

Team Selling



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THE DAYS OF THE "lone ranger" sales professional are coming to an end. Today, more sales, negotiations, and services are performed by teams. So, rather than coach individual performance, today's sales manager must coach to boost team results for both individual and team success.

Management of team selling is complex. As more people participate in the selling process, teamwork becomes more challenging, the cost of making a sale increases, and profitability can erode. This is challenging in an environment of increasing customer price pressure, where customers tell salespeople that their products and services are commodities.

The role of the sales manager has changed in two ways: First, motivating salespeople to achieve personal sales goals is not enough. Sales managers must focus not only on closing sales but also on meeting profit objectives. To achieve these goals, they must do more than help their people close business. They now must manage coordinated, complex campaigns to ensure that business is sold, negotiated, implemented, and serviced effectively.

There is often a gap between what managers need to do and what they actually do in team sales. These gaps erode profitability. To close them, sales managers must focus on five areas.

1. Teamwork. The quality of the performance depends both on the skills of the performers, and on how they work with each other. Too often, sales managers focus only on individuals—making sure the right players are on the team—rather than on how well those individuals work together to achieve results. For a team to sell, negotiate, and service customers effectively, team members must know their roles, situations requiring their expertise, and the structure of the team leadership and decision-making process.

Managers should ask: Who is on the team? Have we left anyone out? Are team roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities clear? Who is the team leader? Will leadership change during the sales, negotiation, and implementation process? Are we involving the

right team members at the right time?

2. Process. Even if team membership and roles are clear, profitability will suffer if the process the team uses to work together (and with the customer) is ineffective. Gaps in this area can lead to embarrassing and costly selling and negotiation mistakes. To close the gap, sales team managers should ask: How should our technical support people respond to customers who request information that might lead to additional sales? In meetings with customers, how should team members signal each other if they feel a "caucus" or "time out" is needed? How should team members respond if they reach an impasse with a customer when negotiating a sales, service, or implementation issue? Who needs to approve which decisions? Which decisions can each team member make independently? When we anticipate the need to



negotiate, how do we ensure we are interacting with the right person? What do technical people need to know to do their jobs well? How and when should we get them this information?

3. Positioning. A sales and service team with top performers and excellent process is only as effective as the value it can add for its customers. Managers must work with their teams to craft a "positioning" approach that clearly communicates the value proposition. All team members must be prepared to articulate it during the selling, negotiation, and implementation process. Here are some "gap closing" questions to ask: How are we uniquely positioned against competitors? Do all team members understand this? What is our value proposition? Do all members understand their role in delivering this value? Can each member articulate our value in a compelling theme that positions us effectively? How can we "position" our solutions to maximize their value (in terms of when we present them, how we present them, who

presents them, and what language we use to present them)?

4. Planning. In the end, a sales team is only as good as the plans it develops to sell, negotiate, service, and keep the business. Too often, sales team members are surprised by unexpected pressures from their customers, and react by giving away too much too quickly to solve the problem. In other cases, sales team members "leave money on the table" in customer negotiations. Effective sales and negotiation planning is critical. Every manager should ask: What is our plan? How have we communicated our plans to all team members? How will we define success? Other than closing the deal, what do we want out of this relationship? What is our concession strategy? If we have to give something to the customer, what will we ask for in return? How can we build more creativity into our selling, negotiating, and servicing? How will we manage information during our customer interactions? Who will share which information at what time? How will we deal with tough tactics and predictable pressure?

5. Personal leadership. Sales teams look to their managers as role models of how to work together to solve sales, negotiation, and service problems. If a manager gives things away to close business, team members will do the same. If a manager fails to involve team members in account planning, they won't communicate well with each other. Managers should ask: Am I modeling the behavior I expect of my team members? Do I involve all appropriate team members in key decisions about how we sell to, negotiate with, and service our customers?

Today doing the right things to build team performance is often counterintuitive because busy managers justify ineffective behavior by thinking: "My job is to take command and solve problems. Involving others just slows things down."

High-performing managers realize that profits and customer satisfaction depend on team skills, team communication, and team process. They invest the time and resources to train members on critical selling, negotiation, and conflict management skills. Then they manage their teams daily to ensure that those new skills are used to improve team effectiveness. **SME**

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ACTION: Use these five points to close any sales gaps in your sales team.