

So you want to have a value added sales force!

by Tom Reilly

Most companies I work with want to develop a value added sales culture because it sounds good. And who wouldn't want to compete on value added versus price? To create a value added sales culture there are a number of questions in five distinct areas that you must ask yourself.

Introspection

This is looking inward, soul-searching. This is where you examine your motives for pursuing the value added sales culture. This internal analysis of your culture and thought process can save you a lot of headaches down the road by asking important questions about your company's commitment to value added. The value added business approach is not for every company. Some companies are not set up for it. Others lack the commitment. When you announce your intent to compete this way and you lack the resources or infrastructure to deliver, it can be de-motivating to the sales force and confusing to customers. On the other hand, when you understand your motives more thoroughly, it will embolden your leadership efforts. These questions will help you conduct this internal analysis:

- Why do you want to adopt the value added approach?
- Is your desire more about charging more for your goods and services or creating greater value for your customers or both?
- Will your culture support a value added sales effort?
- Do you have the infrastructure in place to support a value added selling approach?
- Is value added a cliché or the real thing in your company?

- Do you currently enjoy this image in the customers' minds? Are you sure? Are you sure you're sure?
- Are your resources aligned around the value added approach to business?
- Does everyone in your company embrace this mission?

One of the greatest concerns salespeople have at the end of our Value-Added Selling seminars is whether or not their companies can deliver the value added that the sales force is encouraged to promise. The value added philosophy must be embraced culturally, not just departmentally.

Clarity of Mission

Your mission is the core reason why you do what you do. It's your view of where your company is headed, based on your vision and your dreams for the future. It's your company's special purpose. It's the marching orders that you give your troops. Some of the greatest failures that individuals and teams experience come from a lack of mission clarity, where people are unsure of what's expected from them, and mission creep, where things fall apart because the mission becomes fuzzy as it unfolds. Clarity brings commitment. These questions will help you clarify your mission so that you energize your salespeople and inspire them with your leadership.

- What is your company's mission?
- How well do you communicate this to your sales force?
- What are your objectives? (This is based on your immediate and specific goals that will serve as benchmarks for your accomplishing your mission.)
- What is your strategy? (This is your overall plan.)

- What are your tactics? (These are the day-to-day activities that your sales force must engage in to execute your strategy.)

Focusing

Focusing is positive tunnel vision. It is two things: concentrating your energy with laser-like intensity in those areas that will give you the return you're looking for and remaining locked-in on those targets. It means knowing what business to pursue and what business *not* to pursue.

Over half the reasons that salespeople come to my seminars is that they are chasing the wrong business—business where they are not competitive. This wasted effort distracts and derails them from pursuing more viable opportunities. It's management's responsibility to provide the focus for their sales force. This will give you the greatest probability for success and a greater return on your investment. It's investing your sales force's efforts as you would invest your budget dollars. You don't waste money pursuing business you don't want; why would you invest sales force time on this business?

- Do you want every order or every opportunity?
- What type of business do you want your folks to pursue?
- What type of business do you want them to avoid?
- How much time do you want your sales force pursuing new business versus securing and growing existing business?
- How do you want the sales force to allocate their sales time with respect to the products they sell?

Planning and Preparation

Planning is the bridge between your dreams and reality. It's creating the future in the present. It's anticipating the outcome of your efforts and committing them to paper.

As the adage goes, “No one plans to fail, but many fail to plan.” There is a formula I like to use in my own business, $P + P = 2P$: Planning and preparation equals twice the performance. Planning is a confidence builder, and greater confidence leads to greater competence.

- How do you prepare your folks to sell value added?
- Do your salespeople understand your value added?
- Do they believe in your value added?
- How effectively do they communicate your value added to your customers?
- Have you provided sufficient training for your salespeople?
- What collateral support do your folks have?
- Do they understand the definable and defensible differences between your company and the competition?
- Will your salespeople hold the line on price objections?

Coaching

Coaching is the fundamental sales management activity. Coaches provide their team members with directions, guidance and feedback. They encourage performance and provide feedback. And great coaches coach from the field, not the locker room.

Imagine operating in an environment where you receive no direction or guidance or feedback on your performance. Imagine an environment where the only feedback you receive is numerical. These are a few of the reasons salespeople offer for their lack of performing to standards. Ask these questions about your coaching efforts:

- How much joint call work do you do with your folks?

- How are your ongoing communications with your folks about their value added sales efforts?
- Do you have frequent support meetings to discuss their sales strategies?
- Do you provide qualitative as well as quantitative feedback?

Your salespeople will look to you for guidance, inspiration, and leadership. They will follow your example. As sales manager, you must work as hard at creating the value added sales culture as you expect your salespeople to work at Value-Added Selling.

*Tom Reilly is a professional speaker and author of twelve books. This article is based on his book, **Crush Price Objections**. His pioneering book, **Value-Added Selling**, has been rewritten and published by McGraw-Hill. This book has shaped professional selling globally. You may contact Tom at 636-537-3360 or visit his website: www.TomReillyTraining.com*