Maximize your sales teams' performance to ensure they exceed their targets

Strategic Sales Team Development Programme

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Why do so many sales people fail to achieve their targets?

What can be done to reduce the disparity between your highest sales performers and the lowest?

How can you harness your sales team to achieve your strategic goals?

Introduction

This paper sets out to provide answers to these questions and provide a useful framework to ensure that your sales team have the best possible chance of exceeding their targets in support of your company’s strategic goals. The programme is beneficial for companies with a sales team of 5 to 500.

A brief biography describing some of the common pains that a sales person encounters is followed by a short overview of Vantage Strategies framework for the Strategic Sales Team Development Programme. Each of the two phases of the framework are summarised and then additional high level detail is provided for each stage.

Vantage Strategies typically work with Managing Directors or Sales Director to deliver this programme and are happy to work with other external preferred partners to achieve the programme goals.

“Free sales performance health check available”

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Sales Teams Pain - Biography

Jeremy sits at his desk, first cup of coffee of the day in hand, to tackle the Monday morning backlog of emails. He has 3 weeks remaining to achieve this quarter’s sales target, and is not quite sure how he is going to do this. More bad news, he receives a letter from a prospect to say that his recent proposal was unsuccessful. All his late nights putting it together were in vain. Oh well, he wasn’t sure how the company would have been able to deliver the business anyway, he didn’t think the company had the resources required if they had won the business.

Ten o’clock, Jeremy prints out details of his sales opportunities and key account plans to review in the sales meeting, the implementation of recent contact management software has made this process much easier. In the meeting, Ben announces that he has landed another big deal. Jeremy starts to wander if Ben has been given preferential sales leads? Why does he find it so easy to meet his sales targets?

Another debate in the meeting about which companies to target and what products to sell. The lack of focus is getting Jeremy down. He doesn’t really understand all of the company’s solutions, so just sells the ones he feels comfortable selling.

Back to his desk, just in time to pick up the phone to a prospect who is responding to a recent marketing campaign. It’s only a shame that he doesn’t know anything about the campaign and what special offer they are referring to. Communication between the marketing department and the sales team has always been a weak point. The customer provided some useful information on their existing supplier – one of his key competitors, which he diligently noted and kept for his own future reference. It was difficult to keep up with the competition, and a bewilderingly difficult task to know how the company is perceived to be different by prospects.

Jeremy hears rumours of a potential merger his company is facing, yet more uncertainty about his future and a whole new list of solutions to sell. He seems to speak to a lot of companies but does not get anywhere. Just then he is asked by Ben why he has a sales meeting planned with a senior developer when actually it is almost always a business sponsor purchasing their solution. Ah ha maybe that’s where he is going wrong, he has never been given any guidance on how to qualify an opportunity, or who makes decisions about purchases which results in wasted effort from technical people seeking to update their product knowledge.
Strategic Sales Development Programme Summary

The following diagram provides an overview of the framework for implementing a strategic sales development programme. The programme seeks to optimize the company's knowledge and resources to incorporate into a structured sales training and mentoring programme. The first stage of the programme focuses on a company review, the second stage relates to the development of the individual sales team members.

Stage one - Company Review

The programme should start with a review the company's strategy and marketing plan to capture knowledge that will be critical to support the sales team in achieving their goals. This includes information such as target markets and customer needs, product portfolio and competitive analysis. The next step will be to review the company's existing Customer Life Cycle Management processes to identify opportunities for increasing customer acquisition, loyalty and profitability as well as finding opportunities to increase employee motivation and productivity. A review should then be undertaken of the tools necessary for the sales team to optimize their performance, such as relevant and professional marketing collateral, sales presentations that are tailored to customer needs as well as technology that enhances productivity such as contact management software and remote access PDA’s for email.
Stage two - Individual training and mentoring

The next stage is to review the individual’s sales experience and performance. An important factor affecting their performance is their personal efficiency and effectiveness. Does the sales person understand what actions are required to close the sale? Can they juggle their many conflicting tasks and focus on what really matters to achieve their targets? What changes are required to increase their personal motivation to achieve their targets? Are they getting appropriate feedback on what they are doing well? All of this feeds into a programme that is tailored for each individual which may include attendance of relevant elements of a company sales training course, and participation in ongoing coaching or mentoring as appropriate which will enhance the individual’s development to achieve sales targets.

In addition to traditional sales training, courses should be tailored to a company’s own strategy, specific products, customers and competitive environment. The exact nature of the sales training required will depend on the business, for example account management courses will differ from courses for new business development sales people.

“Does the sales person understand what actions are required to close the sale?”

It can be valuable to include a mini MBA module for the sales team to help them understand customers, their strategy, problems, goals, investment decision making process etc. Our sales training modules have also been run for senior executives of a company who want to understand more about the sales process and how it relates to their company’s solutions. Training courses by themselves do not bring all the behavioural changes required to make significant improvements to the sales team. One of the most effective methods for personal development is the use of experienced independent sales mentors. Their role is to support the sales team in developing their skills, as well as to act as a sounding board for identifying the next steps required to close specific sales.

“Mini MBA for sales team”
**Stage 1 - Detailed overview**

**Strategy**

The most important first step to consider is how to align your sales team with your company values and ensure that they achieve your strategic goals. Typically, this results in a set of sales targets, but it should also include identification of resources and skills required to fulfil these strategic goals such as development of resources in order to fulfil sales orders. To what extent does the strategy differentiate the company from competition and what competitive advantage does the company have? These details should be captured for inclusion in the development programme so that the sales team are able to position the company accurately relative to the competition.

**Marketing**

There is often a considerable amount of very useful marketing knowledge within companies that is not communicated or used by the sales team. This often includes analysis of target customer segments, their needs and how the company's solutions address these needs. It should also contain detailed competitive analysis, including identification of marketing messages that can be tailored for positioning the company effectively.

"Failing to differentiate from the competition"

Marketing plays a critical role in the sales team exceeding their sales targets, from creation of a strong brand, to identification of well qualified leads. Marketing, when done effectively, will reduce the sales cycle and free up sales teams time to focus on closing more sales. One of the most significant factors resulting in failure to achieve targets, is by company failing to differentiate its products and services and approach from the competition and to create perceived unique value add to the customer.
Customer Life Cycle Processes
An internal audit should be undertaken to review the customer life cycle processes that exist to attract, retain and convert customers into profitable loyal customers. Not all customers are profitable, and therefore the company should ensure that processes are in place to be able to accurately measure individual customer profitability and ensure that potential unprofitable business is not won, which will result in existing resources being over stretched.

“Many companies are difficult to do business with”

Many companies are difficult to do business with. Companies should regularly check that they make it as easy as possible for customers to buy from or get access to relevant information to make purchasing decisions. Existing loyal customers generate a greater proportion of a company's profits. With this in mind, ensure that the relationships with your existing customers, customer feedback and handling of customer complaints are well managed. Capture feedback in such a way that it can be used to add value to the development of account plans and future R&D. Ensure that every process in your company will deliver perceived value to your customers, otherwise it will be a cost to your business not a revenue opportunity.

Sales Tools
In many companies the sales team are left to their own devices to develop customer presentations, key account plans, proposals and other marketing materials. Many sales teams do not have access to an effective contact management solution that enables sharing of information such as visibility of when a sales opportunity will close, and the planned actions required to close the sale. In some companies access to a knowledge management solution will greatly enhance productivity of sales team.

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Stage 2 – Detailed overview

Motivation

There are many factors that affect an individual’s motivation. It will always be different for each person and potentially change over time. Factors that could potentially affect a sales persons motivation may be perceived lack of ‘fairness’ for example in allocation of sales leads, positive feedback on what they have done well (not just closing sales), team spirit, the companys investment in developing their skills, the extent to which they feel valued, understanding their contribution to the achievement of the companies goals, how they are measured, if their values are congruent with the companies values etc.

“Independent coaching and mentoring have proven to be very effective”

Companies need to identify what affects the motivation of each of their employees, and use this knowledge to tailor a personal development programme to support the team in exceeding their targets. Companies need to find the gaps in the individual’s sales skills which may be identified through observation of a typical working day, and tailor a programme to address these weaknesses or gaps. It is important to identify the competencies and approach, that the highest achievers have, that the lowest achievers don’t in order to bridge the gap in performance.
**Personal Efficiency and Effectiveness**

Some people are naturally more effective at focusing on the 20% of effort that will deliver 80% of results. Others need more guidance, measures and feedback to keep them focused on doing what is important to exceed their targets. Independent coaching and mentoring have proven to be very effective approaches to support individuals in developing new behaviours that will achieve their goals. In addition, a good contact management system that has been developed to support the company's sales process greatly enhances individual's efficiency and effectiveness.

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“Identify the competencies and approach of the highest achievers”

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**Sales Skills**

Typically the sales team will have very different backgrounds and levels of sales experience. Quite often, the sales team consists of people who have moved internally into the sales team and have no sales process understanding. The sales team members that currently exceed their targets, are the ones that understand that sales is simply a process, and they know what needs to be done at every stage of the sales process to close the sale. This requires a number of skills, firstly their strategic understanding of their customers goals and their decision making process and secondly the ability to use all resources available to them to close the sale. Both of these skills can be summarised as strategic consultative selling skills and team based selling skills. Above all, a person’s attitude and relationship management skills will give them the best foundation for success.
Summary

Companies should start to accept the significant role they can play in supporting their sales teams in exceeding their targets. Vantage Strategies have developed a unique Strategic Sales Team Development Programme, which incorporates traditional sales training and sales mentoring with a broader more strategic approach to maximizing the sales team potential.

The first stage of the programme starts with a company review to support companies in bringing together all the essential knowledge and tools that the team need in order to exceed their targets. This review also identifies company changes required to increase the sales teams performance. Customer life cycle processes are optimized to ensure employees are motivated and customer profitability is maximised.

The second stage of the programme supports the individual development of the sales team members which incorporates sales training and independent sales mentoring which helps the team to understand the company's unique sales strategies that need to be adopted to win.

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