

Sales Skill Competency Progression Leads to New Organization Sales Culture

By: Jim Kasper, CEO; Author of Short Cycle Selling, McGraw-Hill, 2002 Copyright 2003

During recent research concerning the evolution of various Fortune 1000 companies' sales cultures, we discovered that organizations that embrace the #1 brand in their respective marketplaces are searching for groundbreaking ways to maintain their prestigious market share. Their executive committee discussions have spilled out of the usual realms of marketing, quality, customer service and new product introduction into their previously overlooked and misunderstood, but crucial, sales force competency levels. Executive dialogue is changing from ISO 9000 and Six Sigma to elevating sales force and sales management competency levels.

While far from a common boardroom expression, "sales skills competency progression" is gaining significant notoriety within many industries. Many more sales executives are becoming aware of it and the early adopters are growing in numbers. The most common question I get from the rapidly mounting numbers of fascinated sales executives and CEOs is, "In 50 words or less, what is a sales skills competency progression model?" The best answer that I've been able to develop to date is:

"A comprehensive study of an organization's current sales skill and sales management proficiencies, by individual, resulting in a recommended customized development plan that will elevate each member of the sales and sales management team to uniform, progressively higher sales practices."

As you can probably anticipate, the next most frequent question that I field is, **"What's in it for my company?"** That is a very difficult question to answer without performing a "gap analysis" for the inquiring organization, however, there are several common benefits being reaped by the current practitioners. They are: higher total sales; reduced turnover due to increased job satisfaction; lower cost of sales; higher sales per rep productivity; shorter sales cycles; strong return-on-investment; and better internal communications.

The **actual physical deliverables** of a sales skills competency progression are numerous. They include: uniform customized sales skills practices; standardized sales management practices; formalized sales and sales management certification programs; multi-competency level customized sales and sales management training curriculum; sales and sales management behavioral benchmarks; individual personal development tracks; and most importantly, quantitative matrix and measurement methods for determining skill level matriculation and calculating return-on-investment.

From our experience, there are **4 criteria that will insure successful implementation of a sales skill and sales management skill competency progression**. The first is the establishment of quantifiable expectations from each competency area. Secondly, the entire program must be customized to your organization's current sales culture and process. Thirdly, the life of this project is predicated upon top sales management's undying support. Finally, successful execution necessitates beginning with sales management skills; thereby sales management can implement newly enhanced competencies to support the transition within the sales team. Absence of any one of the aforementioned factors will severely jeopardize your chances of success.

Time commitment is one facet of the sales skill and sales management skill competency model that is always of paramount concern to sales executives and sales management. Due to the very nature of a sales executive's job responsibilities, not the least of which is constant travel, the entire development process requires relatively little time commitment at this level. Once the strategic aspects, goals and objectives, are derived, most sales executives find that this is a rather painless approach. The methodology is designed to keep second tier sales management's time to a minimum and the field sales and insides sales teams in front of the customer, not laboring over hours of surveys and assessments. After the decision-making stage, many organizations hand over the tracking, follow-up and collaborative development pieces to their HR and training departments. The timeline for completion of each project varies considerably by the actual physical size and geographic distribution of a sales team. Obviously, the larger and more geographically dispersed, the more time is required. The average amount of time from decision to completion of the model development is between 8 and 9 months. The entire certification process, from model development to certification, is usually 18 to 20 months. Be aware that there are a number of ways to compress this timeline.

Another recurrent question is, **“How applicable is a sales and sales management skill competency progression on a global basis?”** In today’s global marketplace, it is understandable why this question is so common. Sales and sales management skill competency progression models deal with enhancing the skills of establishing and maintaining personal and business relationships and due to the fact that relationship building varies dramatically across ethnic cultures, generally speaking, the models need to be modified to respective ethnicity. This does imply that the methodology changes, but means that local customs and values affect the certification requirements and training curriculum.

Finally, the **importance of certification cannot be overemphasized.** Certification signifies successful completion of a rigid and quantitatively measured “best practices” competency progression indigenous to your organization. It becomes the pinnacle of accomplishment in your firm. It means that your organization has set the ultimate standard for professional sales and sales management achievement and it may well become the benchmark for your industry. It means your customers are working with the best in their field.

Based on the numerous companies that my firm has worked with, **I have developed the following brief survey which will give you an indication of where your organization lies on the “need scale” for sales and sales management skill competency progression.** Place an “x” in the box that corresponds to a sentence that describes your sales organization.

- Sales cycles have lengthened.
- Market share has diminished.
- Sales policies have not been reviewed and rewritten in 18 months or more.
- Sales training consists of a series of good, but varied and disjointed programs.
- Sales force turnover is above 30%.
- Sales management needs to move from directing to coaching to mentoring.
- We do not have a quantitative method to measure sales development ROI.
- Our customers have changed their decision-making process.
- The overall marketplace sees little differentiation between us and competitors.
- It’s becoming more difficult to sell value over price.

Scoring:

More than 7 boxes checked = you’re overdue

4 – 6 boxes checked = your ROI will be significant

3 – 4 boxes checked = borderline

1 – 2 boxes checked = Sell on!

Regardless of your score, if your organization has been through multiple mergers, consolidation, senior management changes, uncontrolled growth or product life cycle changes, it may be in your best future interests to conduct a sales culture or sales process audit.

For More Information: Go to www.salestrainers.com