



Process-Based Practices

How to make managing sales an easier task

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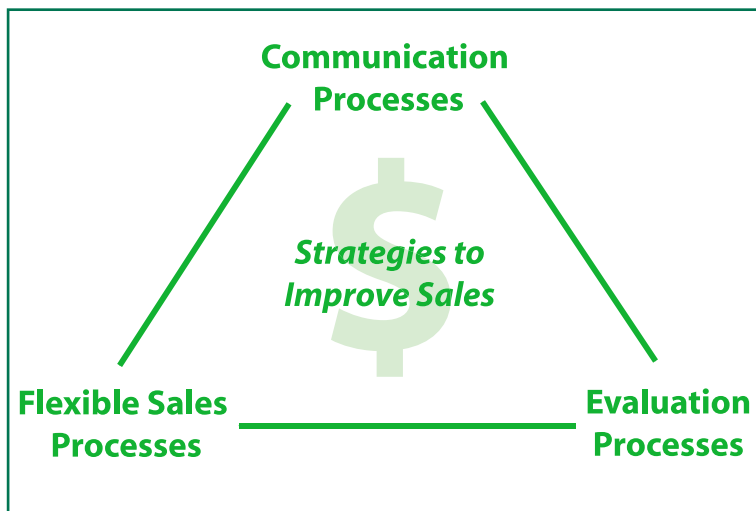
Dealer principals struggle with so many facets of running a viable sales operation. From recruiting the right people to creating competitive compensation packages to keeping up with the latest product pushes, the struggles are endless.

There are strategies that reduce, if not eliminate, those struggles. This article details three process-based strategies. The first is to institute flexible sales processes. The second is to develop customer and employee communication processes. The third and final strategy is to implement evaluation processes. We will explore each of these processes separately.

Flexible Sales Processes

Dealers are ultimately responsible for the bottom-line revenue of their operations. Since ultimate responsibility lies with you, it is up to you to establish a flexible sales process. While many members of your sales force may balk and say that they have been selling their own way since the dawn of time, it is up to you to provide the acceptable formula for your dealership. Components of that formula will reflect your unique culture, customers and products. Basic components of the process include the following:

- Business development approaches.
- Selling strategies.
- Closing techniques.
- Follow-up tools and techniques.



These components need to be supported by an array of tools created specifically for your market. These tools may include: talking points, prospect/client tracking worksheets, sales support, repeat and referral bonuses, and client gifts.

The flexible sales process is one that will actually form a non-negotiable contract with your sales reps. In other words, they have discretion about how they will implement the process, but it is understood that it is a process they must use.

This degree of conformity will accomplish a couple of things. First, it will provide you and the sales manager with a set of concrete, verifiable activities to measure and manage. You will know, without a doubt, what the sales force is doing and how.

Second, having a process enables you to develop standards that link behavior to performance measurement systems. You can more accurately make your performance measurement system very specific. You will be able not to just tailor it to

objectives, but also to targeted activities and behaviors.

Third, having a process will enable you to refine your recruitment and retention activities. You will be able to clearly define the competencies that you are seeking in new hires. You will be better able to identify attitudinal factors that impact performance throughout the process. Additionally, it will be easy to identify

low performers. That identification will make customized coaching and training for peak performance a much easier endeavor. It will also allow you to spot the stages of the process that need refining, as well as talented salespeople who can aid in both the refinement of the process and the coaching of their peers.

Customer and Employee Communication Processes

For the second strategy, customer and employee communication, create a communication plan that provides valuable information on products, services and promotions. Keep a steady stream of useful information flowing to both of these constituencies. Use a variety of methods; newsletters, e-zines, postcards, telemarketers and electronic blasts all work well. Consider holding product-specific training and other creative events. All of these methods will ensure that you have well-informed customers and colleagues.

Types and Uses of Process-Based Strategies

Process-Based Strategy	Objectives
Flexible Sales Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ To establish customized, standardized sales methodology.■ To create a sales culture aligned with strategic goals.
Customer and Employee Communication Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ To build meaningful dialogue with the two most important constituencies.■ To have an endless source of ideas for improving organizational effectiveness.
Evaluation Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ To have recent data for generating incentives, refinements and improvements.■ To establish and maintain high quality standards.

One caution is that you need to find the right mix of communication methods and the right frequency of interaction. If, for example, you only send newsletters, they may get trashed or overlooked (unless you have established a reputation for providing really useful, interesting information). If you send information too frequently, you may be viewed as an annoyance. If you do not send it often enough, they will forget you. So be sure to get feedback on how well your communication processes are working.

Remember, communication is not a one-way process. It is, in fact, a back-and-forth flow of information. Build dialogue with customers and employees. Listen to their ideas, opinions and suggestions. By using their feedback, you will be able to improve the overall effectiveness of your organization. You will reposition yourself with both constituencies. Customers will see you as a partner and a source of useful information rather than just another vendor. You will build esteem in the eyes of employees. They will feel respected and, as a result, will be more willing to share their insights and experiences for the good of the company.

Evaluation Processes

These processes are essential to the success of all of your efforts. It is essential that everything be evaluated. Are you offering the products that customers want? Do you have access to enough of the product to rapidly fill their orders? If you are featuring many diverse product lines but only a few are selling, that information is a form of evaluation. Use that sales data to trim your product lines and specialize on the successful ones.

Evaluate sales trends. This means that you get to measure how people are using the flexible sales process. Talk to the sales force about which elements of the process work best. Remember, it's a flexible process, so this is an opportunity to refine it. This is an opportunity to measure the results of the entire sales team and its individual members. Make evaluation a part of your regular *modus operandi*. Do it at least quarterly. Keep the flow of knowledge fresh.

The last place for evaluation is in your customer and employee communication process. This is sort of an odd one because your ongoing communication with them is an evaluation methodology in and of itself. However, you still have to check to be certain that the tools you have in place are sufficient

for gathering information. Ask whether you are getting enough information. Is it the right information? Are you getting it often enough and in usable formats? There is no area of your operation that is exempt from evaluation.

Summary

Using this process-based strategic approach, you will find it much easier to manage the entire sales function. Data about both customer and employee issues will be readily available to the entire leadership team. There will be fewer missed sales opportunities, communication gaps and mismatches on the sales force. Each of the three processes will help you gain greater clarity about the strengths and developmental needs of your entire sales organization. They will also help you create meaningful alignment between your goals and operational practices. ■

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