



# Start Selling

*Creating a sales culture takes discipline, commitment and focus but that should be no surprise—because excellence is never an accident.*

**A**re your sales numbers down? In today's economic climate it's more critical than ever to consistently produce sales results. As I talk to organizations that are struggling to grow, one area that they need to look hard at is their current sales culture. During the boom times there were lots of leads coming in and sales people were essentially order takers. They took an order and they didn't have to sell on the differentiators of their company or their product offering.

With the market down you need skilled sales people, not order takers. You must have a sales culture that knows how to drive results from your sales team if you are going to compete in today's demanding market.

I read an article called "10 Steps to Creating a Top-Selling Sales Culture" by Rory Vaden that had some good advice. It said that excellence is never an accident. Transforming a marginally performing sales team into a well-oiled sales machine doesn't happen by luck either.

Yet many companies try to grow sales by simply putting more pressure on the sales team, reminding them of their increasing quotas and adding up how much they're behind. Oftentimes well

intentioned leadership teams think increasing pay will be the magic anecdote, only to find that paying salespeople more money doesn't make them any better at generating sales. Many times, it creates more complacency to do just enough to not get fired.

Companies invest a lot of time and money into better products or more marketing, which doesn't

hurt, but only further masks your true underlying sales problem. And it's astounding how many companies know they need to increase sales, yet they spend 70 to 90 percent of their training time teaching their sales force more product knowledge and almost no time teaching them how to actually sell.

You might have amazing customer service. You could be the leading provider of cutting edge technology. You may have an amazing Web presence. It's possible that you have the world's most compelling value proposition. But if your revenue-generating sales team isn't reaching its potential it's because you don't know how to build a true sales culture.

Here are 10 key elements that will get your company on its way to creating a competent sales culture:

1. Follow your salespeople. You really need to spend 60 days doing nothing but listening and watching. You need to spend that much time because when it comes to why they aren't producing, salespeople can never tell you the real deal; they can only show you.

2. Monitor daily activity. A doctor wouldn't look at you and just tell you what was wrong; he'd send you in for an MRI, to get blood work done or hook you up to a machine to get readings. You have to do the same thing for your sales team. Track the six to eight daily revenue producing activities of every salesperson. Whatever system you use is fine, but the data is essential for monitoring because numbers never lie.

3. Create talk tracks. Most salespeople are far less technically proficient at selling than they

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think. They are scared to call on new business because they aren't good at it and they don't know what to say. While they will complain about being forced to say word-for-word scripts, you must have them available and they must work. If you don't, stop everything you are doing, find the nearest consultant and get some. A sales team without talk tracks is like a business without a business plan, scattered and inconsistent.

4. Drive activity more than results. Sales is and always will be a numbers game. Whoever sees the most qualified amount of prospects in the shortest time has the best chance of winning. Salespeople have little control over who buys and who doesn't, so spend more time pushing them to increase activity and results will increase as a byproduct.

5. Cut the bad apples. Our experience suggests that the average sales manager knows in 30 to 60 days whether or not a person is going to make it, yet it typically takes six to nine months to let that person go. Bad attitudes, low work ethic and people who undermine leadership are a virus to your sales team. The longer you let them stay around, the more it is costing your organization and the more they are infecting those around them.

6. Learn to celebrate. Start recognizing top leaders in a big public way. One of the fastest ways we get results for clients is helping them create an incentive plan for driving activity. While big bonuses and contest prizes usually have to stay tied to production, you can come up with fun affordable incentives that create an immediate spike in activity. Top producing salespeople are a different breed and it's amazing how far they'll go to get a \$50 gas card or get their name called in a team meeting.

7. Create a creed. Selling is emotional. Selling takes energy. And many salespeople need to be sold on the greater good of what they're doing. They need to understand that they are contributing to a bigger picture. You can even have them come up with their own creed by just capturing their responses in a group setting to the questions "What do we believe in and

why are we here?" Salespeople need vision and it's the job of leadership to help that vision come alive.

8. Elevate esteem. Salespeople are amazing. They are often (and should be) among the highest income earners in your organization. They battle fear and rejection every single day. If you want them to produce you need to promote how honorable and noble it is to be a sales professional throughout your organization. In your talk and demeanor, elevate the importance of the sales function to the other departments in your company. Anyone who has a problem with that should be invited to make sales calls for a few weeks.

9. Master a sales training process. It's your company's job to give your salespeople the tools and training they need to succeed in their position. Sales cultures have well-defined systems to help their salespeople grow, learn and achieve. This is especially important for new hires but you also need to have some way to deliver on-going advanced sales training ideas for your entire sales team. If you don't think this is important, then determine how much it costs you on average to hire someone and multiply that by the number of salespeople who didn't make it last year; you'll quickly see it's worth the investment.

10. Create more frequent accountability. Most good salespeople need and welcome regular accountability and partnership. Spending regular one-on-one time with your people not only gives you a chance to mentor and train with them; it shows that what they do is important and that you care about their success. Part of the reason why sales coaching has become so popular in recent years is because companies are stretched thin by tight budgets and managers are not able to spend enough individual time with their people so they seek outside reinforcement.

Creating a sales culture takes discipline, commitment and focus but that should be no surprise—because excellence is never an accident. It's something that requires attention and skill, but it's also an art. You can do it. So, get out there and start selling. ❖

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