

Sales Leadership in Today's Economy

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A major trend occurring in companies today is the involvement of CEOs and company executives in sales and customer retention. They're finally realizing that the "right" sales team is key to corporate success.

Today's C-level executives are realizing that as companies change how they buy, and markets become more competitive, the need to have the "right" sales organization that can sell, develop, and retain customers is critical for business success. This trend is based on a real issue; if a company has a unique product, service or market that requires differentiation, the role of sales is often unique or specific to that company.

The Changing Marketplace for Sales

In the 1980s, sales was based solely on relationship selling. Competition was minimal. In the 1990s, companies focused on price and bundled services, and the Internet was evolving. In 2000, technology opened the marketplace to global competition. Requirements for on-line access, websites, CRM technology, e-campaigns and web technology exploded. Today, customers require easy access, advanced technology, lowest prices, best services AND a trusted, expert relationship. And, they will go elsewhere for an offer that may be only slightly better than yours if the relationship is not strong. This makes for a highly complex and competitive selling environment.

This is why today's CEOs are collaborating with sales leadership to assure the sales organization they deploy to their customers FITS. The right sales team must fit the role, customer, company and sales process to be successful. Now more than ever, leadership needs sales and profits to grow, while assuring customer retention and saturation. The sales team is the key to making this a reality in today's market.

No longer can a company rationalize letting a sales professional "try" a job. Success is a must. A top-performing sales organization requires targeted, effective sales force selection, strong sales leadership, and training and development that fits the sales process and drives accountability for performance.

Leading Top Performers

To build a sales force that helps grow the company, executive leadership knows it's easier to develop and improve the performance of the current team versus losing strong performers. GDI research proves that top performers will have unique skills, attributes, motivation and experience that FIT your company, culture and customer. By assessing the existing team's strengths, skills, and motivation and gaining their insights and recommendations, sales leadership can effectively define areas for improvement and support. Eliminate obstacles by arming the sales force with targeted training, knowledge and coaching so they can adapt and improve.

Successful top performers require strong leadership, want to be respected, insist on knowledge-based information that validates performance goals and want to be held accountable and challenged to succeed. Equally important, they seek compensation and rewards that FIT the role requirements and expectations.

Sales & Customer Retention

As the marketplace consolidates, a company's competitive advantage lies in its sales force. Loyal customers expect the sales force to truly understand their business, make recommendations and offer solution-based services, not just take orders. Company leadership is focusing on selection and retention of the right sales team to meet the challenge and is taking an active role in helping their sales force with strategies to gather customer intelligence and knowledge of specific needs and expectations.

Identifying how customers want to buy and be supported by the company and the sales force will help the sales force adapt and optimize the customer relationship for retention and sales growth.

The CEO Dilemma... a Recommendation

If you lead a company where your customer is truly the key to your success, then selecting, developing and retaining a sales team that FITS is critical, and will become more of an issue as today's economy, competition and marketplace change. To select and develop the right team, leadership must first define the role of Top Performance in Sales. At GDI, we call this The GDI Sales Team Benchmark, and then establish a process and a model to attract, interview and select new sales professionals as well as tune-up and train your existing sales force for top performance.

The reality is sales is more complex, sales leadership is more difficult and having the right team and leadership is critical to your business success as a small or large company.

Ty Swain is CEO of Growth Dynamics, which provides world-class sales solutions for the selection, performance and retention of top performers in today's leading organizations.

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