

10 Ways to increase effectiveness of your sales organization

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In the fluid times in which the pharmaceutical industry in India finds itself, the thought uppermost in a majority of the Indian sector companies, whether in product, equipment or services, regardless of size, is – whither post January 2005? Having assisted several small to medium sized businesses to reorient their business and substantially improve their revenues and profits, experience tells me that along with framing their business strategy post 2005, the critical factor they should be focusing on should be to improve their business effectiveness. Research has proved that focus on this critical factor can result in sales growth by as much as 20% - a finding borne out by personal experience.

It is a common practice in most sales organisations, whether one with 10,000 employees or with just 10, the sales people get the rap for the organisations misfortunes. But before blaming the poor souls, it would be worthwhile if the decision makers within the organisation did some introspection to check on how effective their business processes are. Here is a do-it-yourself 10-point health check-up that management consultants undertake, and the order in which they conduct the business audit, to address organisational issues. Don't blame your sales people until you have checked the list!

The 10-point health check-up

1. Is the vision unified?

Most businesses do not know which way they are headed. The vision statement can help chart the future course of the company. What is it that you would like to do different from your competitors? What is it that you do/can do/will do that is faster, cheaper, with higher quality? Be specific not vague. For instance one of my clients who is into the analytical instruments business has a vision statement, which says that they would like to be 'technologists – not traders', a clear unifying statement of the organisations ethics and purpose!

2. In larger organisations only - is the management supportive?

An unsupportive, inflexible management layer can be the biggest obstruction to change and therefore successful selling. Many middle and senior managers usually lose touch with their customers and work on old paradigms. How much 'in touch' are your managers with their customers? Do they know the names of the top 10 customers of the company?

3. Does the sales compensation plan point the sales people in the right direction?

Does your compensation plan reflect the organisations tactical plan? Is it in synch with your sales budget? Is there a right blend of salary and incentive?

4. Have the salespeople got basic sales skills?

This is particularly true in smaller companies (not that the larger ones are any better!), where little thought or time is given to the most important business driver – a well-trained sales force. Are you equipping your sales people with only product knowledge (the confidence-giver) or also with the equally important knowledge of effective selling techniques (the edge-giver)?

5. What about the brand?

Do all the ways you interact with clients - the people, the telephone, the correspondence and the website, reflect the fundamental beliefs of your organisation?

6. Are you identifying enough of the right prospects?

Defining the organisations core/hot/right customers and the sales force plans for their meeting and follow up are THE MOST important business challenge facing organisations. How robust and updated is your customer database, does it exist at all?

7. Do suspects take a long time to turn into prospects?

Work out a time band for prospect development. For instance in the analytical equipment company mentioned earlier, the prospect-to-order time frame was measured in years. This paradigm made everyone within the organisation move things forward at an unhurried pace.

8. Do you fail to get on the short list?

Go back to points 6 and 7. Was this an ideal potential client? Should you have kept progressing the relationship? If the answer is, "No", look for better suspects. If the answer is, "Yes", revisit the branding.

9. Do you get on the short list but not get selected?

Congratulations, your product, proposal and price are great. However, at this stage, buyers do a turn around and your proposition does not "feel" right and this is personal. Offer your sales and management individual coaching so they can explore their approach and improve their congruence. They will get "luckier".

10. When you need to grow, select new recruits carefully

Look beyond claimed track records and carefully select and support your new recruits. Choose the individuals who can represent the ethos of your organisation and your business will continue to grow (and prosper).

Study the above questions carefully, see how they apply to your organisation and initiate the necessary action – do not forget to follow up, and you should have an organisation strong enough to meet any business challenge!