

The case for sales force transformation

 By [Peter Gilbert](#)

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It is becoming increasingly difficult for companies to differentiate themselves by **what** they sell. If they are unwilling to differentiate themselves by **how they sell**, then they will, by default, end up differentiating themselves by **how much** they sell it for.

The current sales model is broken. It simply doesn't work anymore. So while existing momentum will keep selling from an overnight demise, make no mistake about it - we are at the dawn of a new era of selling that will put an end to the need for salespeople as we have always known them.

As the old business model for selling becomes permanently obsolete and the "salesman" fades into the sunset a new business model is emerging. As author Neil Rackham says:

“Irresistible newforces are reshaping the world of selling. Sales functions everywhere are in the early stages of radical and profound comparable to those that began in manufacturing 20 years ago... But one change outweighs all the others. The meaning of selling itself is shifting. The very purpose of sales is being rapidly redefined.” ”

Simply throwing legacy type sales training at the problem is an exercise in futility and a seriously poor investment.

Our research has clearly shown that organisations that are succeeding in today's harsh sales arena have certain characteristics in common.

- **The executive team needs to be clear about what it wants its sales organisation to achieve and how they want to achieve it**, so the day-to-day decisions by the organisation are in agreement and align with the desired sales approach. (i.e. a clearly defined Go-To-Market strategy)
- **The executive team has to embrace the significance of having a supportive organisation and infrastructure and is willing to make changes** to processes in all functional groups to support the sales approach. They have cross-functional involvement in the revenue process.
- **The management team is viewed as the lynchpin in implementing the desired revenue activities**. They invest in management with training and coaching, and sometimes modify their responsibilities to adequately support the right behaviours from their teams. They define the desired sales process to give salespeople a proven framework to work with; enabling them to modify it to the sales situation as appropriate, yet ensuring minimum expectations are still met.

- **The sales force needs new tools and methods that provide them with insights, skills and assistance in executing their sales activities.** Both training and coaching of these tools, and the underlying methodologies, can provide reinforcement and personalisation for the salesforce.
- **Management understand that a formalised and structured change process is required to effect lasting change.** Sales organisations can be very difficult to change and training alone does not deliver the desired results.

Serious questions

If these objectives are to be achieved, then that raises some very serious questions.

- If **how** you sell is the ultimate differentiator, then why would you train your sales people in the same “off the shelf” **legacy sales training programme** that your competitor has also purchased? Why sacrifice the ability to differentiate yourself from your competition by doing the same old “tired” training that has been around for the; last 20 - 30 years and does not take advantage of the unique strengths of your company? Training is an opportunity to train your people to do something your competitor has not yet thought of or has not yet executed.
- Why would you train sales people before senior management have decided and agreed upon an approach to market that will create your organisation's differentiation and a unique buying experience for targeted customers?
- Why would you continue to hire new salespeople without having a defined company-specific selection process and sales process that sets minimum expectations, provides suggested process steps, and identifies desired sales behaviours (or competencies) to be exhibited with targeted customers?
- What percent of your sales team hit or exceed minimum quotas? What kind of tenure do your best revenue producers have with your firm? You can have heroic revenue wins by individual superstar efforts, but to sustain those wins and broaden the number of real revenue producers, you need an organisation that actively supports your defined revenue activities. If it is too hard to do their job, the best salespeople will eventually move elsewhere. How many of your best sales people have moved on? At what cost to your company?

Conclusion

Companies need a structured and organised change process to transform their sales organisation into an entity that is respected, even admired, by their customers, and can deliver the required business solutions, revenues and profits. The margin erosion that is so evident in many markets makes a compelling case for transforming your sales organisation and, in all probability, your business model.

ABOUT PETER GILBERT

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