

Team Selling Strategies

by Monte A. Lewis

A number of trends facing sales organizations are commanding executives to rethink how they do business and how they deploy sales reps.

One major trend in maturing industries is the movement toward consolidation of buyers. These industries have increasing sales, but the sales are in fewer hands. Perhaps your company is moving toward having fewer customers, yet each customer is buying much more.

Another trend occurring in some sales environments is the move from an individual product line sale to a complete system sale. For example, instead of just selling your widgets and being one of the many widget suppliers, your organization may wish to provide a complete widget handling system. You may inventory, manage and distribute your widgets complete with a host of other services (and may even distribute your competitor's widgets) as part of a complete system for your customer.

Partnering is another current sales strategy which indicates that your company's goal is to help your customer maximize their useage of the product or service you provide. A high level of trust is required where each company may even know their respective costs. The

lines blur between customer and vendor, and the goal of the sales rep is to improve performance for the client organization.

Because of these changes, organizations are considering a team selling strategy. Team selling can be defined as when an individual usually charged with completeing the sales transaction is now responsible for coordinating the efforts of a number of individuals, all towards the common sales goal.

Another reason you may consider a team selling strategy has to do with complexity. Either the complexity of your customers' organizations, the complexity of

The sales rep in a team sales environment is the sales leader.

their products and services, or the complexity of the selling process has required some companies to develop a team selling strategy.

Because of these complexities, the team sales approach has enabled these businesses to effectively mobilize the organization to get and keep customers.

The team selling strategy requires the sales rep to perform in a non-traditional sales mode. To be successful in this new arena, the sales rep needs to do



more than present the company's offering and follow-up.

As client organizations increase in size and demand more, the sales rep often has to begin to weave through a series of new influencers and decision makers moving from committee to committee.

If your organization moves to a system sale format, the sales rep now has to coordinate a number of interested parties in both your company and the client's.

If partnering is the watchword in your industry, the sales rep now is more responsible than ever to deliver performance results for both the client and your company.

Often when the client says "partnering", we think they mean "alter your pricing strategy". Partnering does create more savvy, cost conscious buyers; but what they are really saying is "help us be more competitive

in our current market, and we will reward you with our commitment”.

Only the sales rep for your organization can make this happen, but the sales rep must be prepared to meet the challenge of the new selling environment.

In many cases a knee-jerk reaction of sales executives is to improve the sales rep’s negotiating skills. But the sales rep is responsible for assembling the appropriate personnel to gain access to, present, deliver and maintain your company’s offering in a profitable fashion.

While the sales rep is not officially a manager, much of the rep’s work is managing the work of others. In fact because the sales rep is not the team members’ direct boss, much of the skills are about influence. That is why we often dub the sales rep in a team sales environment the sales leader.

Team Selling Definition

A group of individuals working towards a common sales goal.

Often team individuals come from a variety of disciplines including sales, engineering, telemarketing, distribution, customer service, credit, etc.

Here are some examples of traditional team selling:

- A national account manager

coordinates the efforts of a number of salespeople around the country, all servicing the same large account in their different regions.

- A sales executive coordinates the efforts of a variety of people from inside his company to mirror the same functions in the customer’s company.

- The sales rep deploys members of his marketing, engineering and customer service departments to successfully land a large account.

Outcomes of a Team Selling Strategy

- Achieve higher levels of customer satisfaction
- More true consultative selling
- Better time management
- Focus more on sales effort; leave support functions to other team members
- Higher penetration of accounts
- Better positioning with clients from the very first contact

Pitfalls of Team Selling

- Non-sales people may create confusion with the customer
- Multiple agendas from various departments
- Conflicting corporate objectives
- Time intensive
- Attitudes of salespeople

Issues to Consider Before Getting Involved with Team Selling

- Compensation issues
- Personnel motivation issues
- Training strategies
- Team environment vs. team selling
- Informal team selling vs. formal team selling

Questions to Consider Before Proceeding with the Team Selling Approach

- Are your products and services sufficiently complex?
- Do you customize your products and services for major customers?
- Are there always multiple decision makers in on every sale?
- Is there a movement towards partnering in your industry?
- Is your customer base shrinking towards a few large accounts?
- Have you lost business to competitors with a better coordinated sales effort?
- Would a successful major sale cover the costs of a team approach?

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