable.

ACTION

Use the Effort Match Test from the Framework Worksheets on one team member this week. Are they matching your effort? If not, shift from coaching to accountability.

PRINCIPLE 11

Hire for potential. Train for skill.**WHAT IT MEANS**

Skills can be taught. Curiosity, ownership, and the ability to connect with people cannot. Hire the person, not the CV.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

A manager who hires the most experienced candidate on paper and is confused when they underperform. Experience without the right attitude is just a longer history of bad habits.

ACTION

Before your next interview, write down the four Potential Test questions. Use them as your filter, not the CV.

PRINCIPLE 12

Great leaders catch the rain.**WHAT IT MEANS**

Your job is to absorb frustration before it reaches your team. Not because every decision above you is right — but because your team needs clarity, not your complaints.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

A manager who disagrees with a head office decision and says so in front of the team. Compliance drops. Morale drops. The manager wonders why the team seems disengaged.

ACTION

Before your next difficult briefing, use the Catch the Rain worksheet. Translate the decision — don't just pass on the frustration.

PRINCIPLE 13

Don't build compliance. Build capability.**WHAT IT MEANS**

Compliance disappears the moment you stop watching. Capability survives. The goal isn't a team that performs because you're there — it's a team that performs because they understand why it matters.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

A manager who takes a day off and spends it answering messages because the team can't function without them. Feels indispensable. Is actually a bottleneck who hasn't developed their team.

ACTION

Use the Step Back Test from the Framework Worksheets. List everything that still comes back to you when you're not involved. Pick one thing and build a plan to move it off your list this month.

PRINCIPLE 14

Culture is what people do when nobody has to.**WHAT IT MEANS**

Culture isn't what you say in a briefing. It's what survives your absence. The strongest standards are the ones your team enforce without you.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

A manager whose team follows every process perfectly when observed — and cuts corners the moment no one's watching. That's compliance, not culture. Rules, not values.

ACTION

Use the Empty Room Test from the Framework Worksheets. What does your team do when nobody is watching? That's your real culture.

PRINCIPLE 15

When the rulebook runs out, leadership begins.**WHAT IT MEANS**

Some decisions genuinely need sign-off. Learn which ones. For everything else, the decision is yours. Leadership means being the person at the top of the decision tree.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

A manager facing a situation the policy doesn't cover. Instead of waiting for someone else to make the call, they assess the situation, make a fair decision, and own the outcome.

ACTION

Think of the last time you waited for someone else to make a call you could have made yourself. What stopped you? What would you do differently now?

These principles don't have a finish line.

You'll return to some of them again and again at different stages of your leadership journey — and each time, they'll mean something slightly different.

That's how it's supposed to work.

— Matt