



SELL...SELL...SELL

Now, more than ever, you need to help your sales team drill for sales!

By Nancy L. Clark

As if the last few years weren't economically debilitating enough, the last few weeks have left many of us shell-shocked and financially paralyzed. Predictably, our thinking drops to the base level of Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs*--Will we survive? Will my business endure? How big is the meltdown? Will we ever recover? How long will it last? What next?

As a business leader, we cannot allow ourselves to become the deer caught in the headlights. We cannot run and hide and hope that everything will sort itself out and we cannot become frozen into inaction. Obviously, we need to fight, but we need to fight wisely.

Keeping control of your expenses and investing carefully are obvious. The greatest challenge will be to grow or at least maintain your sales during this period. With your team feeling the same economic despair, they naturally look to you for guidance. So how do you help your sales team?

There are four things you need to do—

STUDY
EDUCATE
ALIGN &
MANAGE



1. STUDY

Study your sales

I realize this step sounds obvious and it is; but I suggest a really deep dive. What are the sales trends? Products? Services? Costs? Terms? Specials? By customers? By industry or type? By regions? By sales person? What are the buying cycles? Are they changing? Other timing considerations? Etc. Cut it every possible way in order to see trends, holes, etc.

As part of this study, talk with your customers. Again obvious, but do it. Find out what they are thinking; what they need or want; and, what their relationship is with your sales person and the company. Is it easy to do business with your company? Is it easy for the sales people to get support to close deals, satisfy customer requirements? If not, take action. Identify any people or processes that are preventing or delaying sales. Given the times, you must fight to clean up whatever is causing obstacles. The extra benefit is that the whole team is more concerned and more supportive of getting "it" cleaned up. They are worried about their personal survival and may be more willing to support efforts that before might have met with considerable resistance. Just be clear and communicate what you are doing and why.

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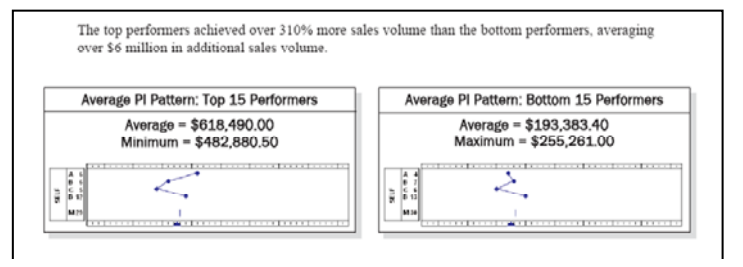
Study your sales team

Do you have the right sales people on the team? How do you know? Whom should you keep? In whom should you invest? Whom should you hire or replace? Are your sales managers effective? Do they know how to manage the sales team? Are meeting the sales goals always a struggle or are sales consistent?

If you are not satisfied with your answers to these questions, then it is time to take steps. You cannot muddle your way through the situation. If you have in the past, you may well be paying the piper for it now. The good news is that there are sales and management systems that can help you; here are steps to follow:

- A. Measure your sales team styles, aptitudes, etc. Do they have the natural strengths to sell? Are they stronger in transactional or relationship sales? Do they have the aptitude to sell more technical or consumer products/services? Etc. If you are not using available behavior tools that can accurately measure and predict behavioral styles/fit, it is time to get onboard. Stop guessing and get with it.*

Below is an example of the impact behavior can have on sales:



- B. Analyze your top sales performers What do they do? How do they sell? Where do they spend their time? What is their behavior style* and does it contribute to their sales success? What can you learn from your top performers to raise sales overall?

- C. Test the sales knowledge of your team What do they know? In what areas do they need training? Are even your top sales people leaving sales on the table? How can you lift sales by 10%, 20% or more? There are diagnostic tools* available that clearly identify where your sales team members are having difficulty in the sales process, where they need help, and where to invest your training dollars. Get out of the headlights and take action. Don't guess, use analytical tools and measures that can make your team successful and provide you a real return.

Using a sales diagnostic tool, this client was able to target where the sales team was having problems and then to address effectively:

Open	Investigate	Present	Confirm	Position	% Correct
3.2	3.3	4.1	3.2	3.5	70%

(scale: 1-5. 5: Excellent (Role Model), 1: Need Broad Skill Development)

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2. EDUCATE

Educate/train your sales team

Once you are sure you have the right sales team in place and you have diagnosed their sales knowledge, then and only then does it make sense to invest in education. As with any investment, you should expect an ROI from sales training. If you are not realizing a lift in sales of 5%-35% or more, then stop your program. Granted, the current economic environment may determine “holding even” is the best you can do, but review the past results. Did your education dollars result in higher sales previously? If not, then it probably isn’t serving you now either.

Sales Metric	Pre-CFS	Post-CFS	% Change
Year 1 Sales Growth	\$38.3M	\$44.4M	16%
Year 2 Sales Growth		\$55.3M	25%
TOTAL Growth: 2 Years	\$38.3M	\$55.3M	44%
Sales Per Day	8	11	38%

After assessing the selling capabilities, targeted education was provided that resulted in a significant increase in sales. Are you getting the same return on your investment?

Educate/train your sales managers

Don’t forget your sales managers...you don’t need the whole herd caught in the headlights. They need to learn how to use the management system and tools in order to understand each team member and how to drive performance. Armed with the right system and tools, they can become much more effective. They can evaluate with you—do you have the right people? What and where should you invest? How the sales managers will support and expand that investment? Everything and everyone needs to work together which brings us to align.

3. ALIGN

Align the reward system

Ensure that your reward system is aligned with the behaviors and results you want. For example, if you place “caps” on monthly or annual sales, then the sales behavior will withhold sales to the next month or year. If you want sales teams to work together, then a portion of the compensation must be shared. Compensation and rewards are complex, but they must encourage the sales behavior you want otherwise you will always be surprised or disappointed at the results.

Align the organization

Nothing is more frustrating and costly to the company than an organization that does not focus on sales or satisfying customers. If there are obstacles, identify what they are. Do your people have the needed resources? Are the processes streamlined and focused on customers? Is everyone working in concert or are politics and silos causing problems? You and your leadership team need to come together and fix whatever is wrong...don’t assume it will just happen on its own!

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MANAGE

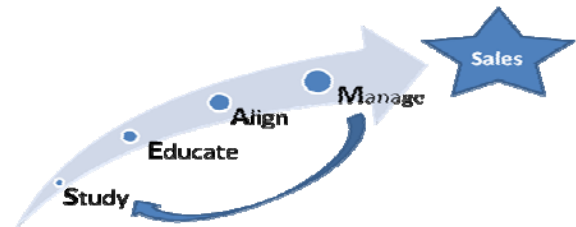
Manage the sales plan

This assumes you have a marketing and sales plan. If you don't, now is the time to create one. But don't create it in a silo. Make sure you build it from the ground up, or as the Japanese call it, catch ball...toss it back and forth and challenge all elements of the organization to make it a stretch, but make it real.

Once you have a plan, don't put it on the shelf. Make sure you are monitoring and managing its execution every day/week/month. And, always, ask first—what are we doing as a leadership team to execute this plan? How are we removing obstacles? Empowering our teams to make sales? Don't look for blame unless you are willing to look at yourself first. And, remember, you are the captain of the plan—if you don't focus on it, don't expect others to pay much attention to it either.

Manage the whole system

Make sure you keep "looping" through SEAM. Constantly monitor and study the sales trends, regularly evaluate your sales team and educate as needed. Make sure to align/re-align as appropriate. And, clearly, manage the plan as well as the whole system.



Not surprisingly, sales solve most business problems...and during this economic meltdown, it is paramount to do whatever you can to keep your sales as strong as possible. Be cautious, but be bold as well. Don't freeze and don't take flight. Don't allow the economy to sucker-punch you. Instead, leverage this time to build a stronger more aligned team. It will take courage. But now more than ever, we need leaders to step up to the economic challenges...help your customers, help your team, and help yourself.

**At Leadership Dynamics, Inc. we have researched and vetted the top available management systems and tools. Contact us if you are interested in learning about and implementing them.*

Nancy Clark is the President of Leadership Dynamics, Inc. (www.leaders-inc.com). Leadership Dynamics, Inc. is an international management consulting firm working with organizations to successfully achieve results and build positive work environments. Its approach combines assessment, education, executive coaching and business consulting. Leadership Dynamics is unique in that it transfers the knowledge and power to its clients and their teams. To contact Nancy directly, please call +1 925.831.9100 or email her at nclark@leaders-inc.com.