

Creating a Great Sales Team: Construct a Great Sales Culture

October 2008

Sales Culture Selling

Sales culture selling is different. Why is this true? We can start with our world today. Organizations, as well as the world, are complex. There are new needs for collaboration, integrating an independently-minded workforce with unlimited access to information. Competition and decision-making have taken on new levels of importance. When we consider what it actually takes to get something done, we realize that we need to know what everyone else is doing. How might their activities conflict with what we are attempting to do? Even more importantly, how do they conflict with what we need them to do for us?

Selling is a tricky business, and an art, as well. It requires detailed knowledge of your customers and their needs. It requires an in-depth understanding of your suppliers and their suppliers who serve your company. Constructing a platform to integrate all of these insights is not a simple process, especially when you have to consider the complexity of today's world. This platform can be thought of as a culture. A strong culture helps in all arenas, but especially in the sales arena. In strong cultures, people work well together. They understand each other, accommodate each other's needs, and work towards common goals in complementary ways. They share values and beliefs about what is good, bad, right, wrong, productive and/or unproductive. They share ideas on customer needs and subsequent accommodations.



The world is full of complexities and integrations, some logical and some not so logical. This makes finding the strategic buyer, and identifying all of that buyer's concerns and stakeholders, complicated. Selling into that situation requires a collaborative effort, a common culture for doing work. It requires that the stakeholders know each other and each other's needs, as well as how to accommodate them.

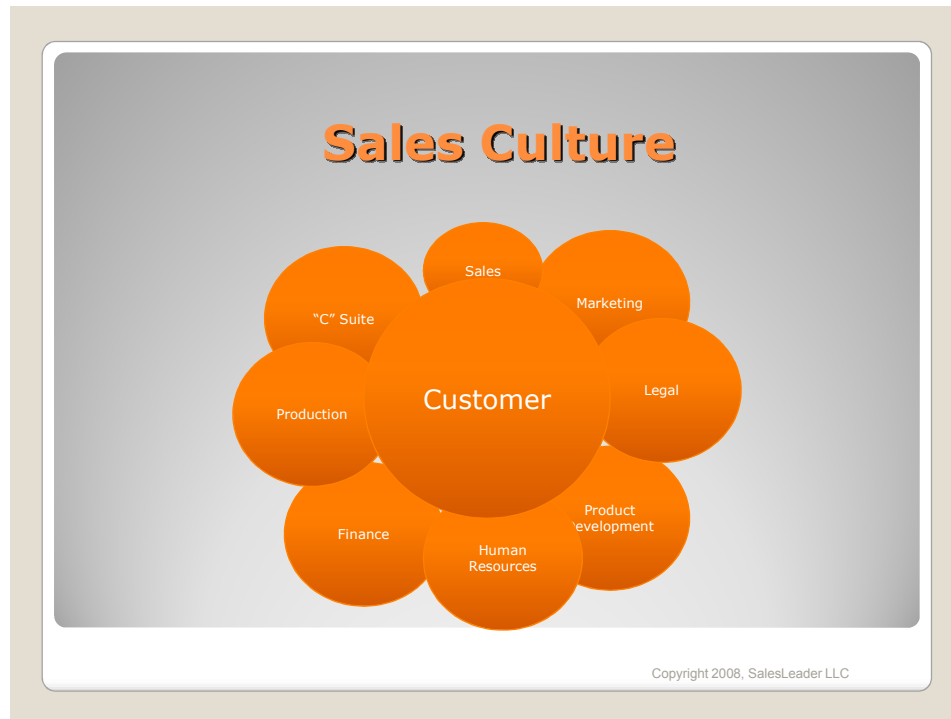
Stakeholders are numerous in the sales endeavor and come in all sizes and shapes. The sales professionals have them in their organizations. The customers have them in their organizations and in their customer base, as well. If these stakeholders are unaware of each other's needs, they cannot accommodate them. Ensuring results requires that needs are met. Creating common goals and direction with one's stakeholders is foundational to understanding their needs. In the Sales domain, this is most critical, since sales results are one of the most important elements of a successful organization.

Stakeholder needs are often recognized through individual and group values. Understanding needs and values increases your ability to work collaboratively and effectively with those stakeholders for exceptional sales results.

Selling is a science, but it is also an art. Knowing the basics of the scientific process of selling is essential. Knowing when, where, and what stakeholders to approach and in what context is even more relevant to actually creating sales success. Great sales professionals create great sales teams. Those sales teams can then move forward to build expansive sales cultures to shepherd sales campaigns through the organization.

Creating the Sales Culture

So let's focus on the concept of how to sell in a complex 21st century environment. This is when the sales professionals become aware of the need for extensive support when leading each sales campaign. The sales professional must understand the customer, his environment and needs, and who within his own company would most likely be able to meet those needs. These experts within the company must be brought together to create a virtual team. This means that they work together in a matrixed manner toward the common objective and goal of a specific sales campaign, meeting the customer's needs to create success for the sales campaign.



It is the sales professional's responsibility to design the sales campaign so that the objectives and goals are clear to the virtual team members. The virtual team members can then translate the campaign needs into a prescription for their own involvement and required contribution. Everyone knows best what personal expertise to contribute once the objectives and goals are known.

A second responsibility of the sales professional is to ensure that all virtual team members are aware of the flow of work needed to support a successful sales campaign. Awareness is good; but even that might not be enough to ensure success. All virtual team members must understand the workflow and be ready to contribute to it at any point.

In summary, it is the sales professional who creates and manages the work of the virtual team. All coordination is the job of the sales professional!

The Essentials of Culture

Culture is the vehicle by which things get done in an organization. It is based on a set of underlying assumptions about what is important, such as nature, the environment, and/or basic human rights. These assumptions focus a group of people with a set of values by which people conduct their activities. The values are based on the beliefs of the leader and all of the stakeholders as to what is important, what needs to be completed, and how they will treat each other while doing their work. If people come together with different sets of values and beliefs, they will not be able to work together very effectively unless they agree on a common set for working together. If a sales professional is working with a customer from another country, how they work together must be established or they will not be able to meet each other's needs and to close the sale. Likewise, if the technology experts and the customer service experts do not understand each other's basic values and beliefs about how they will work together, their joint work will never be complementary. They will not be able to collaborate and support the sales campaign as is needed through their virtual team membership.

Several considerations are important in creating a culture. They include industry requirements and compliance, company shareholder perspectives, knowing employee strengths and weaknesses, and management preferences for achievement of company objectives and goals. In addition, each stakeholder group has preferences and "best practices" that each likes to maintain. All of the views can be complementary when working together, but, most likely, there will be conflicts. These slow down progress. It is the sales professional's challenge, but also his opportunity, to mold these different perspectives into a commonly agreeable view, a common culture, for managing sales campaigns. Often work in this area will seem to go far beyond the sales process. Remember that everyone is in sales. Therefore, their needs must be considered and contributions must be maximized for best company results.

The significant challenge for the sales professional who is leading the virtual team initiative is to understand the needs of the virtual team members and the external customers. Since the virtual team members come from various areas within a company, they are likely to have their own culture within which each is comfortable working. This is where service level agreements between team members become critical to the success of the virtual team and, ultimately, the sales campaign.

Service level agreements can cover timeframes for deliveries, priority of jointly planned work, common quality standards, or any other aspect of the virtual team members working together.

When the sales professional understands how each of the virtual team members must work and how the customer's culture fits into these views, a common platform of values and beliefs can be built to direct and facilitate the work of the virtual team. This is the job of the sales professional!

Also, the virtual team members must understand the nuances of how the external customer works within his organization, his company culture. Delivering product includes how you deliver it. If timeframes, quality, hierarchical perspectives, and/or mode of delivery expectations are not accommodated, customer satisfaction may be at risk. It is the sales professional's responsibility to bring all of these perspectives together, understand them, and then help everyone reconcile any differences that might interfere with the efficient close of a sale and its campaign.

The Stakeholders

The stakeholders include everyone who touches or is touched by the company business. The ultimate goal of a company is to sell its products and services to its customers. So, the sales campaign should touch everyone in the organization as well as the customers and everyone in their organization who will benefit from the products or services acquired. If you think of this scenario from the sales professional's perspective, he must consider many people.

So why do all of these people want to help the sales professional close a sale, since it is really the sales professional's job? It is the sales professional's job, of course, to close a sale, but what does everyone get out of a successful sales campaign? The sales professional, who understands what needs to happen to close a sale, must ensure that the stakeholders understand the necessity of their contributions.



The stakeholder groups must all understand also what they gain from successful sales campaigns. It is, again, the sales professional who leads this process. Stakeholders contribute more effectively if they understand the gains to be made as a result of their help. Individually, as well as corporate-wide, they must see their connections to results.

What do they value? The sales professional must understand motivations and how to satisfy them while bringing the sales campaign's goals to stakeholder awareness for best results.

The sales professional leads this process to ensure delivery of these best results. This requires a good understanding of the cultural values and beliefs of each of the stakeholder groups. When creating a culture by which the virtual team will work, all stakeholder cultures must be considered. Facilitating the development of this common culture around each sales campaign is the most important job of the sales professional. Without creating this culture, virtual team members will not be able to effectively deliver their efforts to the sales campaign. This is where the sales professional exercises true artistry.

The Workflow

When sales professionals are hired, they must acquire a great deal of information in order to be able to represent their company's products and services to customers. They must also learn a considerable amount about their customers: the how, when, and where of value that they bring to those customers. They need to understand the workflow of their own company, the workflow of their customers, companies, and the workflow of industry requirements. Actually, workflow should be considered a part of the cultural understandings of each organizational entity. Workflows direct the activities that get things done. These activities are designed to be in compliance with the values and beliefs of the culture of the organization. Understanding and perhaps modifying this workflow to better serve a sales campaign will require that the sales professional has knowledge of the cultural framework that drives the activities of that stakeholder group.

For example, if a group of Research and Development (R&D) professionals decides that it is necessary to review and recertify some product data due to their internal quality standards, this may delay a product's delivery and jeopardize the close of a sale. This decision is based in the R&D professionals belief in their quality standards, but is in conflict with the sales professionals' belief in on-time delivery. It is the sales professional's job to manage this conflict and find a common belief that will accommodate both stakeholders' needs.

When sales professionals have a deep understanding of all of these operations, they can act as the connector, or catalyst, for making progress toward sales campaign goals, satisfying the customer's needs and facilitating the work of all company experts in contributing effectively.

Touch points are where the stakeholders come together and need to understand how to accommodate each other. They are critical to progress towards sales campaign goals. Sales professionals can identify them and help focus relevant activity to make them work smoothly. This is how the sales culture is created and moves the virtual team toward sales campaign closes. It helps everyone in the organization contribute.

Essential Selling Skills

As previously mentioned, the sales culture is most effectively created by a great sales team. A great sales team has mastered the essential skills of selling. The nature of how these skills are used contributes to the culture of the organization itself. They make up the commonly understood way of working. These skills provide the sales professional the ability to successfully interact with his customers, both external and internal to their companies. When interactions are smooth and accommodating to all other's needs, one has created a great sales culture.

The essential skills of selling are categorized into four areas: personal, relational, business, and growth. They must be mastered in priority order for greatest effect. Having mastered the personal skills, sales professionals develop relational skills as they add to their personal skills. Relational skills allow the sales professional to connect to stakeholders in their organizations who are business focused. The business focus

enables everyone to see the connection of their individual work and activity to the close of a sales campaign; but, also, as it contributes to the overarching objectives and goals of the company as a whole. When these three categories are mastered, the sales professional is positioned and ready to share his all-encompassing perspectives with less experienced sales professionals. Sharing the wealth is so important to proliferating the sales culture and sustaining successful sales campaign activities.

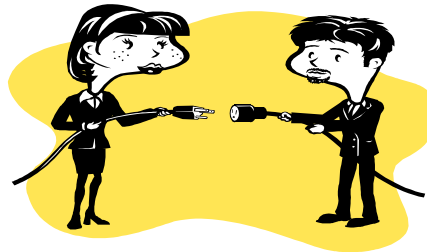
The nature of acquiring these skills should not be overlooked. It will provide a logical and easy path to creating a great sales team and then on to creating a sales culture. When all categories of skills are mastered, the sales professional is ready and prepared to create a sales culture to manage his sales campaigns to successful closes.

Personal Skills

Personal skills include the awareness and ability to know yourself and your tendencies for managing in the environments in which you must succeed. For sales professionals, these include the sales organization, the corporate organization, and the customer's environment. The personal skills to be developed include an innate desire to sell, passion, energy, self-motivation, and integrity.

Relational Skills

Relational skills include your ability to use personal skills to build relationships with others who will help you create sales success. These people are your customers, both external and internal to your organization. Relationship skills are humility, ego control, confidence, relationship-building, collaboration, listening, patience, and personal responsibility. These skills are probably the most important to the success of your sales career.



Business Skills

Business skills involve your ability to make good business decisions in sales situations. What are the consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a sale? What is the likelihood of its success? Is it good business or bad business for your company? Does this specific sales effort enhance your sales territory business plan? Does it contribute to your company's business plan? These questions can all be answered correctly with skills of business acumen, building a territory business plan, competitiveness, and asking for the order.

There is an underlying tier of business skills that are foundational to building the territory business plan and aligning it to the company business plan. These skills are the basics of the science of selling. They include focus on prospecting, pipeline creation, needs analysis and research capabilities, call strategies, tracking and monitoring progress towards sales close, and evaluating progress toward company goals.

Sharing the Wealth

Sharing the wealth is the last category of skills and these skills involve your ability to help others become exceptional sales professionals. Once sales professionals have mastered all other skills, they are positioned to mentor and help other less experienced sales professionals, as well as other organizational members,

understand the sales campaign process and requirements for success. They also help customers understand industry perspectives and background in order to help them better understand the value of their company's products and services. Sharing the wealth skills include intelligence, seeing the big picture, becoming a thought leader, desire to educate your customer, and commitment to lifelong learning.

Customers of Customers

The idea of a customer is a relative concept. We all have customers and have to appease and build relationships with anyone and everyone who we want to work with to get something done. This includes your auto mechanic, your dry cleaner, your office mate, and even your spouse. How many customers do you have? Lots and lots.

The customer relationship drives all productivity and, once this is fully realized, sales professionals build relationships with all of their external and internal stakeholders. It is a two-way street AT ALL TIMES.

Sales professionals' relationships are what create successful sales campaigns that sustain companies. The external customer relationship keeps you coming back to sell more of your products and services. It also keeps you in the discussion when that customer is innovating and needs you to update your products and services to accommodate new needs.

Customers become part of the culture of your company. When managed effectively, this culture can provide common and joint working relationships that facilitate their help in closing their own campaigns. They seek to understand your company's value and become your strongest advocate. This culture is inclusive of your internal customers, as well. It will work to facilitate your internal stakeholders' ability to share that advocacy for the campaign and the external customers' satisfaction.

Sales professionals' internal relationships keep the sales professional on track to be able to deliver products and services to external customers in a way that satisfies those customers. These relationships also provide the sales professional with critical information about specific external customer needs in a highly technical domain. This domain is the area of focus of an expert within your company; it is far beyond what you might need to understand. The trusted relationship with that internal expert can be essential to maintaining a positive relationship with that external customer. Service level agreements in all directions are needed. Sales professionals make promises that they need to keep...in all directions. They need to expect others to honor these agreements as well...including the external customer.

Customers expect to give and to get. When a sales professional understands and leverages these relationships, successful sales campaigns abound.

In Conclusion

Good selling is not only a science, but an art as well. The science of good selling skills and practices cannot get the job done alone. There is an art to how all of these essentials come together...at just the right time...at just the right place...to fully satisfy everyone.

"The will to win means nothing

Today's times are different. There is not one decision-maker. There are many and the 21st century company is complex. Your external customer and your internal customer both have complex company infrastructures to manage.

without the will to prepare."
-Juma Ikangaa
Tanzanian marathon runner

The sales professional is the link between and among all of these constituents. We called then stakeholders earlier. The key thought here is to consider your constituents as stakeholders. Why should each support your sales campaign? What are the benefits? Relationships are built on trust. If you can build trust with your constituents, they will know that you are offering them something of value in return for their expert help.

You, as a sales professional, are the great connector. When you implement a sales culture effectively, everyone in your trusted circle of stakeholders knows why to help and what element of help is meaningful. Each offers support and expert help as needed so that you can sustain your sales campaigns to successful ends, sustain your company through these successes, and add an element of sustainability to all in the process.

This is a great sales culture.....

Good selling!

Todd Cohen, President and CEO of SalesLeader, LLC, is a proven high-performance sales leader who has delivered significant revenue for leading equipment, education, e-learning, and information companies, including Xerox, Gartner Group, Pensare, Thomson, and LexisNexis. His sales methods and approach to team building have been utilized by some of the largest corporations in America.

Having founded SalesLeader, LLC, in 2007, Todd has been helping individuals and their organizations to develop unique sales cultures through sales and culture assessment tools, coaching, consulting, training products, and motivational presentations. His reputation as a sales culture communicator and creator is strongly established. For more information, visit www.toddcohen.com. Todd may be reached via e-mail at todd@toddcohen.com.