

Process Excellence: Inject Science into the Art of Selling

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Process Excellence: Inject Science into the Art of Selling

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Standards and process permeate nearly every functional area in business, from accounting, finance and operations to IT, human resources and now, even marketing. And for good reason. Processes and standards enable management to control the controllable so they can focus attention and resources on the more difficult issues that stagnate sales and revenue and disappoint shareholders. Standard process drives predictability, consistency and efficiency, and when properly integrated across the organization, radically improves sales performance.

Despite the tremendous benefits that standards and process can deliver, sales organizations have been much slower than other disciplines to move down this path. Imagine how much better sales managers could manage if they had consistent, objective criteria to evaluate the status of opportunities and accounts in each sales rep's funnel. Or, imagine how much more efficiently account teams could collaborate on large deals if they used a common language. And how much better a CEO would sleep at night if he knew his sales force had a consistent, professional approach to interacting with customers! An improvement in these factors helps drive revenue predictability, reduces cost of sales and increases sales force productivity--all critical business objectives.

Our research clearly shows that "Winning Sales Organizations" take a much more scientific approach to selling and sales management than others. While there will always be a certain art to selling, it's an increasingly sophisticated business world, and "Winning Sales Organizations" prove that sales process excellence cre-

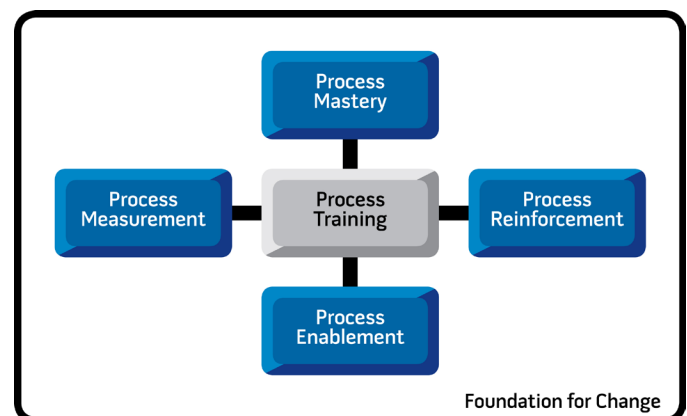
ates a significant competitive advantage. However, the transition from "art" to "science" is not easy. It requires a sound foundation, strong commitment and precise coordination for widespread cultural adoption. That's the challenge.

Foundation and Elements of Sales

Process Adoption

The following framework, which we've developed over time, won't entirely eliminate the hard work involved in successfully implementing new processes. But it's been proven to help streamline the effort. Our sales process adoption model offers strong parallels to the Six Sigma™ quality-control methodology adopted by many of the world's leading enterprises and consists of five key elements built upon an all-important foundation. With this model in mind, the change adoption process for a sales organization would have the following elements, each of which is essential for successful company-wide integration.

Sales Process Adoption



The Foundation: Executive Sponsorship, Organizational Commitment and a Clear Plan

When we say “executive sponsorship,” we don’t just mean getting sales management’s buy-in for the change initiative--although, of course, that’s critical. In the best situation, solid commitment and support must come from the entire “C-level” leadership team in order to create a successful sales culture.

Our research indicates that, when it comes to understanding what drives sales and revenue growth, there’s typically a huge disconnect between a company’s C-level executives, sales leaders and salespeople. Top executives may be out of touch with customer needs, current marketplace challenges and just how competitive their services and solutions actually are at any given moment.

At the same time, overhauling sales processes often causes a ripple effect that extends well beyond the sales organization and into finance, operations, customer service and IT. You’re making changes that may substantially alter the way your company does business.

Getting executive sponsorship for process implementation, then, requires convincing your company’s leadership that change is necessary, that your initiative is aligned with company strategy and that the entire organization stands to benefit from its successful implementation. For the CEO, the benefit might translate to “success” in hitting growth targets. For the CFO, “success” may mean better meeting financial expectations and reducing sales-cycle volatility.

Ultimately, the precise reason your company’s leadership team buys into the effort almost doesn’t matter--what’s important is that their support is genuine, complete and visible all the way to the topmost position.

We strongly recommend securing the following commitments to build a solid foundation for a major process change:

- **A respected executive sponsor**, and in the best-case scenario, one who will go beyond sponsorship to **coach, mentor and motivate** those responsible for implementing and executing the new process.
- **A vision** that’s crisp, clear and easy to communicate. It should concisely spell out where your organization is today, where you want to be, and what you need to do to reach those goals.
- **A transition team** to manage the day-to-day details of the change effort and a **coaching plan** to keep sales leadership and management on task and on message.
- **A set of milestones** that, like those used for any other project, allow you to assess your progress by asking some hard questions at key points along the way. You can figure out what’s working that should be replicated across the entire organization—and what’s not working that should be refined, revised or scrapped entirely.
- **A disciplined review process** to assess progress and to address unforeseen problems, questions and risks immediately as they arise; you can then adjust your course as needed to make sure the entire effort stays on track.

Finally, as you build your foundation and prepare your implementation team and plan, keep in mind that while it’s best to begin integrating the principles of a new process into daily life as quickly as possible, it may take awhile--perhaps years--for the change to fully take hold.

Elements of Sales Process Adoption

Element #1: Process Training

At the center of successful sales process implementation is process training. Everyone across the organization using or supporting the new or revised process must be thoroughly trained in the new sales method. The more heavily the employee uses the process, the more intensive the training. For example, we've found that sales managers and sales reps almost always require live, instructor-led training to ensure that they understand not only the thinking behind the process, but how to apply it to their jobs and how they do business. The process must be a practical exercise, not just a theoretical one. However, someone in finance might only need an overview of the sales process delivered through an e-learning module.

New employees should receive the appropriate sales process training as soon as they come aboard; the existing team should receive occasional refresher courses and the opportunity to upgrade their knowledge as needed. At the same time, it's important to realize that training alone isn't enough to guarantee effective implementation and real improvement.

Element #2: Process Mastery

Any successful implementation of a new program requires developing "process masters"--cadres of insiders who value the process, understand it completely and are committed to making it a core part of the way they do business. Six Sigma™, for example, relies on "Black Belts" who teach the process and "Green Belts" who manage it on a daily basis. Similarly, Miller Heiman has programs to "train trainers" and to "train coaches" in our core sales processes. Developing internal coaches and trainers helps drive adoption and reinforcement, fully integrates the new processes and supports the sales team in

using them correctly and for maximum benefit.

We have found the best "process masters" (sometimes called "subject-matter experts") to be highly respected sales managers. These are people that have been in the trenches and have the credibility with sales reps, who will be the recipients of their coaching. High performing and high potential sales reps should also be considered, especially if they excel in coaching and mentoring others. Key to the success of change adoption is the development of those internally who are both business and sales process experts.

For practical reasons, your choice of process masters should also consider geography, product line and management roles. In any case, the ones chosen should display enthusiasm and emotional commitment before and during implementation, and they should be able to serve as "go-to" resources after implementation is complete. You may consider systemic ways of establishing and evaluating such expertise, such as specific training and certification for process masters.

Element #3: Process Measurement

No improvement initiative can realize its full potential--without setting well-established goals and without tracking progress toward these goals in a disciplined manner. Consider how industries using Six Sigma™ take baseline measurements of defect rates and track on-going improvement. Process measurement should take place at the individual level and the organizational level. There are some very effective assessment tools which evaluate how effectively a sales person is applying the process in his daily routine. For example, our *Sales Excellence Assessment*™ requires the sales person to evaluate his perceived effectiveness on a number of dimensions of the sales process. Then, the sales manager rates that salesperson using the same criteria. The results of the assessment show

not only how well the salesperson is executing the process, but also highlights disconnects with the sales manager. This information creates a credible foundation for dialogue and coaching necessary for effective process implementation.

At the organizational level, both internal and external benchmarks should be used. We find many organizations benchmarking performance internally, tracking how well they are progressing against the plan or other historic predictors of success. However, although using external benchmarks is a relatively new concept in sales, it gives the sales organization even more valid criteria with which to gauge success. Although success can be defined in many different ways, the success factors should create line-of-sight between the objectives of the process change and the overall business objectives. The key is in the next step: using—and, as necessary, refining—those metrics to determine how well your sales team is doing as it moves toward the process and business goals.

Element #4: Process Enablement

Sales leaders say that when the word “process” comes up in their organizations, salespeople sometimes cringe because they don’t understand how the process will help them sell more and sell faster. And sales managers may worry that introducing a new process will add complexity, prolong the sales cycle and adversely affect the team’s performance.

In truth, any successful change initiative includes tools designed to streamline the process and integrate it with existing systems, removing barriers to adoption and minimizing overall disruption. In Six Sigma™, that’s accomplished by using Total Quality Management and Process Control Systems, which gather and process information in real time so problems can be

detected early on and corrected as quickly and painlessly as possible.

In sales, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems are often associated with sales process implementation. However, there have been many instances where CRM systems are very unpopular with sales people because they perceive them as data repositories that don’t streamline the process or add value to the sales effort. Fortunately tools are now available, such as Miller Heiman’s *Sales Access Manager*SM (www.salesaccessmanager.com), that bridge the sales process with the CRM system and add significant value to the sales person.

The appropriate tools—combined with the all-important milestones included in the foundation—will help salespeople recognize that the new process ultimately makes their jobs easier, not harder. It should be clear to them also that as they embrace and utilize the new systems, they will become both more efficient and more effective, and their jobs will become more rewarding as well.

Element #5: Process Reinforcement

In any business process implementation, ongoing reinforcement is a critical—and often overlooked—component for success, especially as many such initiatives may span long periods of time. Reinforcement involves adjusting your culture—not just in the sales organization, but throughout the company. Keep the key principles in front of your people at all times to make sure the change becomes and stays part of how everyone does business every day.

Promote the new process implementation throughout your organization, and, in particular, communicate its successes. Make sure you bring new sales hires up to speed on the process as quickly as possible. Pro-

vide all team members with the chance to refresh their knowledge and further their mastery through additional learning opportunities. It may mean offering training to people who support the sales process even if they're not directly involved in selling.

And, revisit the process itself regularly by returning to the milestones, adjusting the process as needed and communicating the changes throughout the organization as quickly as possible.

Bringing It All Together

While all the elements of the foundation are important, remember that the success of any initiative ultimately rests on the foundation of executive sponsorship and commitment. And keep in mind that, whatever the level of sales management, each role is equally important.

Our research tells us that when employees are trying to decide whether a change-management initiative is a good idea, they frequently look first to their bosses to see what they think. If you believe in the process you're promoting, you must demonstrate it by example. To quote Harvard Business School Professor John Kotter: "Nothing undermines change more than behavior by important individuals that is inconsistent with their words." And, we're confident that those with the commitment and belief in a process that injects science into the art of selling will become a "Winning Sales Organization" and will substantially outperform their peers.

About Miller Heiman

Miller Heiman has been a thought leader and innovator in the sales arena for almost thirty years, helping clients worldwide win high-value complex deals, protect and grow key accounts, manage talent and optimize sales strategies and operations.

With a prestigious client list that includes Fortune 500 clients, Miller Heiman helps companies in virtually every major industry to build high performance sales teams that deliver consistent sustainable results to drive revenue.

Sales Access ManagerSM

Miller Heiman sales process enablement through CRM integration.

Not getting CRM adoption? Looking for greater visibility into sales activities? Miller Heiman's suite of automated selling tools will deliver the information you need to drive consistent sales performance.

To learn more, visit: www.millerheiman.com/sam.

To find out more, visit:

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