

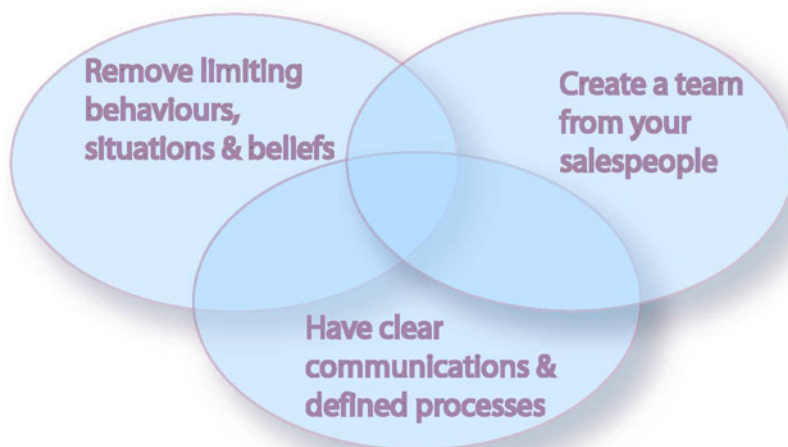
Grow the “right sort” of sales with 5 simple actions

In our work with sales teams, sales managers and sales directors we hear the same two questions: ‘*how can we grow sales without increasing costs?*’ and; ‘*how can we get our sales department to bring us more profitable sales?*’

The good news is that you are not on your own! The bad news is that not many other people have found the answer either. But there is an answer and it is simpler than most companies think. In fact many companies have dismissed this approach because ‘*if it were as simple as that, everyone would be doing it.*’ Wrong!

I define the issue as *systematically generating more sales which are more profitable from existing budgets*. I include ‘systematically’ because the process must be repeatable otherwise all that is generated is a short term blip which quickly disappears.

The three elements that will create this lasting change in a sales team are:



Each of these elements requires time and energy from the company to implement, but they will not increase your costs.

For example, you can drive a car with the handbrake on, but it goes much better if you release the handbrake and push on the accelerator.

In the same way, you can make improvements in your sales team performance by driving them harder, but they will perform a whole lot

better, with less driving if you first deal with issues that are holding them back.

Therefore the approach here is to first identify and deal with issues that are limiting your salespeople, then build them into a team, become very clear with your communications and define process that work for everyone.

Take the brakes off your sales team

Every company has issues, politics and process that sap the energy of its sales team for no good reason. Some of these (for example, excessive form filling) cannot be changed, but many can be circumvented or their effect on the salespeople reduced with creative thinking.

Action point 1: Review all the organisational issues that hinder your salespeople. Have the salespeople rank them in terms of annoyance. Create a plan to reduce the effect of these issues on your salespeople. Start with the most annoying issue.

The second set of “brakes” that are being applied to your salespeople are individually by the salespeople themselves. This may be from lack of knowledge, misconception or a belief that limits their behaviour. The limiting belief is the most damaging as the person truly believes (however wrong they may be) that they are, for example, not credible with senior directors. This will significantly limit their ability to sell.

Action point 2: Work with each salesperson to identify gaps in their knowledge, misconceptions and limiting beliefs. Agree a plan with the person to remedy issues.

Once you have begun to remove these limiting factors from your salespeople, they should have more time and a greater willingness to accept new ways of working. If you try this the other way round, your well meaning approach will be viewed as *'yet another idea that detracts from the selling'*. So start by helping your salespeople to take the brakes off.

Be clear

Clarity in communication and action builds understanding, respect and trust. Clarity of communication requires that everyone means the same thing when they talk about, for example, 'an opportunity'. Confusion is inevitable if one person sees 'an opportunity' as an unqualified lead and another as a qualified sale with a defined close date!

This is the set of definitions that I use:

Universe: Every person or company out there that may (or may not) have a use for my product or service.

Suspect: Somebody that has stated that they may have an interest in buying. They may have responded to an advert, called up or been referred to me.

Prospect: Somebody that has a requirement for my product or service, budget for the purchase and a compelling reason to buy.

Opportunity: A sales situation where the buyer has a compelling reason to buy in the next three months and claims to have money or budget and authority to spend the budget.

Customer: Someone that has bought from me in the last six months

Other terms will need to be defined for your company. But you can see that if everyone in your company uses the same definition for these terms, understanding a sales situation is straightforward and fast.

Action point 3: Agree a common vocabulary of sales terms in your company.

Define sales processes

Most salespeople that I meet dislike following processes, but all will follow sensible processes that help them to be successful. Many will even help define processes to which they are happy to subscribe.

Every company needs its sales team to follow processes, so they may as well be ones that the sales team are happy with. The result of sensible, negotiated processes is that everyone in the team understands their own role and how this impacts on the remainder of the team.

Action point 4: Review existing processes and amend if necessary with input from the sales team.

Create a team

Most sales teams are teams in name only. At best they are a loose collection of independent salespeople at worst they can be described as hungry sharks as happy to devour each other as 'the prey' (ie your customers!).

But it doesn't have to be like this. Indeed, many of the changes that you will be making through actions 1 to 4 above will be encouraging your salespeople to cooperate rather than fight. The trick is to give the sales team responsibility for determining its own direction within a framework that you have defined. Let the team set its own roles, appoint its own leaders and only get involved to keep the team on the course you have determined and never override team decisions, unless they contravene your controlling framework. The end result will be that your relationship will be with the team and you will be able to plan far more and fire fight far less.

Action point 5: Support the team to take responsibility for its own destiny within your defining framework.

By creating a team in this way, you are demonstrating your trust in your salespeople. This is vital as the one thing that you want your customers to do more than anything else is trust your salespeople...

Summary

Sales is the one area that a company can maintain competitive advantage over its competitors. No one can copy the attitudes and behaviours of your staff. Therefore investing in creating the most effective sales team possible will yield both short term and long term benefits.

By following actions 1 to 5 above a sales team can be significantly enhanced. This enhancement can be brought about far more quickly by the application of specialist sales coaching such as that provided by Apex Coaching.

The Advert

I work with companies as a freelance sales director or sales consultant to help them grow sales and exceed their targets.

My customers find that my service pays for itself in a matter of weeks through enhanced sales, better customer retention and bigger profit margins.

As I have worked in most industries from manufacturing through consulting, services, IT, distribution, finance, retail and public sector I have seen what works and does not work far more than anyone that has been confined to a few industries.

This means that I have a huge database of proven successful ideas that can be applied to your business today. It also means that I have failed more than most – and that's great as you can also learn from my mistakes!

Please get in touch – I'll happily spend an hour with you without charge.

Simon West – March 2005

Telephone: 01672 541636

Email: simon@apexcoaching.co.uk

Web: www.apexcoaching.co.uk