

## 12 Keys to Turning up Sales Force

Many cars today tell the driver when it is time to perform maintenance. Even better, some tell the driver that maintenance is needed in 1,000 miles with updates along the way. It would be great if as a business executive or small business owner, you had this kind of technology at your fingertips. Unfortunately, managing a sales organization will always be a manual effort. Sure, CRMs and contact managers help, but there is no technology that replaces the leadership associated with sales management. Not sure where to dig into your sales organization? Here are twelve areas that will show just how game ready you are.

**1. Business Objective.** In your capacity, I'll bet you can cite the objectives of the business easy as pie, but do the key members of the sales team know them? Better yet, do they know the current one(s)? Business objectives change. It is important that those affected by the change are in the know. The business objectives serve as the foundation of the company's sales architecture® which is the overall selling system framework. If the foundation changes without reviewing the selling framework, there is a high risk of not achieving the objective. It is the equivalent of constructing a building with the wrong materials, or worse, in the wrong place.

**2. Differentiation.** Some argue that differentiation is the job of the marketing team. I see this as a shared responsibility between sales and marketing. The bottom line is whether or not your company is successful winning business at your desired prices. George Carlin has a great line on this. "If you nail together two things that have never been nailed together before, someone will buy it!" The target for differentiation is always moving. What is unique today is passé tomorrow. However, sales people can differentiate themselves above and beyond the product by being a valued resource to their clients. This is critical in a competitive or commodity marketplace. One of my favorite questions to ask sales people is why someone should buy from them. The goal is to see what value they see that they bring to their clientele.

**3. Ideal Client Profile.** Hopefully, you already have one of these. This is the document that clearly defines the attributes of your ideal client. Think in terms of size, buying circumstance, budget, buying habits, etc. This is a profile which each member of the sales team should memorize and be held accountable for knowing. Their pursuit of new business should be aligned with this profile. As the objectives of the business change, this profile may change. Be sure that it still meets the needs of the business.

**4. Messaging Consistency.** You spend time and money investing in a new campaign. Your sales people position the company using this new message, but the print material and website still convey the old information. Not good! The outbound message to the market must be consistent. If the sales people say it, the corporate presentation should reinforce it. The printed collateral material and website should help position the message. In essence, the entire approach should be aligned.

**5. Intellectual Capital.** What is that, you say? These are your reference able clients. Other than your employees, they are your most valuable asset. This asset is critical for your sales team to help them win

business. How are you growing your portfolio of reference able clients? How are you ensuring that your largest client is not overutilized by the sales team for these purposes? Do you have clients who can speak to everything your firm does, coming from multiple buying circumstances (newbie, veteran, etc)? The use of references can serve as a key competitive advantage for your sales team. It is important that the portfolio be ever-growing and well-managed.

**6. Sales Performance.** How are the members of the team performing relative to their assigned goal? While you may be tempted to measure only revenue performance relative to quota, this is not always the best approach for longer-term buying processes. In those circumstances, review of performance in the buying process itself is an important area for study. That said, the rule of thumb is to look to upgrade the bottom 20% of the sales team. Recruiting is an ongoing initiative of any healthy sales organization.

**7. Pipeline Analysis.** There are various opinions on how large a sales pipeline should be to ensure it yields enough to meet the business objective. The challenge is that a strict quantitative value minimizes the importance of a qualitative one. I've seen sales people with a pipeline of twice their goal finish the year at 150% of quota. I've also seen sales people with a pipeline of five times their annual goal miss the target. Quantitative studies aside, the best approach is to conduct formal, periodic pipeline reviews so that you and your executive team can dig into the pipeline to see what prospects are real. Quality supersedes quantity. Pipeline reviews are very helpful for executive teams with respect to learning of market trends and competitive intelligence.

**8. Ideal Sales Person Profile.** Hopefully, you have one of these too. This tool defines the attributes of the ideal sales person for your firm. You need this if you are going to upgrade the bottom 20% of your sales team. This profile changes, however, as the business changes and matures. Think in terms of the Blackberry®. About seven years ago, their sales people had to create demand in a minimally competitive market. Today, the Blackberry® is a staple in business, but buyers have product choices outside of the Blackberry brand. The skill set required to be successful in their business initially is very different than today. Don't have a profile? See my article titled "The Sales Marriage" to learn how to formulate your ideal sales person profile.

**9. Revenue Accelerator Program (RAP).** Again, you are probably asking yourself what this term means. I could have just written "new hire training." That doesn't convey the importance of getting sales people to a productive level as quickly as possible. Every time a sales person is hired in your company, there is a cost to the business. Thus, the development of a program that is focused on reducing the time for a sales person to generate revenue is critical. To effectively formulate your RAP, ask yourself what the sales person needs to know to effectively sell your product and when do they need to know this information. Some err by using the fire hose approach. "Teach them everything in their first week and tell them to go sell!" The fundamental question is, how quickly is there a return on the investment for this hire?

**10. Skill Development.** Many think that sales talent is born; not developed. Oh, if that were only the case. Companies need to invest in their sales team development just as professional sports teams practice their craft every single day. A sale is a profession, one of the few professions in which ongoing training is

not required to continue to perform in the role. However, it is critical to success. One of the biggest disconnects between executives and sales people are when the sales team is criticized for not “selling the value.” When the executives are asked when and how they trained the sales team on demonstrating this value, a blank look appears on their faces. Sales people will perform based on how they are trained and how they are compensated.

**11. Compensation.** Does your compensation plan drive the sales behaviors you feel assist in meeting the business objective? It all comes back to the business objective. The blessing and curse of sales people is that they use their compensation plan as a job description. If you pay them for doing one thing, but expect another, you will be disappointed. This is also a very sensitive area. The plan must change as the business objective changes. However, if the plan changes too frequently, the sales team will grow distrustful and look to leave. Approach this with true circumspection.

**12. Metrics.** The beauty of sales is that just about everything can be measured. Some like sales for that very reason. It is incumbent on the executive team to create metrics with desired goals such that every aspect of the company's sales architecture can be measured and analyzed. This is a great way to use your CRM. They are designed to track what needs to be measured. I suggest analyzing performance of team members, product lines, and the sales organization in total. Who sells the most of what product? Who sells the highest margin deals? What product is not selling as expected? Which sales person has the shortest buying cycle? Which sales person has the longest buying cycle? Review of these twelve areas will ensure that your sales organization is finely tuned and ready to conquer the selling world.

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