

Building a great sales force

 By [Peter Gilbert](#)

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Many businesses in sectors such as real estate, IT, parts, components, recruitment, electric motors, raw materials, insurance broking and many others are primarily sales organisations - nothing more and nothing less. They generally do not bring huge intellectual capital to the equation, they do not make anything, they have no factories to distract them, they generally have no complex supply chain to manage, they buy something or acquire the mandate to sell something, and then they sell it.

So sales should be their primary competency. They should be very good at it. Mysteriously, lots of them aren't. Great sales forces are a rarity. This is both a problem (sales is not taken seriously), but it is also a huge opportunity. Sensible investment in sales effectiveness can deliver massive returns. The key however, is investing in the right things, in the right sequence.

Sales enablement

Simply put, sales enablement is a basket term that encompasses all of the things that management need to do to create the level of sales effectiveness they require in their business. This requires answers to a number of questions: What is my go-to-market sales strategy (GTMss), or what is it that I am asking my sales function to do? This could range from selling plastic coat hangers at a traffic light, or flogging trinkets in a flea market to selling complex IT solutions to large corporations, or a fleet of jet airliners to British Airways.

This dictates the conversation that takes place between seller and buyer. This, in turn, raises the next question. Do I need a sales force at all? Would a telephone sales operation work. Or, can I justify the high cost of a field sales force?

Once these questions are answered, it becomes possible to start building the type of sales function that meets the needs of both buyers and sellers. This short article focuses primarily on sales that involve some form of human intervention.

The selected GTMss dictates your channel to market (resellers, telesales, direct sales etc), and each of these require different types of salespeople who will require different types of sales managers. Call centre sales managers, for example, are very different from field sales force managers.

Assuming that a sales organisation has a clearly defined and articulated GTMss (most do not), one needs to focus on two of the most problematic areas, which are sales recruitment and sales management.

Sales recruitment

Any kind of recruitment is challenging, and sales recruitment is doubly challenging, because great salespeople are a product of natural talent and learned skills, much like sport, which is a good analogy. Sadly, sales is far less effective than sports at selection, and failure rates of 50% are common. With a properly structured and disciplined recruitment process, a hiring accuracy of >90% is achievable. This has a profound effect on the profitability of any organisation.

Sales management

Recent research in South Africa revealed that 69% of sales managers have had absolutely no training to do this challenging job. Added to this, the majority have been in the job less than four years, and have never lived through a recession. No wonder so many are failing.

ABOUT PETER GILBERT

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