

Sales Sustainability™ – “Change Management in Sales” (CMS)

>> Managing sales activities and resources in a dynamic business involves episodes of change. A well-defined change management process facilitates sales force alignment, communicates the business situation, and allows the sales force to adapt rapidly. We produce results despite the changes.

Sales Managers often ask themselves why their sales force cannot respond to changes in customer requirements or market conditions. Usually we express this in the form of a question to ourselves and other managers. “Why didn’t they do that or why didn’t they know that?” As a sales manager how many times have you heard these statements? *Our inability to adapt to changing conditions often manifests itself as explanations, objections, excuses and claims.*

Usually we recognize change when sales objectives were not met or customers didn’t respond the way we expected. By then it is often too late because we now have the outcome as opposed to the initial signals of a changing market. We react to the outcome rather than managing changing conditions with our sales people. Teams often spend valuable time evaluating responses, excuses, claims, and opinions. Seldom do we see this as our inability to recognize, evaluate and adapt to the initial signals of change. *Failure to have a defined method for recognizing signals of pending changes and adapting to new conditions is a common issue in sales.*

Ultimately our ability to adapt to changing market conditions, customer requirements, new products, and competitive threats is a key factor in sales performance. Sales managers must differentiate poor performance from poor implementation. Often we hear explanations of why an account couldn’t be closed, why customers bought from competitors, or why products are performing poorly. Our efforts usually focus on determining the validity of the claims made by sales people. *However, we should be focused on improving the sales process because the outcome is the result of our process rather than poor sales performance.*

Sales managers often spend time and resources gathering information and analyzing results rather than enhancing our ability to identify changing customer requirements. Why? It is our inability to develop, communicate, and execute a good change management model. We know conditions change but our

tendency is to resist rather than embrace change. Until we accept and actively embrace a process for identifying changing conditions, we cannot take advantage of the benefits change provides our sales force. *The ability to predict changes in customer requirements and take advantage of them is a critical element in sales sustainability.*

We need to establish a model which clearly identifies the signals of change, implements a process, and directs the actions required by our sales force. This produces proactive sales force management. One model for sales change management is the DIRECT model. This model outlines the phases of changing customer requirements, market conditions, and buying behavior. The phases in the DIRECT model include disruption, imaging, resistance, energy, action, change and finally temporary stability. *This model allows sales to recognize the initial behavior of customers and competitors and thus become effective in adapting to change.*

The initial phase of change management involves disruption (D). In this phase new data, actions or information challenges our expectations of the customer and the marketplace. *We see the effects of disruption and now clearly recognize that the forces of change are in motion.*

Disruptions may involve customers, buying behaviors, products, suppliers, or prices. We need to recognize early when a disruption has taken place because the old status quo no longer exists. If we do not recognize the disruption our sales force cannot be managed effectively. Thus our objective should always be the early identification of a disruption and guiding our sales people toward a positive outcome. *Take your sales people through the entire change management process to achieve a positive outcome.*

The Imaging (I) phase identifies possible benefits for us from the disruption. Imaging represents the second phase of change. Here we begin developing a new vision. We identify the new requirements and how can we produce alternatives. Can we change our process, products, customers, sales people, prices, or delivery to meet the new conditions? What are the possible alternative scenarios for this customer in our sales plan? Imaging is powerful because it produces alternatives and challenges the way we view the present situation. *Imaging allows us to reposition our efforts to meet the new requirements and re-establish relationships.*

Customers, suppliers, market conditions, and sales people will exhibit both resistance and energy. Resistance and Energy are two key elements in sales change management. Resistance is a form of negative energy. It occurs because not



everyone has the same vision of the desired outcome. For example, our customers may want a lower price but suppliers may object to lowering their costs, or we may desire to provide a substitute product for the lower price and our customers object to our proposal. *The key to change management in sales is in directing energy and overcoming resistance by transforming the resistance into a positive solution for the customer.*

Actions (A) represent our efforts to adapt to the disruption. All participants are critical of our actions. Customers, suppliers, competitors and sales people view our actions against their image of the desired outcome. The net result of our actions produces the Change (C). Change can be positive or negative to our business and customer relationships. It depends entirely upon our response to the initial disruption. Change brings Temporary (T) stability which appears to show no further disruptions. *But in all cases stability is just the period in between the next disruptions guaranteed to produce change in your sales environment.*

Where does this all lead? The answer it leads to leads to preparing your business and your sales people for a changing marketplace. This is done by positioning your resources to take advantage and predict change rather than reacting to it. Using the DIRECT model to identify and manage salespeople through changes by providing them with a process. Successfully dealing with change requires us to DIRECT our organization through the process and communicate each phase of change management. It's interesting that how we get there requires us to initially focus less on one element of sales, the actions (A) of our organization. *However most sales managers focus exclusively on the actions (A) of their sales people to address the effects change.*

By focusing our efforts to DIRECT our people through the process, we build the capability to identify and adapt to change within our organization. This capability is essential to transitioning a sales force to a proactive organization. As sales managers, this capability also gives our organization a new tool to identify opportunities, and achieve sales and marketing objectives well beyond our original expectations. *Begin using the DIRECT model to DIRECT your sales force to achieve objectives, identify opportunities, and produce exceptional results despite the inevitable changes that will occur in a dynamic marketplace.*