



Sales and Service: Creating the Winning Combination

Editor's Note: This is part one of a three part series on sales and service.

This series of articles examines the sales/service connection. Whether you're a VAR, an OEM or a dealer, selling and servicing the customer have to be paramount concerns. Let's face it, the absence of either spells death to your enterprise. This series will provide practical tools that you can use to forge stronger ties between sales and service departments, to create an organizational culture that fosters those strong ties and to develop communication mechanisms that support collaboration.

We'll begin by focusing on leadership responsibilities in creating the sales and service link. There are two underlying assumptions for leadership. The first is that you, as a leader, want to positively impact the bottomline and view this collaboration as a tool for doing such. Plainly put, you must understand that sales impact revenues and service, and both technical service and customer service impact customer loyalty, which impacts market share. The second assumption is that you understand organizational alignment. Alignment is simple: policies, procedures and practices must both match and support the values espoused. So, if you spout the rhetoric of cus-

tommer satisfaction, every policy, procedure and practice will support smooth customer relations, customer retention and customer loyalty if your organization is properly aligned.

Now that the assumptions have been put forth, let's begin exploring senior management's role in creating the sales/service link. There are three critical behaviors that you, as a manager, must master. One, you have to lead by example. Model the collaboration you seek. Sec-

ond, commit to long-term organizational development. That is the only way to dramatically alter the organizational culture. Third, lighten up. Yep, lighten up. None of this is brain surgery. There are bound to be mistakes and missteps along the way, so don't forget your sense of humor.

Making the Link

While there are many different ways to bring the sales and service departments together, the strategies that I'm going to

present are comprehensive in nature and involve building bridges throughout the entire organization. The first step is to create an organizational context for collaboration between departments and functions. That means you have to build the business case for cooperation throughout the organization. Bill, the owner of a chain of regional office products dealerships, created that context by using both management and staff meetings to provide more than facts and figures. He consistently provided future-focused scenarios depicting where the company could be if it worked together better. He did not load people down with lots of flowery prose and lofty theory. Instead, he pointed to actual examples drawn from the field where cooperation and collaboration would have





made a difference. He also provided practical examples from other organizations within the industry with a similar size and placement. This helped people understand that the identity of the company was changing to one that focuses on working together. Bill made another smart move. He repeatedly reinforced the underlying philosophy of the initiative: collaboration, not just between sales and service, but throughout the enterprise, is good business because it strengthens customer loyalty, which enhances marketshare.

The second step is to disturb the enterprise. By that I mean shake things up. Forcibly move people out of their comfort zones. Create a learning organization. Shuffle the deck. Do whatever you can to get people moving, thinking and behaving differently. Here are a few examples from your peers:

- Assign one day a month for the sales staff to take calls in the service department.
- Send front-line people out on sales calls.
- Send teams of sales and service people out on sales calls.
- Give every person in the entire organization sales goals.
- Provide sales training to everyone in the organization.
- Give each department, division or region the opportunity to host a monthly/quarterly meeting so that they can showcase accomplishments.
- Launch marketing campaigns in-house before they reach the public to build awareness, interest and product knowledge throughout the organization.
- Require technical staff to do on-site demos so that everyone has intimate product knowledge.

The third step is to begin cultivating the enterprise. Cultivating the enterprise requires that you weed the organization just as you would a garden. Be sure that you keep the people who add value to the organization and send the others packing. This is an important step that many man-

agers are reluctant to take. A misplaced sense of loyalty gets in the way of sound business decisions. Remember, just because a person has stayed around for many years doesn't mean that he or she has added value. Some people have simply stayed and complained, stayed and whined, stayed and stalled the progress of the organization. Some people have stayed because no one else would hire them. I know this sounds like blasphemy in an industry that is filled with so many people who boast about their longevity. I am not suggesting that we simply fire all of the old timers. Rather, managers have a responsibility to get and keep the right people, cultivate talent and then let those who don't cut it go elsewhere and find their right livelihood.

It is vital that you keep and cultivate the people who can make your vision of a collaborative organization a reality. Remember, each new hire will not be a star. When you are recruiting, be systematic and hire for the right attitude: an attitude that is team-focused, willing to learn and has some humility. If you hire teachable people who lack technical proficiency, you can help them master those skills. Use cross-functional teams for interviewing so that you reinforce the notion of collaboration. Cross-functional teams will also provide a broader range of feedback on the candidate.

Cultivating the enterprise also involves offering on-going education and training. These learning experiences should focus not only on industry issues, but also on larger business trends that may impact the industry, on technical knowledge, on sales and service. Building a cadre of well-informed people strengthens your company's position. It enables you to be confident that your people are conversant in the same language as your customers.

Part of cultivating the enterprise is creating incentives to reinforce the change. This is a noteworthy point. Incentives do not drive change, they reinforce the behaviors and objectives of the change. When

incentives are used to induce new behaviors, they become bribes and have little impact on creating lasting change. When new modus operandi are introduced as business imperatives and, after some demonstrated successes, are rewarded with a particular incentive, there is a greater likelihood of the behavior sticking. Overuse and misuse of incentives dilutes their benefit. How many organizations have those tired employee of the month programs? Eventually every employee, barring some truly egregious misconduct, will become employee of the month. That incentive has little or no value because it has become trite.

Consider creating incentives that are aligned with collaboration. For instance, one manufacturer wanted to build greater cooperation between its sales team and the people who actually build the equipment. The two departments were frequently at odds because sales made promises production couldn't keep. The production folk felt like they were constantly held to unrealistic deadlines. The result was quiet animosity that erupted from time to time.

Jane, the senior vice president, decided that the real objective was to meet both sales and production goals, both of which had been waning. And, even more noteworthy, she wanted to link their goals together. Rather than linking a monetary incentive to either department's individual performance, she linked time off awards to the performance of both departments. That got both departments talking to one another at the outset by reformulating their goals together. Each got to hear about the other's struggles and unique challenges and they made mutual commitments to mutually acceptable goals.

An organization can attempt to get people to comply with a particular change initiative by offering bonuses and cash simply for compliance. Or they can link different incentives to more meaningful, long-term objectives. Compliance is for the short-term, where the second



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approach yields long-term participation. In other words, it's not the incentive that people are shooting for, instead it's the larger objectives and interests that the incentive is reinforcing.

Summary

A leader's job in making the sales/service link begins with creating a collaborative mindset throughout the organization. Create that context with real-world examples that support your objectives. Select examples of successes and failures with interdepartmental cooperation and use both to create opportuni-

ties for learning. Once the context is established, the next task is to disturb the enterprise. Shake people up by requiring them to do different tasks, explore different areas and learn new competencies. This enables staff at all levels, in all departments, to get a real feel for what other people in the organization face on a daily basis. Sales people will understand service, service people will develop greater empathy for the front-line, managers and staff will begin building bridges of understanding. And, lastly, the job is to cultivate the organization by hiring and firing the right

people, educating everyone and using incentives to reinforce the change you seek.

As you move through the steps presented in this article, you are bound to wage inevitable turf battles. In the next segment of this series we will talk about realistic tactics for moving beyond those wars. We will also address communication tools that enhance the sales/service link. ■

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