

Sales: The Key Fundamental To Driving Revenue

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“Implementing a daily sales huddle has helped Quickparts grow at a torrid pace,” explains Mark Mackie, co-founder and Vice-president Sales for this Atlanta-based source for custom-manufactured plastic and metal parts (they helped develop the 2002 Winter Olympic Torch). And this growth has garnered them plenty of honors including Finalist Atlanta Small Business Person of the Year, Finalist Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year for the Atlanta region, and number 86 on the Entrepreneur Magazine Hot 100 list of growing firms. More on their specific approach to the daily sales huddle in a moment.

Building on last month’s column on marketing and the previous column on meetings, I’ve been evangelizing the importance of a daily 5 – 15 minute sales huddle (a conference call for those with sales people in the field). If you want to grow faster, pulse faster. The hundreds of firms I know that have initiated a daily sales huddle see a dramatic rise in sales in short order, independent of whether the sales cycle is short or long, the sales process is simple or complex, the product or service is high tech or low tech, or the firm is big or small. Sam Palmisano, CEO of IBM, used a global daily sales call to compete with EMC in the storage software business like Quickparts uses their daily sales huddle to drive success in their custom parts company.

The concern voiced by many is that “I have a high powered and high paid sales team and I feel they would view it as micromanagement or babysitting – they don’t need this to stay motivated and performing. Besides, our sales cycle is so long that not much changes daily.” The other concern is that “my sales people need to be out selling and this is just another interruption to their schedule.”

Let me approach the value of the daily sales huddle from the sales person’s perspective. The number one complaint of most sales people is that the organization is not supporting them sufficiently – that various departments are not responding quick enough whether its waiting to get credit approval from the finance department, a sample from engineering, a proposal from marketing, service or delivery problems with existing customers that are jeopardizing new sales, or waiting for a pricing decision from the CEO or VP Sales.

FOCUS ON STUCK POINTS

Make the focus of the daily sales call an opportunity for the sales people to express their “stuck” point. Let them see it as a way to alert the firm each day of what they and the customers need in the field to do their job better in a way that gives them witnesses (the

other sales associates and leader). This is key! You want to use the power of peer support and peer pressure to drive results.

It also lets them be champions for the customer, letting them voice customer concerns and ideas they're picking up in the field. Then view the intervening 24 hours between sales calls as a deadline for the organization to respond to the daily requests of the sales team. Let the sales people see that the organization is there to back them up and rally resources to get them what they need to power revenue.

In turn, it needs to be made clear that this sales call is when the sales people are expected to vocalize their bottlenecks. If a sales person loses an opportunity because of a perceived problem with the rest of the organization and they didn't vocalize it immediately (and early in the process), then they only have themselves to blame. Delaying even a few days to resolve bottlenecks can jeopardize sales. In turn, when customers feel their supplier can act quickly, they have more confidence in the rest of the service delivery process.

The daily is also a time to share best practices among the sales team, to celebrate wins, and to give them a shot in the arm of enthusiasm. Selling is a roller coaster job and sales people need positive reinforcement daily. Notes Brian Ford, one of Quickparts' territorial sales managers, "the daily huddle is all about generating energy and excitement." And he was quick to share that the daily saves him time. If he or one of the sales people needs advice about a special order of which one of the other sales associates might have experience, it can be garnered at the daily meeting rather than wandering around asking each person and hoping you get some insights at the water cooler. "Our ability to help each other has shot up since implementing the daily meeting," explains Ford.

QUICKPARTS' SPECIFICS

Quickparts has 8 inside sales people and 3 marketing people who participate in the daily huddle, a habit they've also initiated in all the other functional areas of the company. They muster around a large round table, standing so it forces the meeting to be quick and concise. They give the "honors" of speaking first to the sales rep with the highest sales the previous day. They use a lectern and each new speaker is introduced by the previous speaker.

The agenda for each rep to cover in 2 minutes or less is: Hot Opportunities, Notable Losses, Lessons Learned, and Bottlenecks. As for timing, they do it at 10am each morning after everyone gets in (some people arrive later to cover the west coast), feeling that it's best earlier than later so it provides energy for the rest of the day. And over time they've evolved the structure so the meeting lasts 10 to 20 minutes. This is the other key – keep it short and concise. Surprisingly, once the daily becomes habit, it seems the rest of the world (including customers) will magically bend their schedules around this daily routine.

Concludes Mackie, “this tool keeps us well aligned as a team and provides us a forum for storytelling.” And the results speak for themselves.