

Achieving Sustained Sales Growth Efficiently, Reliably and by Design

By Jonathan Farrington

In his book "Fundamentals of Selling," Charles Futrell identifies careful use of selling time as perhaps the distinguishing characteristic of the successful salesperson. Frequently there are two main pitfalls that even experienced salespeople can fall into in terms of activities. First, they simply aren't doing enough. What's enough? Enough telephone calls to make appointments, enough face-to-face calls, enough calls that involve or influence the decision-makers. In general, the more focused sales activity salespeople generate, the greater the number of sales opportunities they can create.

Poor Quality Activity:

Second, but equally important, salespeople often aren't clear about how to identify the prospects most likely to have a genuine need for their product or service. Without an objective way to prioritize which prospects to contact first and/or an efficient strategy for contacting them, salespeople are doomed to waste a large percentage of their time.

Another huge dilemma for many salespeople is how to divide their time between servicing existing clients and generating new business from new prospects. Existing clients frequently make requests for service that could be dealt with by support staff. But salespeople who lack a disciplined, future-orientated plan for generating new contacts and sales often find themselves spending more time attending to "urgent" tasks for existing accounts instead. A common approach among salespeople can be summarized in the saying "If you throw enough mud against the wall, some of it is bound to stick". This approach is exhausting, demoralizing, extremely unproductive, and very expensive in the long term.

Speed of Relaying Customer Information:

The Sales Director provides another interesting dimension to activity management. Apart from product or service knowledge, salespeople require knowledge about prospects, clients, and market trends. Therefore, if the information those salespeople require isn't relayed in an efficient manner, their "face-to-face" selling activities are dramatically reduced.

Harder Rather Than Smarter:

In the book Emerson's Essays, there is a section on "Law of Compensation", which can be summarized simply as "give more, get more" This is what most salespeople try to do, so they end up working harder when they could be working smarter. This begs the question, are your sales activities deciding your strategy or is your strategy deciding your sales activities?

Developing a Consultative Sales Process:

From the Sales Director's perspective, developing a consultative sales process means developing a comprehensive, formal, realistic and step-by-step outline of what salespeople are expected to do. This is just as appropriate for internal and totally reactive sales teams as it is for external pro-active ones. This outline includes the activity and calls they must make, the relationships they should establish with prospects, the documentation they should use in sales calls, the issues they must discuss and resolve with prospects and the tangible goals they must achieve in sequence along the path to each sale, in order to achieve maximum effectiveness.

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It's only when such an outline is in place that sales management can be in a position to:

- Monitor the sales force's activity, progress and results,
- Assess issues as they arise and take appropriate action,
- Redirect individual sales effort efficiently.

Although many organizations appreciate the importance of being customer-focused and talk in vague terms about their "consultative sales process", surprisingly few sales leaders invest the time and energy required to develop a formal sales process - a process that is at once detailed and resilient enough to guide their salespeople and permit effective management of their efforts.

Overcoming Implementation Inertia:

Even when a consultative sales process has been developed, understood by sales managers, written down and circulated, it's often not enough. No matter how brilliant, a sales process will only be effective to the extent it is followed and used by frontline sales staff. And this is where most organizations fall down: overcoming inertia - among managers and salespeople alike - and implementing the process.

The hurdles that must be cleared in order to get people throughout the organization to actually implement it are enough to cause Sales Directors to tear their hair out. But a select few, of the very best, have found some innovative strategies that have enabled them to achieve the Holy Grail: Sustained sales growth achieved efficiently, reliably and by design.

About the Author

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