



# Ten Steps To A Successful Sales Force



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## Quick, what do you think of when you hear the term salesperson?

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If you still think of a manipulator with a pinkie ring and open shirt who specializes in golf and is hell-bent on separating you from your money with high-pressure—allow me to bring you out of the Dark Ages. Selling is a profession where the truly successful are people with integrity, honesty and possess superior communication skills.

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As a business owner, you are under enormous pressure to maintain existing client relationships and to continually find new ones. Have you ever stopped to think about exactly why the road to success has become so much more challenging in recent years

- Do you have the feeling that your sales team could be performing at a much higher level of productivity?
- Are there unjustifiable peaks and valleys in their performance?
- Does the performance vary greatly between those that are your top producers to those that are least productive?

In studying some of the most productive sales teams in various industries, a core of key principles, beliefs, skills, and practices becomes apparent with those of the top tier. The best sales teams exhibit an energy, cohesiveness, and structure of process that allows them to dominate.

Here we will examine the essential elements you must review, to take your team to a higher level that is ***focused on success***.



## 1 Develop a Sales Plan that is Aligned with Corporate Strategy

Your purpose should top the list. Why are you in your respective business? Does your team know why your company has chosen its niche? Does the team know and understand the philosophy of its leadership? The answers to these questions establish the motivation for a team's focus.

A company's vision—where it plans to be in the marketplace of the future—establishes the focus of its sales team. In turn both the company's vision and the team's focus will establish its mission. A clear and succinct definition of what the company does and how it benefits its clients is essential to your development. The company's mission can take many forms. When best defined, though, it can become a battle cry and marketing weapon which blocks your competition from gaining market penetration.

When the marketplace asks your team what it does and why it is different, each team member's response must be unique and powerful yet congruent with the answers of the team as a whole. If this is not the case, you need to gather the team and refine your mission.

The umbrella of a mission also covers the issue of positioning. What is unique about your firm and the message it delivers versus that of your competition? Do you know what your competition is saying, and what are they saying about you? When was the last time you interviewed your lost prospects? If your message is not clear and concise or if your awareness of the competition is not up to date, positioning must be your top priority. Get a leader from your company and facilitate a process of discovery and refinement of your competitive positioning.

Your business must define its values. A clear set of values, one that defines the parameters and priorities of your organization, empowers the team to make decisions at lower levels. It saves time and differentiates you in the marketplace. No one can duplicate your culture and philosophy. And when your customer understands and buys into your company culture you can develop a long lasting and loyal relationship.

## 2 Develop and Implement Sales Processes

Successful selling demands, methodologies, productivity plans, time management skills, and sales processes. Are you analyzing the areas of opportunity for productivity enhancement on a *regular* basis? If not, you're losing money and opportunity on a daily basis.

The area of basic organization and automation is a huge opportunity for many sales teams. Have you created a process by which new ideas for increasing the productivity of the team are fostered, rewarded, and implemented? Have you objectively mapped your selling processes, lead generation plans, and opportunity reviews? Have you developed a process to accurately forecast and manage your opportunities? Most companies have some lead generation plans, but have you implemented a process to measure their effectiveness relative to corporate growth and direction?

Have you implemented processes to effectively develop and foster customer loyalty? It takes a significantly larger investment to win new business over making your existing customers satisfied. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is essential for companies to grow in a productive and measurable manner. Incorporate an automated sales force tool, but only after processes have been established and tested for effectiveness. Remember, if you automate garbage, you still get garbage!

## 3 Effectively Communicate Your Message

Do you keep your customers updated with how you have been serving them and keeping your commitments? Customers tend to forget things, especially what is not consistently in front of them. Remind them of how you have been serving them and keeping your promises. Give them more than they expect.

Highly successful companies have a philosophy that everyone in the organization is a sales person! Everyone, at sometime, must be prepared to communicate to a perspective client what the company does. Develop an *elevator*

*pitch* that is clear, concise and effectively describes what your company does.

Do your employees and specifically your sales force have the skill and tools to effectively communicate your message? Do they know how to compare your organization with your competitors in a favorable image? Sales executives must be able to perform the following in order to communicate effectively in today's competitive market.

### **Create Rapport**

The best sales executives are noted for their effective rapport building skills. But many organizations continuously monitor the sales force's rapport building skill in an objective process. They give feedback and constant input to even the top producers on how to improve this part of selling. How often do you observe your sales force in action and how do you foster and measure the improvement of the rapport building skill?

When you arrive on time (not early or late) for the meeting, thank the prospect for seeing you. Ask an open-ended question about the interviewer or the company. Open-ended questions will get the prospect talking and he/she will feel you are interested in listening to issues.

### **Be Yourself**

Remember that selling is nothing more than directed conversation. We all have the ability to hold conversations. Don't change your personal style (unless it is offensive) because you're trying to get someone to do business with you. Be sincere and you will gain the respect of your potential customer.

### **Prepare Ahead**

Plan for your sales call in advance. Know something about your prospect and their organization. Understand where and why your product or service may be of benefit. Last, but most importantly, know what you want from the call. Do you expect an order? Further information? Always have the objective of the call clear in your mind.

### **Listen! Listen! Listen!**

This is the area most underused by inexperienced sales people. Some sales people believe they have to tell all they know in a sales call. Quite the opposite is true. By asking open-ended questions and listening closely to the answers, you can find what is important to the prospect. You'll know how he/she makes decisions and what projects are coming soon. You can uncover how your company could be of benefit. Listening is not thinking about what you are going to say next while the prospect is speaking. Don't forget, he who speaks first, loses!

### **Tie Needs to Benefits**

Now that you have listened to the prospect's needs you are ready to tell him how you can help with his situation. Using the words of the prospect, tell him how your product or service will be a perfect solution for his problem. Deliver to the customer an effective *benefit statement* utilizing their words.

### **Review and Exit**

Review the items each of you agreed upon during the meeting. Make sure any action items have dates assigned to them. Never leave the next contact/meeting entirely in the hands of the prospect. You want to always leave the door open for further conversation.

## **4 Develop an Integrated Sales Support Structure**

A sales person is only as good as the company he/she represents. If you're the best sales executive in world, but are representing bad products or services, you will quickly reach your limit and ultimately fail. Sales executives need support structures within companies to be successful.

They need marketing to generate qualified leads and produce quality materials that represent your business as a high quality organization. In today's competitive market, sales executives alone will not be successful. They need support structures that include finance for competitive pricing, proposal support for clear accurate

writing, and a technical group to demonstrate product or services capabilities.

You can guarantee that if a sales executive is required to perform marketing, pricing, and technical support, the sales person won't be successful and will look for an organization that is prepared for success.

## 5 Incorporate a Team Selling Approach

It takes a true partnership within an organization to develop successful selling methods. Support structures are essential to successful selling. Marketing, sales, finance, management, technicians, and others within companies need to participate in the sales process.

The sales executive is the coordinator of the sale. They must recognize the customer's needs, qualify the opportunity, then manage the sales process. They will be responsible for bringing the customer the right resource at the right time. The sales executive role changes as the sales process unfolds.

He/she is the point person, the main contact for the customer. However, as other buying influences emerge within the prospect, the sales executive must recognize their role and bring in the appropriate resource to answer specific questions that apply to that buying influence. Remember that technical people like to talk to technical people and finance people like to talk to other finance people.

It takes a partnership approach within a company to successfully sell in today's market.

## 6 Implement Consistent and Effective Training Programs

Training within a company is essential to develop effective sales executives, but also to make sure a consistent method of communication is used throughout the organization.

Sales training should be catered specifically to your organization. There are several quality sales training programs on the market. What is

essential for a company is to either pick an existing method or develop a method that will work within your type of business and fits your corporate culture.

Training and developing skilled sales executives varies depending on the type of product or services you are selling. Developing skilled sales people in the services industry also varies from the product industry. Selling intangibles or solution selling is unique and requires a unique sales training method.

Sales training can not be completely accomplished in a classroom. Sales executives need experience in front of customers and need to be monitored and reviewed for effectiveness. Training is never finished. Effective sales training is consistent and continuous. Companies change. Products and services change. Training must incorporate changes that a company goes through. Develop role playing as an effective and fun training exercise.

## 7 Demand Corporate & Personal Values

### Honesty

Honesty is essential in selling. When you've stopped laughing, understand that knowing and responding to *gray* areas is essential to successful selling. You must know ahead of time how far you will go before you get into your gray area. You will eventually be asked a question that demands an unclear answer. How will you handle it?

"Can you deliver this in two weeks?", "Is this your absolute best price?" For some, an answer such as: "Yes, and if we can't, I promise to call you within 48 hours" is enough. To others, that answer is not completely accurate, and thus dishonest. In their case, they may call the home office to verify or have a delicate predetermined response giving the more honest negative answer. Do you know ahead of time how you will answer questions that demand answers from the gray area? Not having a confident and accurate answer will often cost you the sale, or even worse, a relationship.

Sit down with others on your team and discuss the above areas. There are always areas we can enhance to improve our honesty, accuracy, and confidence with our clients. Improvement comes best when you work with another partner.

### Integrity

The best sales teams do two things: (1) They establish strong credibility with ethical persuasion techniques and (2) they sell in a process. Is your team aware of the key areas in which it can establish and enhance credibility with customers? Create your own list of the top areas and means by which you can enhance your credibility.

In regards to selling by process, we have seen that the best sales people are those who excel at asking powerful questions. They do this in an organized manner that leads the customer to discover the need, value, and urgency of beginning a process with the vendor.

Do you observe and evaluate your team's ability to ask powerful questions? Do you have a list of great questions that can be used in your selling process? How could you continuously improve the process selling abilities of your team while maintaining a high level of honesty and integrity?

## 8 Establish Market Differentiators

Every successful company has characteristics that set it apart. These competitive differentiations might be in the areas of service, technical support, lead-time, or breadth of capability, not just price or product benefits.

Once you've focused on your company's strengths, investigate potential new customers and industries to see if they value these attributes. In the case of new markets, research the trends in those industries to see whether there are long-term prospects for success.

After you've completed this research and targeted new prospects, whether in the same or in a new market, research their buying history and develop a detailed list of ideal customers profiles (ICP's, IPP's) that effectively leverage your differentiators in the market. Learn what

you have to do to reach your customers and get your message across successfully. Then launch a consistent marketing campaign directed at these prospects.

## 9 Communicate Value Add Services with Quality Individuals

The good news: You can develop a significant competitive advantage in our "me-too" world by developing a superior approach to providing value to your customers. The bad news: It takes more than lip service to become a recognized leader.

The delivery of service value to the customer base has created a boon for professional salespeople and the companies they represent. Simply stated, your sales force represents the single most influential statement of *value-added service* that you make to your customer base. Skyrocketing service expectations on the part of your customers require that you send *business partners* rather than *salespeople* to the selling field.

These *business partners* meet the following requirements.

- They are true experts in your product line. "I don't know, but I'll find out" is not in their vocabulary.
- They have highly polished customer-focused selling skills that place them in a true leadership role with both customers and prospects throughout the sales process. They take the initiative to move the sales cycle to the appropriate next step and know where they are positioned in *each* account and at *all* times. They lead their customers to good buying decisions in a low-key and confident manner, making the experience a pleasant one for all parties.
- They have the highest empathy for customer satisfaction and will not hesitate to place the needs of the customer ahead of their own interests. They do not blame their manager, their territory, or their company for their shortcomings and take personal responsibility for their own success. They think and act as business owners, franchised by their employer

to market in their established territory. They require little supervision and work hard because they want to be successful and are willing to pay the price.

## 10 Develop a Corporate Program for Commitment & Growth

Studies on the use of making stated promises have been conducted to determine whether making promises affects one's believability in a positive or negative way. One researcher's theory was that the word *promise* creates doubt in the mind of the person hearing it. Contrary to the researcher's thought, the study proved that in the context of personal one-to-one promises, the words "we will promise..." or "we will commit to..." used in a "honest and sincere" tone gave the one promising added respect. When a series of promises were verbally made and then kept, credibility dramatically increased as compared to the same actions being taken without a stated promise.

The biggest opportunity for increasing the effectiveness of most teams is creating new and dynamic forms of accountability. Some form of team building, idea generation, planning, and continuous improvement for any sales team is essential for growth. It is based on creating more peer-to-peer accountability and minimizing unnecessary team managing. Do you implement the principles of *Total Quality Management* and *Continuous Improvement*?

Is your team constantly working to enhance the Critical Success Factors (the two or three areas that, when enhanced, assure success of the selling process)? Do they even know what the Critical Success Factors are? Do they know the highest priority actions of their selling process? Their order of priority? If not, hash it out and focus!

Whether it is lead generation, appointment setting, or whatever, it is key that you determine and monitor the priority critical success factors. How are you focusing on them now?

## Conclusion

Given these essential requirements for success, how can you, as a business owner, improve your organization in these areas?

In today's super competitive environment, building a successful sales force depends on a *partnership mentality* between the employer and the sales employee. The employee must bear responsibility for performance and bring a work ethic/desire for success to the table that is sufficient for success on a daily basis. This is why hiring the right people plays such a critical role in organizational sales success. If you hire those who aren't motivated to be the best, you can hardly expect to achieve high levels of success in your organizational sales efforts.

On the other side of the table, the employer has a responsibility to provide the tools and support necessary to give a motivated and talented employee the means to turn their hard work into results. It is truly a travesty when a talented salesperson fails to deliver results, not through a lack of effort, but because of a lack of sales tools, support and direction from management.

Ask yourself: How do you deliver training to your sales staff? How much money do you invest in developing these people? What tools do you provide them to manage their territory in an effective manner? How much time do you spend with them in the field? If you aren't meeting your end of the bargain, you can hardly expect your sales team to produce spectacular results.

There are many alternative solutions in the market today. Companies have options available to them that weren't available over the last two years. Make use of the Internet and review creative alternatives to building your sales force or look at alternatives such as business process outsourcing of your sales organization. The common denominator among successful companies is that they are process-driven and always **FOCUSED!**