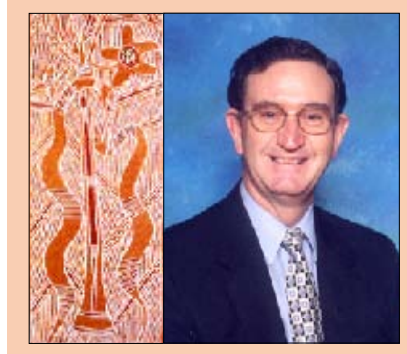




Improving productivity through better sales and sales management: Part 1

Reflecting on the productivity and competitiveness of world-class organizations, often neglected and seldom reported on in productivity terms is the sales and sales management process. As the world becomes more globally competitive and borderless, one of the constants is the need to market and sell products and services. When we consider this, our thoughts usually jump to traditional sales-type organizations, those with the large, visible advertising budgets, brand names, and instant recognition.

Some time ago a training video was used to focus on the sales process which was entitled “Who Killed the Sale?” The various situations retraced the steps through the entire sales process from the disappointing “loss analysis meeting” back to an original enquiry about a product. Concurrently, the training situation showed a competitor that had won the business and how its sales process had been superior from the beginning. Some of the situations that were reported and encountered are summarized in the table in a simplistic review of a sales process in competing organizations.



Who killed the sale in the scenario in the table? Was it the incompetent sales representative, the sloppy order fulfillment department, the disinterested accounting department, or inefficient delivery company; or was it the unfriendly receptionist or personal assistant who did not communicate issues? Probably everyone had a hand in it but no one took ownership. The key person in the sales process, however, is the sales representative.

The truism that “nothing happens until someone sells something” is what drives the businesses and economies of the world, whether they are small and simple or large and complex. Some organizations do not recognize a sale until the account is paid in full, i.e., the end of the process. This requires the salesperson to keep watch on all the steps during the sales ordering and fulfillment processes to ensure that a high level of customer satisfaction is achieved.

At the end of the sales chain are customers. To what extent are they satisfied or dissatisfied? Customer satisfaction measurement tells us whether the sales process is working or needs fixing. Such measurement is an important first step in improving the process. A good sales and/or operations manager reviews the whole process, engages all involved in the process review, and institutes changes as necessary. In some cases, the attitude or culture of the organization is such that sloppy process performance is acceptable. Surely, however, such an organization could not remain in business very long, since it would not take long to discover that the amount of waste and rework


| Incident (moments of truth) | Won | Lost |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Sales prospecting | Well-planned appointment made Appointment kept on time | Random selection of potential customer not based on strategy Appointment changed at last minute Late for appointment |
| Sales call | Well dressed Polite and courteous to all Asked thoughtful, need-based questions Made direct eye contact Gained agreement & summarized points Talked about value Qualified the customer-stated requirements/ budget Asked for the order Promised realistic delivery time | Untidy appearance Discourteous to receptionist & prospect's personal assistant Gave impression of being in a hurry/disinterested Started sales presentation without ascertaining prospect's needs Did not listen to prospect Talked about price Did not ask for order but got it Overpromised on delivery time |
| Order fulfillment | Order correctly transmitted & entered Inventory situation confirmed Customer informed & reassured | Order incorrectly entered in system Inventory not checked for availability Inaccurate packing Did not inform customer of delays |
| Accounts | Invoice correctly processed Delivered on time | Invoice errors on price & delivery details Several days late Quantities incorrect |
| Follow-up | Customer called to verify satisfaction | Customer returned goods with angry note Went to competition |

involved in a sloppy sales process was eliminating profitability and alienating customers.

Most of us are occasionally the victims of poor service. As customers, we do not like being taken for granted and not being appreciated. Inevitably we turn to another supplier. Remedies for poor service and poor sales management can include improved sales training, new methods of customer relationship management, improved attitude toward internal customers, and a better focus on quality assurance during the order invoicing and delivery process. Throughout the sales process, there should be a key dependency on teamwork and an understanding of the “pass-off” from one person in the process to another (internal customers). It is not much help to an organization to hire a “top-gun” salesperson if the support processes are in such disarray that the customers are turning to the competition for satisfaction. Very soon the top gun will be working with that competition for more job satisfaction and higher remuneration.

Good salespersons are treasures in any marketing organization. Here are some tips for professional sales staff:

- 1) Remember to put the customer first as there is no substitute for excellent customer service at all times.

- 2) Be honest and fast when responding to customer queries.
- 3) Make appropriate, disciplined use of IT systems and processes to support sales.
- 4) Develop a mindset/attitude that recognizes that everyone in the business is engaged in the sales process.
- 5) Forecast sales realistically so as not to commit the company to overordering supplies and/or resource services.
- 6) Build strong customer relationships to protect and grow your market share.
- 7) Try to remain ahead of trends and be innovative.
- 8) Be prepared to do some basic, quotidian tasks such as making appointments, maintaining customer records, packing, and sending and copying information.
- 9) Become your customers’ key contact person and make yourself readily accessible. 

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