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SUPERIOR SALES PERFORMANCE

THE PATH TO COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE AND MARKET LEADERSHIP

INTRODUCTION

Today's mandate for sales and marketing executives is clear: boost revenues and profits, cut the costs of sales, and increase customer satisfaction and retention. Things get muddled, however, when executives try to figure out how to meet those objectives in the face of increasing competition, spiraling sales costs, and ever-escalating customer demands and expectations.

Unfortunately, no single strategy guarantees superior sales performance.

Superior sales performance results from the organization-wide commitment to attracting new customers while increasing the profitability of existing customer relationships.

Note the emphasis on organization-wide commitment. AchieveGlobal believes that establishing and maintaining customer relationships is too essential to the health of an organization to be the sole province of the sales department. *It requires the commitment and participation of every person in the organization, regardless of function.* A belief throughout the organization that “everybody sells” is essential to the organization's success.

How do organizations reach, and thrive at, this level? In our nearly four decades of research and experience in helping organizations increase sales, we have uncovered three dimensions that form the framework for superior sales performance:

- Strategic Focus
- Cultural Empowerment
- Operational Proficiency

These three dimensions of superior sales performance—when properly balanced and executed—enable an organization to achieve its vision.

We believe that without a comprehensive understanding of these three dimensions, and a rock-solid commitment to their principles and strategies, organizations will be unable to compete effectively in tomorrow's unpredictable and constantly changing marketplace.



PROFILE OF A TOP-PERFORMING

SALES ORGANIZATION

In our quest to identify the requirements for superior sales performance, we relied on our experience in working with highly successful companies around the world, and on conclusions drawn from our landmark *Sales Leadership Research* study.

Sales Leadership Research profiled leading sales organizations in North America, Europe and Japan (see appendix). It focused on how customer expectations and perceptions are changing, as well as how outstanding sales organizations are meeting those expectations. The study involved nearly 300 senior sales executives, sales training managers, field sales managers, salespeople and customers of the organizations profiled.

Based on the results of this study, we conclude that a top-performing sales organization:

- Is highly regarded in its industry. (North American companies selected for the study were recognized by *Sales & Marketing Management* magazine as top performers. The European and Japanese companies were selected because of their extraordinary sales performance and reputation in their local markets.)
- Consistently offers top-quality products and services that customers need and value.
- Conducts leading-edge research into marketplace trends and customer expectations.
- Operates at the highest levels of efficiency possible—and is constantly searching for ways to improve that efficiency.

- Achieves immediate and long-term success by building lasting, mutually beneficial business relationships with customers.

VISION

Vision is a widely misunderstood part of achieving superior sales performance, often lampooned as a words-on-paper exercise designed to simply soothe the egos of top management. Others say that in today's fast-changing business environment, a vision grows obsolete too quickly to be of much use. We respectfully disagree.

Vision is an organization's statement of where in the marketplace it hopes to be at a certain point in the future.

Unlike a mission statement, which is usually a broader, more conceptual statement of an organization's operating philosophy, a vision serves as a unifying and motivating objective for the entire organization. Strategies are developed and tested against the vision. Decisions are made in light of how they will help bring the organization closer to its vision.

Leaders of today's top organizations see the logic and value of having a vision. In a Louis Harris and Associates study of top management, sponsored by AchieveGlobal, 82 percent of those surveyed reported having a vision for their company. Among the top leaders of the Fortune 500 companies represented, the percentage jumps to 89 percent.

The most effective visions we have studied illustrate clarity of focus and collective understanding.

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

"I don't much care where —" said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

*—From Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,
by Lewis Carroll*

Clarity of focus – Visions should be stated clearly and succinctly; in most cases, a phrase will do. Effective visions also have a clear, unequivocal focus. In the Louis Harris and Associates study cited earlier, most vision statements fell into one of three general categories:

- Improve growth through diversification (31%)
- Increase domestic market share (27%)
- Become a leader in the industry or business (21%)

Collective understanding – To avoid the words-on-paper syndrome that renders a clearly defined vision useless, executives at top-performing organizations take great pains to make sure that the vision is communicated to and understood by everyone throughout the organization. This collective understanding ensures that every employee knows:

- The organization’s goals and directions
- Priorities in terms of customers as well as product and service offerings
- What differentiates their organization from others

Hewlett-Packard is an example of a company that continually strives for collective understanding of its vision. Every person we interviewed at Hewlett-Packard as part of our *Sales Leadership Research* study expressed a clear understanding of the company’s competitive issues, goals and key strategies. Most strikingly, three levels of sales managers, several sales representatives, and the vice president of sales all described the sales strategy using similar words and phrases.

A vision, then, is a clearly marked destination on the competitive map. As Lewis Carroll’s famous exchange between Alice and the Cheshire Cat makes clear, if you haven’t decided and communicated where you’re going, any road—or strategy—will do. Unfortunately, in today’s unforgiving competitive environment, the wrong road frequently becomes a dead end.

VISION INTO REALITY: THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF SUPERIOR SALES PERFORMANCE

Vision is useless if the means for achieving it are not in place. Top-performing sales organizations achieve their vision by careful, organization-wide balance and integration of the three important dimensions of sales performance:

- **Strategic focus** – which is based on a clear understanding of current and anticipated customer and marketplace needs.
- **Cultural empowerment** – in which responsibility and authority, especially in matters of customer satisfaction, are shared at all levels of the organization.
- **Operational proficiency** – which results from organizational competence in processes, information, skills and technology.

The three dimensions of superior sales performance bridge the vision-reality gap when they are balanced, integrated, and executed equally well throughout the organization.

If any one of the three dimensions is missing or out-of-balance, performance results shift away from the vision, lengthening the time it takes to reach that vision—or causing the organization to miss it entirely.



Strategic focus, once adjusted correctly, is not likely to change quickly—constantly changing focus produces instability. Cultural empowerment also will change slowly—once anchored, an organization’s culture will take time to alter.

Operational proficiency, on the other hand, can be fine-tuned more easily. In fact, the processes, information, skills and technology that make up operational proficiency provide key leverage points for continuous improvements that can close the vision-reality gap.

STRATEGIC FOCUS

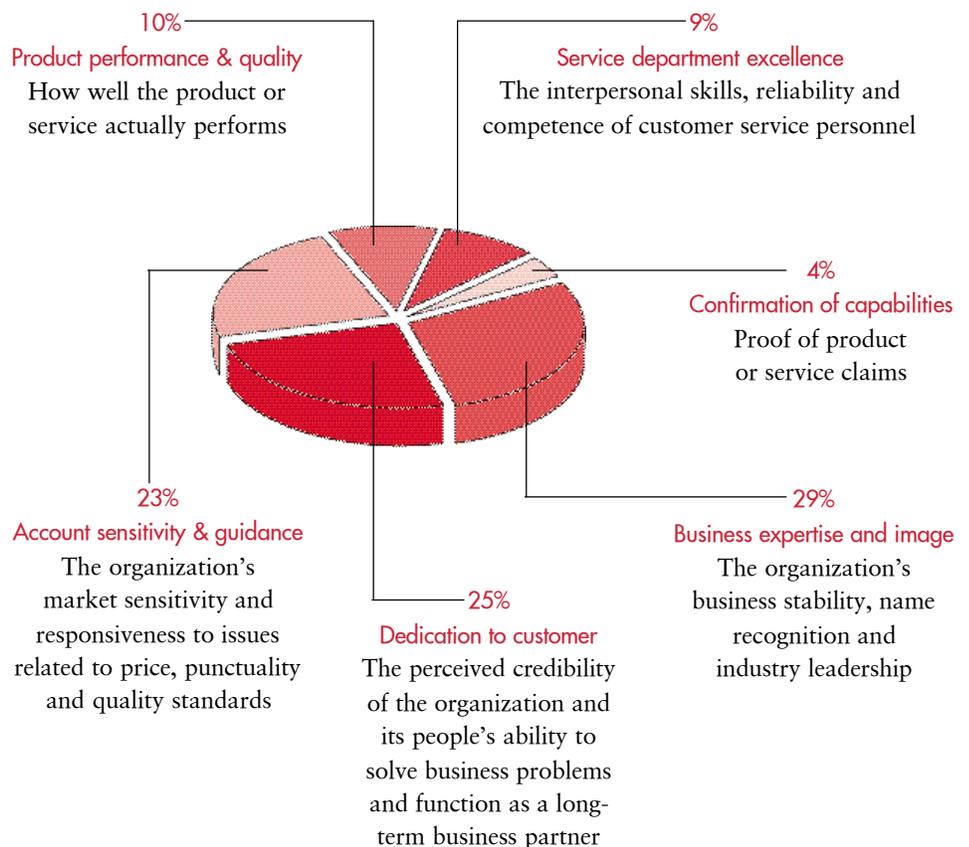
To realize their visions, organizations implement a wide range of initiatives—such as quality systems, cost controls, sales force automation, re-engineering and continuous improvement. These initiatives are as varied as the organizations themselves. But to effectively reach its vision, an organization must make sure that every initiative has the proper strategic focus.

Strategic focus refers to the guiding principle behind all initiatives undertaken by an organization to achieve its vision.

Based on our work with top-performing organizations, we firmly believe the following: The only appropriate strategic focus of any initiative to improve sales performance is on strengthening the quality and durability of the relationship between an organization and its customers and potential customers.

Data on buyer-seller relationships can illustrate why a customer-driven strategic focus is so critical. As part of our *Profiles in Customer Loyalty* research, we asked hundreds of buyers in seven different industries what aspects of a supplier organization contributed most to their continued overall satisfaction with that supplier. Six factors emerged. These factors are depicted according to their weight (expressed in percentages) in contributing to continued overall satisfaction.

It’s interesting to note that 86 percent of what contributes to continued satisfaction relates to the way the supplier organization interacts with the customer (i.e., business expertise and image, dedication to customer, account sensitivity and guidance, and service department excellence). Clearly, an emphasis on customer relationships is fundamental to a successful strategic focus.



Having a customer-center focus influences many of the strategic decisions that must be made in order to realize the organization's vision. Some of these decisions center on:

- Segmenting your customers—deciding to whom you want to sell and whether how and what you sell and service should be different for different groups of customers.
- Opening new business within desired organizations.
- Deploying the sales force in the most effective manner (e.g., geographic, key account, telemarketing).
- Choosing the right distribution channels.
- Setting appropriate sales and service goals.
- Scanning the market—keeping an eye on the competition as well as looking for new product and service opportunities.

Integrated Throughout the Entire Organization

As with a vision, everyone in the organization must understand how a strategic focus helps bring the organization closer to achieving its vision. This means all employees have to be *willful*—that is, committed and not merely compliant; and *skillful*—possessing the knowledge, skills and attitudes to put the strategy into action.

The *willful* and *skillful* involvement of everyone is essential to the success of any strategic focus.

Some of the behaviors that top-performing organizations have demonstrated to ensure that this customer-driven strategic focus is integrated throughout the organization include:

- Hiring the best available candidates and clearly communicating job performance expectations as they relate to the strategic focus.

- Training and coaching employees to understand and meet or exceed customer expectations.
- Giving employees the resources, support and authority to serve customers effectively.
- Motivating employees to focus on customer-driven service through incentive and recognition programs.

CULTURAL EMPOWERMENT

Does the culture support the strategy and vision? If it does, the organization is said to have cultural empowerment.

Cultural empowerment refers to an organization's commitment to ensuring that people at all levels feel motivated and authorized to make decisions that will support the organization's strategy for achieving its vision.

Cultural empowerment within an organization is characterized by the following:

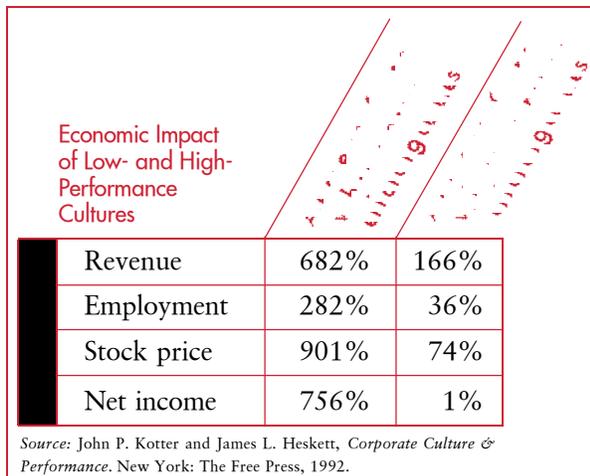
- Management leads by example. Top managers are not only committed to living what they preach, they actually do live what they preach.
- Information flows freely. Individuals are encouraged to share their knowledge and expertise with others. Mechanisms are in place so that information crosses organizational boundaries smoothly, with minimal bureaucratic static.
- Continuous learning and professional development are encouraged. Top management encourages and enables all employees to learn. Acquiring new skills is rewarded; failures are examined for valuable improvement lessons, not for placing blame.
- Trust is pervasive. Dissension and challenge in the name of improvement are encouraged. Employees are valued for their ideas and diverse thinking.



- Risk-taking is encouraged. Creativity is considered necessary for success.
- Feedback is welcome. Feedback is viewed as essential to maintaining the correct focus on, and progress toward, the organization's vision.

Does cultural empowerment translate into measurable results? A key finding in a study of corporate culture (summarized in the following table) removes any doubt that a “performance-enhancing” culture can boost profits.

A practice we identified at S.C. Johnson Wax exemplifies the risk-taking mentality associated with cultural empowerment: The company instituted what they called a “Rent a Helicopter” program. Service providers are essentially told to do what is necessary and reasonable to ensure that customers have what they need. For instance, if a customer has an urgent need for cleaning chemicals, and renting a helicopter is the only way to get the product delivered on time—then do it.



Removing the Barriers to Cultural Empowerment

Creating an atmosphere of cultural empowerment takes a lot of work. Much of that work consists of removing the barriers that inhibit empowerment. The following questions may prove useful as you strive to create the kind of cultural empowerment that will help everyone in your organization work toward your vision.

Leading From the Top

- Do your senior executives use personal leadership and involvement to create and sustain a customer focus?
- Are all roles and responsibilities defined in the context of customer requirements?
- Are key future product and service features based on customer requirements and expectations?

Creating a Responsive Organizational Structure

- Are your organization's resources aligned in such a way as to empower your employees to perform their duties according to best-practices performance standards?
- Does the organizational and technological structure provide for speedy and flexible execution and encourage value-added activities?
- Is the number of management levels between senior management and the customer kept to a minimum?

Communicating Constantly and Comprehensively

- Are all communications on goals and objectives presented in the context of customer requirements?
- Is the voice of the customer frequently shared throughout the organization as to the customer's perception of the company?
- Is information about the customer relationship process shared across functions at every level?
- Is marketing and product information organized and documented in terms of customer needs and requirements?

Developing Appropriate Compensation and Recognition Systems

- Are employees compensated for placing the customer first?
- Is recognition based on objective feedback from the customer?
- Are senior executives actively and publicly involved in the recognition process?

Instituting Customer-driven Hiring and Orientation Standards

- Do the hiring managers have a thorough understanding of the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to fulfill the organization's strategic focus? Do they use this understanding as part of their hiring criteria?
- Do you use an interviewing and hiring approach that provides a systematic process for selecting new employees and orienting them to the importance of mastering the customer connection?

OPERATIONAL PROFICIENCY

While strategic focus and cultural empowerment aim the organization toward achieving its vision, operational proficiency balances and adds power and momentum to the equation, keeping the organization on track.

Operational proficiency refers to the organization's ability to execute strategic focus in a manner that differentiates the organization from its competition.

Operational proficiency is all about responding to customer needs better than anyone else. To do that, top-performing organizations work hard to achieve the highest levels of performance in *processes, information, skills and technology.*

Processes

Top-performing organizations execute their strategies through well-established processes. These processes are tested and refined to work effectively toward the vision throughout the organization.

It is important to understand the culture of the organization before establishing a given process. Employees in an advertising company, for example, where innovation is always expected, may not accept a process borrowed from a company that requires many checkpoints along the way.

Organizations with superior sales performance examine best practices and establish processes that range from targeting the right customers and generating leads, to delivering the products and services, and providing follow-up support. Well-established processes become the basis for driving the right information, skills and technology throughout the organization.

One process that exists in most of the organizations we studied focuses on the customer's point of view: the Customer Relationship Process.

The Customer Relationship Process (CRP) is the sequence of activities, performed by the people who are in direct contact with customers, that enables the supplier organization to meet or exceed customer requirements.

Adapting the principles of quality improvement to the sales process, many organizations now "map" the CRP to uncover vast amounts of critical information that can be used to make decisions about the organization's direction, processes and procedures, hiring practices, training and coaching priorities, and rewards systems.



Customer Development Process – Avis Fleet Services

1. Earn the right	Build credibility and gain customer commitment to proceeding to the next phase
2. Share information	Gather and exchange information required to understand the customer's needs
3. Develop solutions	Consider and exchange alternatives and design possible solutions
4. Agree on the recommendation	Recommend final solution and obtain customer agreement
5. Implement	Deliver products and services according to customer expectations
6. Maintain and expand the relationship	Satisfy customer by fulfilling current and future needs

Avis Fleet Services, for example, the largest fleet service company in Europe, has used CRP analysis to develop a new market strategy that would capitalize on a key competitive strength: Avis's ability to serve the Pan-European market as one unified company while being flexible enough to respond to the needs of local markets. The CRP they developed, which they refer to as *Customer Development Process* (summarized in the accompanying chart), has proven to be a dynamic tool for identifying critical customer information gaps, gathering and sharing strategies and “best practices” for filling those gaps, and for communicating with management about what's going on in the field.

The organizations that have documented their CRPs have found that the following basic guidelines serve as an effective springboard for CRP development:

- Start with a commitment to better understand and improve how the organization relates to its customers.
- Define the phases of the Customer Relationship Process simply and concisely.

- Anticipate the customer's expectations for each phase.
- Define the activities, tools, and resources needed to cost-effectively meet customers' expectations for each phase.
- Define the performance standards that you will use to assess how well your frontline sales and service professionals meet your customers' expectations.
- Validate the CRP map with customers to ensure the usefulness of the activities in the process and the quality of their experiences with each.
- Gather information from customers about their current and future needs, and examine their competition's strengths and weaknesses with respect to the CRP.
- Improve selected activities.
- Define best practices.
- Use feedback from customers to track progress and identify additional activities to improve.

It is important to remember that the CRP process works in conjunction with other processes—that touch the customer as well as those behind the scenes. An organization might start by examining its CRP, but it also needs to identify and standardize supporting processes if it is to become a top-performing sales organization.

Information

To meet ever-escalating customer needs and expectations, and to interact successfully with increasingly knowledgeable and sophisticated customers, employees within a top-performing organization must themselves be more knowledgeable than ever before.

As one example, customer service personnel at top-performing organizations are no longer expected to master only information about their product or service. As the following chart from our *Lessons from Top Service Providers* shows, customer service personnel are expected to manage more types of information than ever before.

Top-performing organizations use information to help position themselves with customers as trusted business advisors. These organizations:

- Make sure all employees have the information needed to demonstrate and refine their understanding of the customer’s big-picture challenges and bottom-line realities. This includes the issues at all levels of the customer’s organization—including strategic, departmental and individual needs—as well as the customer’s perceptions of market trends, company direction, and potential product and service needs.
- Foster the exchange of information and ideas. They facilitate the free flow of information and ideas between their organization and those of their customers.
- Continually strengthen their employees’ business knowledge. They make a point of helping everyone within the organization stay current with the business world at large, not just their own, or even their customer’s particular field of specialization.

Information Area	How This Might Be Demonstrated
Demonstrates knowledge of the company’s industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is aware of competitors’ products and services • Is able to discuss industry trends
Demonstrates understanding of other departments’ operations and functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matches internal resources with needs of customers • Refers calls to appropriate departments when required
Knows capabilities, tolerance and limitations of products and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows how long products should last, what can go wrong, and what to do to get them working again quickly • Knows what customers usually expect in terms of customer service • Knows what to offer customers as a substitute when they ask for something that is not available • Makes suggestions regarding ways to tailor offerings to meet customer needs

Interacting successfully with customers is not the only reason that information is a key factor for superior sales success. Decisions—whether in front of the customer or not—depend on having the right information, and having it updated quickly. Access to information, therefore, becomes essential to realizing an organization’s vision.

Information about the vision, strategies, culture and processes must be shared. Too often, though, information does not reach the appropriate individuals.

The importance of sharing vital information across functions and levels often surfaces with training initiatives. As the accompanying table reveals, executives, operations managers and training professionals in both the sales and customer service areas must share a vision of the markets, strategies, and appropriate training responses if the company is to successfully meet its objectives. Systematic sharing of information, therefore, prevents confusion as well as provides the knowledge employees need to do their jobs.

Skills

Earlier we referred to the importance of everyone’s “willful and skillful” involvement in achieving the organization’s strategic objectives. As the phrase implies, the best of intentions and the most inspiring of objectives are not enough to achieve a company’s vision; what’s needed are people with the skills required to execute the appropriate strategies.

What skills will be needed to support an organization’s strategic focus, as well as its processes, information and technology? Obviously, many of the specific skills will depend on the nature of the strategic focus, vision, and the organization’s industry. But based on our ongoing research into marketplace trends, the most important skills that will need to be incorporated throughout the organization touch upon the following areas:

- Communication skills
- Self-management skills
- Problem-solving and planning skills
- Organization skills
- Team skills
- Financial skills
- Technology skills
- Relationship-building skills

Information is the key to success

Information is the key to success

Information is the key to success

Ideal Profile of Shared Information

Area	Executives	Operations Managers	Training Professionals
How markets are changing	✓	✓	✓
How sales strategies are changing	✓	✓	✓
The new roles of the sales and service professionals	✓	✓	✓
How salespeople must sell differently	✓	✓	✓
New skills, knowledge and attitudes		✓	✓
Designing, implementing, assessing and improving training			✓

- Interpersonal skills
- Consultative-selling skills
- Strategic sales-coaching skills

Of these areas, our research indicates that organizations able to maintain their competitive edge place particular emphasis on skill development in the areas of *consultative selling and strategic sales coaching*.

Consultative Selling – Consultative selling is the process of helping the customer achieve strategic goals through the use of your product or service. The key word is strategic. With these goals as the basis for sales conversations, the salesperson and the customer can create a highly focused and targeted solution together. Information flows both ways. Recommendations are based on mutual understanding and agreement—*which reinforces the organization’s strategic focus on developing long-term business relationships with customers*. This approach is a radical departure from the products-focused selling strategy that many companies still use today.

Strategic Sales Coaching – Across industries, markets and cultures—in North America, Europe and Japan—there is an astounding degree of consensus among salespeople, sales managers and sales executives about the potential power of sales coaching to influence the performance of salespeople. Considering the influence that individual sales performance exerts over customer relationships, it’s easy to see why sales coaching is such a critical aspect of operational proficiency. Strategic sales coaching is a systematic approach to providing ongoing feedback and encouragement to a salesperson or sales team member with the goal of improving that person’s performance.

Recognizing that it is important to develop the skills of all employees, regardless of function, top-performing organizations emphasize and invest heavily in training. The most successful training investments are made when the organization is committed to ongoing training, so that as market conditions change, the entire organization responds appropriately.

Union Pacific Railroad is an excellent example of this organizational commitment and approach. When deregulation caused major upheaval in the transportation industry, Union Pacific Railroad knew it had to make drastic changes if it was to win customers, gain market share, and achieve its vision of providing world-class transportation service. To reach its vision, Union Pacific Railroad implemented an eight-pronged total quality strategy to better meet the needs of its customers. The company started with a series of core programs that focused on the skills needed to uncover customer needs and establish rapport with customers. Training provided the skills needed to explain the benefits of Union Pacific’s total quality to its customers. Top management also used these sessions to explain Union Pacific’s overall strategies and to define the link between training and the positive contribution that the new skills could make to participants’ careers and the company’s prosperity. To keep the positive momentum going, Union Pacific reinforced the training with additional skills and with coaching. In the ensuing years, Union Pacific Railroad leapt out of the doldrums, with net income growing from \$444 million in 1987 to \$667 million in 1992.

Three Roles of Consultative Salespeople and Strategic Coaches

Consultative Selling		Strategic Sales Coaching	
Strategic Orchestrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works to harness all of the company’s resources for the customer • Seeks assistance from others to satisfy customer expectations • Involves colleagues at all levels of the organization in problem-solving • Weighs the costs and benefits of value-adding activities 	Strategist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses comprehensive knowledge of goals and objectives to develop strategies that reflect a balance between achieving financial targets and satisfying customers • Ensures understanding of goals • Obtains commitment to agreed-upon goals • Modifies strategies, processes and activities based on team’s success at building customer relationships
Business Consultant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses internal and external resources to gain an understanding of the customer’s business and marketplace • Thoroughly educates the customer about products and services • Discusses competitive positioning • Approaches problem-solving and decision-making with creativity and a “big picture” perspective 	Communicator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizes and uses information effectively • Shares information with team, management and other appropriate groups • Ensures clear understanding of all communications, clarifies expectations and resolves conflict • Ensures meeting time is used productively • Gathers and uses feedback to improve customer relationships
Long-term Ally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts as a business partner, working to support the customer even when there is no immediate prospect for a sale • Positions products and services honestly • Turns down business that isn’t in the customer’s long-term interests • “Goes to bat” for customers whenever necessary • Helps customers with fact-finding within their own companies • Shows pride in company, products and services 	Coach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishes an environment for performance improvement • Maintains good rapport with team • Fosters open communication, collaboration, creativity, initiative and appropriate risk-taking • Models professional attitudes and behaviors • Establishes clear priorities • Provides appropriate rewards/recognition

Technology

Given today's competitive realities and customer expectations, it is clear that the organization that is able to manage information and provide it quickly and accurately to the customer has a leg up on the competition.

Nearly all sales organizations use some sort of technology application in an attempt to meet this critical customer expectation. Some of the most recent technology options many organizations are pursuing include:

- The Internet
- Intranet
- Client servers
- Database marketing
- Multimedia applications
- Automated facsimile technology
- Automated telemarketing
- CD-ROM-based information/presentations

A Model for Skills Training Activities

Activities	Key Questions
Describe company strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What changes are occurring in the market regarding customers, technology and competition? • What is our strategy to differentiate us from competition?
Build commitment to the strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does everyone have a common understanding of the company strategies? • Does everyone have a high level of commitment? • Is there an understanding of how the organization, and every individual in it, will benefit from supporting the strategy?
Identify new roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What new roles will employees fulfill to execute the organization's strategic focus?
Identify training needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are competency strengths and weaknesses? • What competencies should the training target for improvement?
Describe the ideal training design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What content and methodology should be included?
Implement training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can the quality of implementation be ensured? • How can learning be reinforced? • What coaching and follow-up activities are intended?
Assess training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is new learning being used on the job? • What is the impact?
Improve training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What needs to be improved, and how can it be done?

Tool, Not Panacea – Technology is proliferating and advancing so rapidly that it’s easy to become infatuated with the “bells and whistles” and lose sight of the purpose for introducing technology into the organization. Top-performing organizations use technology as a tool to:

- Support processes, such as the Customer Relationship Process.
- Organize and move the appropriate information through the appropriate channels and into the appropriate hands.
- Reinforce and enhance skills.

The best uses of technology we have seen among top-performing organizations share information with customers and make it easier for the customer to do business with the organization. To this end, many organizations are investigating ways to automate the sales process through *Sales Process Automation* (SPA) so that the salesperson is not only able to provide the customer with information that is pertinent to his or her business needs and objectives, but also is able to manage the account more efficiently and productively. This leads to a number of critical benefits, including:

- Accuracy of forecasts
- Increased revenues
- Improved efficiency
- Enhanced knowledge of the customer’s organization/business
- More focused attention on the right sales opportunities

An example of an organization using SPA technology effectively is Intel Corporation, which provides its 1,000 sales representatives with what it calls the “I Know” performance support system. The system is accessed on the representative’s notebook computer during a sales call and lets the sales representative:

- Compare two Intel products side by side
- Compare Intel products with a competitive product
- Develop “if/then” sales scenarios with recommended answers
- Create custom presentations

Using this technology, Intel salespeople have the means to keep up with information about new products and to get the information they need, when they need it. It also decreases the time they spend on fact-finding and improves customer responsiveness. This should be one of the primary goals of any SPA initiative.

Information technology also is used by American Airlines to create a competitive advantage as well as add value on sales calls. It is used to analyze the components that affect American Airlines’ profitability as well as that of the travel agents who book its flights. The data are downloaded to each salesperson’s laptop computer for use on sales calls with travel agents. The travel agents are shown how increased bookings on American Airlines affect their agency’s commissions and overall market share.

Whether using information with customers or with co-workers, technology has obviously enabled organizations to both increase and manage the availability of facts and data. Superior sales performance, however, is achieved when technology is used to integrate all sales processes (e.g., forecasting, profiling, account planning) into one system. The integration of these processes allows individuals to collectively analyze all available data—and make better decisions.

ACHIEVING SUPERIOR SALES PERFORMANCE

For nearly four decades, AchieveGlobal has conducted research on, and worked with, the leading sales performance organizations in North America and around the world. Our research and experience have clearly demonstrated to us that successful sales organizations concentrate on the integration and balance of three dimensions: *Strategic Focus*, *Cultural Empowerment* and *Operational Proficiency*. They also consistently build long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with their customers—and thus grow their businesses.

The leaders with whom we've worked share another characteristic—they are committed to ensuring all employees understand how they, as individuals, are involved in, and contribute to, the organization's sales and service strategy. They continuously motivate and equip everyone toward that end. The operative word here is everyone. We repeatedly find that a commitment to integrating the three dimensions and including everyone is the most observable difference between top-performing and moderately-performing organizations.

Top-performing organizations also understand the need to integrate these dimensions across all functional areas—well beyond the traditional boundaries of “sales”—and to use processes, information, skills and technology to ensure that each customer interaction is successful. Integration includes customer service professionals, information system professionals, field support specialists and others.

While creating a high-performance sales culture and incorporating a vision throughout an organization are critical to success, neither will compensate for inadequate technology, lack of information, nonexistent sales processes, or employees without skills.

Achieving superior sales performance requires a conscious decision to continuously monitor, calibrate and challenge, to ensure that the three dimensions are properly integrated and balanced throughout the organization.



ABOUT ACHIEVEGLOBAL

AchieveGlobal is the world leader in helping organizations translate business strategies into business results by developing the skills and performance of their people. Our learning-based solutions focus on skills training and consulting services in sales performance, customer service, leadership and teamwork.

With offices throughout North America and a presence on every continent, we serve more than 70 countries, and offer programs and services in more than 40 languages and dialects. We continually adapt and translate our programs and services to meet the needs of global cultures.



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