

Our Conclusion

Sales is not only a manageable part of the business, it has to be managed, and it can be managed, very much like any other function of the business. The key lies largely within the attitude and mindset of senior management, and within strong basic strategy and clarity in the operations of the business and its sales function.

Call Caxton Growth:

1-877-442-7011
bestchoice@caxtongrowth.com

Taking Control Of Sales

Nine Tips For Overseeing Sales Without A Sales Background

Executives spend a lifetime learning to become managers. They take different paths: finance and accounting, operations, sales, marketing, legal, HR, or systems. The best managers advance, and at some point, become responsible for managing ever larger portions of the enterprise. In most cases, growing managers easily adapt. They are able to confidently apply what they know, and what they've learned, to manage well new areas that may be somewhat outside their base of experience.

With one too frequent exception. The sales function.

For many executives not reared in the sales discipline, or in a sales culture, sales can seem a scary and not easily managed part of the business. Sales people seem "different" - not easy to understand, not easy to manage. They are aggressive; they may even seem at times manipulative. They seem to be always stalking the deal, spinning a tale, and almost crossing the line through shades of grey. They spend money and they cut deals. They take the customer's side, seldom the company's. They're never in the office; they may never be at work. They all talk a good game; but only a few of them ever seem to really deliver.

And the sales process itself seems unlike any other process in the business. It's not clear what activities and steps lead to what outcomes. It's not clear what our time or result expectations should be. It's not always clear who is or should be accountable. And when it seems to be working, it seems to be driven by personality and style as much as anything else.

But sales as a function is manageable, and it must be managed. Here are *Nine Tips for Overseeing Sales Without a Sales Background*.

1. Begin With Your Own Attitude And Biases.

If you're feeling intimidated in managing the sales process and the sales team, don't. Sales people are mostly normal and fun people committed to doing great things for the business. They are as interested as you are in seeing sales results, and they appreciate every contribution you can make in helping them achieve those results.

Similarly, if you're feeling superior to the sales team, don't. Your sales team knows your customers best - they're your link to important buyers. They're smart, capable people. They're often talented at picking up intuitive signals: biases, perceptions, hopes, and fears. If you want them to be on your side, they're going to need to feel that you also are on theirs. If you're not, the best will know.

Part of preserving your attitude will rest in recognizing that at least some of the time, salespeople will behave like, well, "salespeople." Some in your organization will observe it, and react negatively. They're too slick, or too insensitive to internal issues, or too manipulative, or too Expect conflict from time to time, and help the organization come to terms with it for everyone's good.

2. Calibrate Your Mindset To The Customer.

Your sales team lives everyday with your customers. They know your customers, and they know how your customers feel about you. That's a part of what makes them so valuable. They'll tend to think and behave from that context - thinking first about what will serve and motivate the customer.



As an executive, your focus is somewhat more diverse. You're thinking about how employees are feeling, how owners are reacting, how various other stakeholders are involved. While all of those constituencies matter, the one that must matter most is the customer. If you're thinking about the customer first, you'll be not only serving the business well strategically, you and the sales team will be perfectly aligned.

3. Do Your Part To Provide The Rich Business Strategy From Which Sales Can Rise Or Fall.

Customers buy because they perceive your organization offers them some value that is, all things considered, better from you than they can get in any other way. A part of that customer perception, certainly, is the message that customers hear from your salespeople.

But a bigger part of that perception - certainly with business-to-business customers - rests in the strategy of your company. Who are the customers you serve best? What value do you offer them that is to them truly superior versus anyone else? How do you deliver that value sustainably and profitably well? How do you make sure that those best customers know and understand?

All of that is at the root of your business strategy. It's your responsibility to outline the focus, the targets, and the delivery and communications strategy. Only then can the sales team predictably well do their part in talking about it, and closing deals.

4. Choose Your Core Sales Team Carefully.

Choosing the best sales people - the horses who will pull your sales wagon - is a complex and dicey proposition. In many parts of the business, you can look at who's successful today, and go find more people just like them.



But sales is remarkably more complex. Profiling a high potential sales person is akin to profiling a high potential golfer. It's tough to do. The best come in all sizes, all shapes, and all personalities. Background and style for the best differs widely.

In part, that's because there are so many attributes that can hold back an otherwise high potential sales person. It's easy to see what traits the salesperson has that could make him or her an excellent performer. But it's nearly impossible to see what traits the salesperson has that will likely hinder performance. Issues like self-limiting beliefs and self esteem come into play here.

There are good sales screening tools and other aids available in the marketplace. While they are only tools, they can make a difference and they should be leveraged.

Take a look anew at your sales team, and consciously make a new choice about who is, and who is not, on the team. Recommit with your full energy to the team you choose. Release the remainder. Select new people with a similarly vigorous evaluation. Then train, support, and mentor your team the best way you can.

5. Consciously Frame The Sales Process And The Selling Cycle For Your Business.

Gaining new business is a process like any other process of the enterprise. There are certain standards, policies, and procedures that you have established. There are goals, objectives, and measures. Accountability and roles have been assigned. You are monitoring and reevaluating the sales process and its results continually.

More, you can frame the sales cycle. You know who the buyer, the gatekeepers, and the influencers are. You know what the key steps to a sale



include. You know roughly how long each step should take. You know what the normal issues and objections are at each step. You know what a successful sale looks like when done at its best.

If you don't know these things, figure them out. Get outside help if you need it. The sales process is a place for you to streamline and refine. You might find, for example, that proposals are going out too early and hence too frequently - wasting time, distracting focus, and sapping hope. You might find instances where two calls are being used where one should suffice. Here, the analytics and understanding of business improvement that you have applied elsewhere in the organization also apply.

Like in any other part of the business, time spent better defining and streamlining the work of the sales team is worth a fortune in helping your sales team avoid mistaking motion for action.

6. Once You've Done Your Job, Now Insist That Your Sales People Do Theirs.

You've calibrated your own attitude, and your own mindset. You recognize the tough job of the sales team, and you're there for them. You've chosen good people, and you're giving them the support they need to succeed. You've evaluated the business strategy - you believe its real, its valuable, and it is attainable.

In essence, you've structured the "game." Like in a game of chess, you've laid out the definition of winning, and how game play will be evaluated. You've defined roles and boundaries, and how various roles can make their moves in the game. Now the game can be played in myriad ways - all valid. But as executive overseer, you can observe play, discern unfolding play strategies, and provide insight and ideas for how play might be enhanced.



Yet playing the game is the role of the sales team, and you must leave accountability for winning play squarely and solely in its court.

7. Around Deal Opportunities, Ask Four Basic Questions That Will Help Both You And Your Salespeople Sell Better.

When you discuss opportunities with your team, the objective is two fold. One, you want to understand, and you want the salesperson to understand, what the real issues, obstacles, and probabilities are with regard to the deal at hand. Second, you want to contribute insight to the selling process - to give the sales team ideas about other activities that might help better firm the deal.

Here are four questions that help drive the conversation to the central issues:

- Can we add value to the potential customer and to the situation at hand?
 - How involved and proactive is the customer in helping to discover and strengthen our solution? How clear and urgent are the business issues? What is the scope of impact our solution will have on the business? How measurable is our value?
- Should we pursue this opportunity?
 - How stable is the business, and how is it trending? How ideally matched is the geography to our resources? In what time frame is the prospect expecting delivery and results? Is it reasonable and doable? How available is the funding? How capable is the customer? How profitable is the opportunity relative to the risk? What is the future value of the pursuit to us if we win?
- Can we compete to win versus the prospect's competing alternatives?



- How strong is our offering or solution compared to competing alternatives in the marketplace? How rich is our history and political alignment? How culturally aligned is our organization with the prospect's?
- Are we positioned to win if we choose to pursue?
 - Do we have a pursuit sponsor - an inside salesman - in the pursuit opportunity? How strong is he or she? How entrenched are we in the power base - do we even know what the power base is? How much influence do we have, in the decision making process - especially relative to our competitors? How credible and dispensable are we in the eyes of the key executive sponsor? How strong and certain is our momentum in the pursuit?

8. Don't Try To Carry The Load Yourself.

An all too common reaction for executives with selling backgrounds, especially when they are faced with selling deficits, is to strap the load onto their own backs and try to drive the sales results themselves.

See Tip #6: Once you've done your job, now insist that the sales team does theirs.

While carrying the load may solve some issues for you in the short-term, it will do nothing but harm you for the longer term. And there may be bigger issues that need your attention in order for anyone, including you, to succeed. That's where your focus needs to be.

9. Continuously Monitor, Measure, And Re-evaluate What You Are Doing.

Gaining new business is as much "art" as it is "science." But it is both. What has worked for you before, might not work for you now. Perhaps the market has changed. Maybe customers have changed, or competitors are



behaving differently. Maybe new technologies offer new options that have rendered your competitive edge frayed.

But your activities in the selling arena have very clear measurement potential. They either generate sales, or they don't. And if they don't, you need to figure out why - fast. Look at what your organization is doing consistently. Monitor your own attitude, mindset, and biases. Measure and evaluate your customer's responses. Reevaluate how your own company operates within the market, and how well. Try new things, see how they work. Learn from what doesn't work; build on and leverage what does.

Use tools to help ease the administrative burden. Every company should have a clear picture of its pipeline - what opportunities are where in the selling cycle, and what are the next steps? Many companies benefit from technologies like sales force automation and CRM - both are worthy of consideration.

