



FATAL FLAWS IN THE FRONTLINE:
21 WAYS TO FIX SALES PERFORMANCE GAPS



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Introduction



Today's sales professionals walk a fine line every day, balancing diverse roles including detective, confidant, problem solver and analyst. But when you take a close look at the behaviors of any seasoned, successful sales professional, you'll find that what keeps them perfectly balanced is their **constant focus on the customer**. Their every word and deed is guided by an unshakable desire to uncover, understand and solve their customer's challenges.

These customer relationship champions deliver value that resonates throughout their customers' organizations, and add value to their own organizations by consistently meeting their sales goals, improving on their sales numbers, and achieving stellar levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Introduction



So what should business leaders who are striving to build a team of high performing, customer-focused sales professionals look for? Through a three-tiered global research initiative, AchieveGlobal discovered specific customer-oriented skills and behaviors that sales organizations can develop to boost the performance of their frontline sales teams. Our market analysis revealed:

- Current sales trends that impact frontline sales performance
- 27 performance drivers associated with positive sales outcomes
- 19 skill areas where sales professionals tend to struggle
- How to identify potential gaps in your organization's sales performance
- 21 sales best practices to put into action for fast improvement in challenging areas

Today's Sales Trends

RESEARCH PHASE 1

At AchieveGlobal we began our research by reviewing worldwide business and academic literature to identify current trends in the sales environment. We analyzed the findings and netted out the most important themes that emerged. Below is insight into concepts sales leaders should be aware of to understand the world in which their frontline sales professionals live and breathe:

Customer-oriented selling – Also known as customer experience management, this concept has significant implications for sales organizations. Let's define it as the set of beliefs that puts the customer's best interests first (while including those of all other stakeholders, too) to develop a long-term profitable relationship. According to several academic studies, a salesperson's customer-oriented selling behavior is linked to a significant positive impact on sales performance.

Creating and delivering value – In sales literature, the most studied and perhaps the “newest” concept is creating value in business relationships. The salesperson who creates the most value for the customer typically wins the business. Creating value involves high-level cognitive skills around identifying problems and applying strategic, creative options to solve them. Creativity shines through when the salesperson generates new solutions for ongoing problems, defines and solves a new problem, or detects a neglected problem.

Today's Sales Trends

RESEARCH PHASE 1

Team selling

As sales opportunities become more complex, there is increasing reliance on other parts of the organization (technicians, specialists, solution experts) to participate in the sales process. Roles such as customer service and inbound call personnel are being held responsible for delivering additional value to the organization through selling behaviors, such as up-selling and cross-selling. Organizations need to develop sales skills for team selling and for traditionally non-selling personnel.

Building relationships

The sales organizations we interviewed expressed a desire to develop better interpersonal communication skills to cultivate deeper, more personal connections with buyers. In fact, several recent studies suggest that a salesperson's personal relationship behaviors significantly affect buyer perceptions. A salesperson must have the ability to create genuine rapport to build trust and confidence.

Sales leadership

There is a widespread need for better sales coaching and management skills across all levels and experience grades. Sales managers must not only be proficient in advanced sales skills and behaviors, they must also be able to coach and motivate their sales teams to deliver results in those areas. "Strategic coaching" is becoming ever more important as organizations work with savvy buyers and complex sales opportunities.

Today's Sales Trends

RESEARCH PHASE 1

Sales process (or lack thereof)

Few companies, even those with large and mature sales organizations, have a standard, formal, universally adopted sales process. Companies are hampered, to varying degrees, by wide variations in how their salespeople perform their work including time and territory management, prospecting, account planning, etc. Such companies would benefit from a sales call process that is replicable, effective and provides a shared language.

Global concerns

Businesses across all markets are experiencing similar challenges, although the economy appears to be having more of a persistent, negative impact on European organizations compared to those in the U.S. Another notable difference is the trend across Europe in downsizing or eliminating sales forces. Sales organizations are moving to increased reliance on agents, distributors and channel managers, which leads to a demand for sales training in those areas.

Risk management

Customers tend to be more cautious than in the past, so minimizing risk for buyers has risen greatly in importance and should become a core part of sales conversations. Risk drives inertia. Salespeople can demonstrate tangible value by helping customers understand the cost of doing nothing, and by building solutions around what customers already have in place.

Today's Sales Trends

RESEARCH PHASE 1

Understanding needs

The focus should be less on the diagnosis of need and more on demonstrating an understanding of the need. That is, salespeople ought to be able to convey their understanding of the implications and all facets of the buyer's problems and objectives.

Collaboration

The value of buyer-seller collaboration cannot be overstated. Collaborators are perceived to be responsive, proactive, and easy to buy from; and they become a key component of the buyer's success. Customers are more likely to buy from sellers that collaborate with them during their buying process to achieve a mutual goal.

27 Key Sales Performance Drivers

RESEARCH PHASE 2

AchieveGlobal's interpretation of current sales trends led us to conclude that salespeople need **strategic skills around customer-oriented selling** – skills for creating client value, managing clients, building relationships and expanding business. So we embarked on phase two of our research study with the goal of defining and validating those customer-oriented skills.

We generated a list of more than 400 sales-related activities from academic sales journals; reviewed dozens of sales process frameworks and competency maps; and investigated data analyzing relationships between predictors of sales performance, and actual sales performance, for 410,000 salespeople. An independent group of experts then analyzed this data to identify themes between specific skills/activities and sales performance.

This iterative process led to a targeted list of 27 key performance drivers (sales activities) that positively impact the customer experience, and consequently, sales outcomes—including total sales, meeting sales goals, and customer satisfaction.

Key Sales Performance Drivers



1. Building rapport
2. Clarifying needs, issues, options and solutions
3. Communicating effectively
4. Creating advocates within the buying firm
5. Developing unique value propositions
6. Effectively allocating external resources (budget)
7. Effectively allocating personal resources (time)
8. Engaging your customer in the consultation process
9. Gaining alignment across stakeholders
10. Identifying gaps in your customer's business processes
11. Identifying the key players in your customer's buying process
12. Identifying the risks associated with your customer's buying process
13. Identifying your customer's goals
14. Leveraging the key players in your customer's buying process
15. Listening
16. Locating high potential customers
17. Overcoming objections
18. Performing customer and industry analyses
19. Positioning solutions
20. Providing value at each stage in your customer's buying process
21. Questioning
22. Synthesizing data
23. Uncovering latent issues
24. Understanding your business
25. Understanding your business's capabilities and limitations
26. Understanding your customer's business
27. Understanding your customer's buying process

Common Sales Performance Gaps

RESEARCH PHASE 3

Where are sales professionals flourishing or falling short in their efforts to master the 27 key sales performance drivers? This question launched the third and final phase of our research initiative. Our primary research study surveyed 1,047 seasoned sales professionals globally in a wide range of industries, including retail, technology, manufacturing, healthcare, hospitality and others. Forty-three percent (43%) of the respondents were from the United States, and the remaining 57% of international participants hailed from Brazil, China, France, Germany, Mexico and the United Kingdom. These were highly seasoned sales professionals with an average of more than 16 years of work experience (including 16 years of sales experience), and just under 13 years of service with their current employers.

Common Sales Performance Gaps

RESEARCH PHASE 3

Using the 27 key sales performance drivers that our expert analysis had previously identified, we asked these sales professionals to rate on a five-point scale:

- The importance of each performance driver (sales activity)
- Their own self-perceived skill level at that activity

The results revealed **19 positive differences** (or a notable 70% of the performance drivers). A positive difference occurs when respondents rate a performance driver's importance as higher than their skill level. In other words, they recognize that the activity is significant, and that they aren't as competent in that area as they think they should be.

Positive Differences

Sales Performance Driver	Perceived Importance*	Self-Reported Skill Level*	Difference
Creating advocates within the buying firm	4.55	3.93	0.62
Gaining alignment across stakeholders	4.34	3.79	0.55
Identifying your customer's goals	4.40	3.87	0.53
Effectively allocating personal resources (time)	4.48	3.99	0.49
Effectively allocating external resources (budget)	4.40	3.98	0.42
Identifying gaps in your customer's business processes	4.25	3.86	0.39
Understanding your customer's buying process	4.32	4.06	0.26
Understanding your customer's business	4.33	4.07	0.26
Identifying the risks associated with your customer's buying process	4.17	3.93	0.24
Synthesizing data	4.08	3.86	0.22
Overcoming objections	4.37	4.15	0.22
Understanding your business	4.44	4.23	0.21
Identifying the key players in your customer's buying process	4.20	4.00	0.20
Leveraging the key players in your customer's buying process	4.12	3.92	0.20
Providing value at each stage in your customer's buying process	4.27	4.09	0.18
Positioning solutions	4.22	4.08	0.14
Engaging your customer in the consultation process	4.22	4.10	0.12
Locating high potential customers	4.11	3.99	0.12
Developing unique value propositions	4.03	3.98	0.05

* Ranked on a 5-point scale, the positive differences shown here indicate areas for performance improvement potential.

21 Best Practices For Performance Improvement



So what does this mean for sales organizations and their leaders? The potential for performance improvement is tremendous—as evidenced by the high percentage (70%) of positive differences between sales professionals' recognition of the importance of sales activities, and their own skill levels.

Salespeople are most receptive to expanding their skills, knowledge and abilities when they believe a gap exists between what they'd like to do, and what they feel they are capable of doing. As the experienced sales professionals we surveyed identified 19 performance areas where they believe they would benefit from skill improvement, chances are, your sales professionals likely have similar needs.

This research can be used as a beacon to illuminate areas where you might want to focus your own sales training efforts to improve the performance of your team.

If you are interested in further identifying potential areas for improvement among your sales professionals, use the sales performance diagnostic tool (Appendix A and B).

21 Best Practices For Performance Improvement



At AchieveGlobal, the 50 years we have devoted to helping client organizations in over 40 countries have given us a unique perspective and extraordinary insight into the strategy and skills you need to accelerate your sales effectiveness.

We have focused our expertise on identifying best practices you can use to sharpen your sales professionals' abilities in common performance gap areas. When mastered, these practices will add value for your customers at every point in the sales process, and ensure your team is skilled up to meet and exceed its sales goals.

You will want to keep the following best practices top of mind during your training, development and coaching initiatives with your sales team.



Best Practice Research...Then Reach Out

In our experience, research might be the most overlooked aspect of a successful sale. In general, salespeople are more oriented towards activity and less inclined to pursue this more cerebral and contemplative step in the sales process. Many will say they don't have the time. However, it is almost always time well spent to move closer to sales goals. **Breaking news or latest developments can often serve as launching points for a compelling contact to a prospect.**

Resources that your team might find valuable for their research include:

- **Analyst Reports** - to delve into the financial position of their customer's company
- **Company Annual Reports** - a good guide for networking efforts to identify key leaders
- **Press Releases** - to discover what news the company is choosing to share externally
- **Other News Sources** - to find out whether word on the street aligns or conflicts with the company's presentation of itself

Through these resources, sales professionals can assess what is happening in the client's upstream and downstream markets, current and forecasted demand for the client's product/service, trends in their client's buying behavior, and other intelligence that will help them gain instant credibility with their prospect.

SKILL CHECK

Encourage your sales professionals to review industry resources for relevant news on customer companies before they ever reach out to a prospect.



Best Practice

Know How You Stack Up Against The Competition

In conquering the competition, what matters most is that **sales professionals understand what's unique or special about what you offer**. There should be crystal clear distinction between exclusive benefits you offer, benefits you have in common with competitors, and drawbacks you might face when compared to your competition.

Sales professionals can get ready for head-to-head competitive challenges by preparing questions they can ask customers that position each of your exclusive benefits favorably. They can also counter any drawbacks (a need that you cannot meet or that would have a negative impact from your organization's perspective) by emphasizing your exclusive benefits that are more important to the customer.

SKILL CHECK

Make sure every sales professional has their hands on a competitive profile so they understand and can talk knowledgeably about how your solution compares to the competition.



Best Practice Quantify Prospecting Targets

As the saying goes, “if you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll be lost when you get there.” This holds especially true for prospecting activities, which aren’t always high on sales professionals’ lists of favorite things to do.

SKILL CHECK

Does each of your team members know the **ideal number of prospects they should contact weekly to help achieve their sales quotas?** It might sound obvious, yet some organizations skip this calculation or don’t update their numbers regularly.



Best Practice Qualify Prospects...And Fast

When a sales professional spends too much time chasing prospects who have no ability or intent to buy, his or her productivity and morale suffer. To qualify prospects effectively, sales professionals should try to uncover information in four key areas: the prospect's **potential** to generate sufficient business for your organization, their decision-making **authority**, their financial and non-financial **resources**, and their **timeline** for taking action.

SKILL CHECK

Provide your sales professionals with effective questions—focusing on the four key areas of potential, authority, resources and time—that will help them qualify prospects quickly and effectively.



Best Practice Focus On Customer Business Issues

When approaching or communicating with a customer, sales professionals can easily revert to focusing on your product or solution and its general benefits, without **linking those benefits to business issues their customer might be facing.**

It's absolutely worth the time for sales associates to document common business issues faced by their customers and prospects, and to realize the ways your company could help address each business issue.

SKILL CHECK

Does your organization offer research tools for your sales professionals to identify business issues that impact your customers and prospects? Once you've equipped your team with those tools, you can make it a habit to ask about customer business issues in your coaching meetings. If they start hearing that question from you often enough, your associates will come prepared with answers.



Best Practice Master “Mutual Value” Questioning

Let’s make sure we understand each other.

A clear, complete, mutual understanding of the customer’s needs ensures that the recommendations made to address those needs appeal to the customer and offer a direct route to success.

Mutual value questioning goes a long way toward accomplishing this goal. These are questions that ask a customer to analyze his or her situation and speculate on possibilities. They position the salesperson as someone who is interested in helping the customer’s business succeed, and who has the acumen to go beyond the standard give-and-take to offer more value in the relationship.

Usually, the answers to mutual value questions are not top of mind for the customer. So your customer benefits from thoughtful reflection, while the salesperson benefits from obtaining valuable information (that, by the way, your competitors may not know).

SKILL CHECK

Make sure your sales professionals are skilled beyond “open and closed” questioning techniques, into more advanced questioning techniques. By thoughtfully inquiring about what’s at stake for customers, they can work together to minimize risks and achieve optimal outcomes.



Best Practice

Uncover the “Need Behind the Need”

A salesperson who has asked the right questions to uncover a customer need isn't quite ready to move on yet. To take the sales call to a deeper level, they must find out why the customer has the need and why it is important. At AchieveGlobal, we call this insight the “**need behind the need**,” and it is a critical component in every sales call.

The need behind the need is usually a larger goal customers want to accomplish that will ultimately drive their buying decision. Knowing this is especially useful when customers are specific about what they're looking for, yet it's not clear how you will help them if you provide what they want.

SKILL CHECK

Make sure your sales professionals come away from every sales call with an understanding of not only what product or service the customer is interested in, but *why*. Only then can the salesperson offer a solution that fully addresses all facets of the customer's needs.



Best Practice

Support and Acknowledge Customer Needs

Supporting is all about helping customers understand specifically how your company can satisfy their needs. Before attempting to provide support, it's crucial to ensure that the customer has indeed expressed a need, that there's clear understanding of the need, and that there is clarity about how the product or organization can address the need.

- The salesperson must fully and deeply understand the features (characteristics) and benefits (value to the customer) of your product or solution.
- If possible, it's better to draw a link between features and benefits and the need *behind* the customer's need.
- The salesperson should keep checking for acceptance as the conversation progresses.

As with other parts of the sales call, the salesperson can continue to earn the trust of the customer by demonstrating understanding and using language of acknowledgement...“That makes sense. I understand. You share the same viewpoint as many of our other customers.”

SKILL CHECK

Make sure your sales team understands the nuances of how and when to support customer needs. Timing and communication style will determine whether the conversation moves forward or stalls.



Best Practice

Respond The Right Way To Customer Concerns

At any point in the sales process, a customer may raise an objection, voice a concern, or express reluctance to make the commitment you are asking for. Generally speaking, customers have three types of concerns: skepticism, misunderstanding and drawbacks. In all cases, the salesperson will want to ask competent questions to understand the concern fully, and acknowledge the concern with honesty and empathy. Then it is important to **respond to the concern appropriately**:

- For skepticism, offer relevant proof.
- For misunderstandings, describe relevant features and benefits.
- For drawbacks, refocus on the bigger picture and outweigh the drawbacks with previously accepted benefits.

SKILL CHECK

Make sure your sales team understands the differences between the common types of customer concerns, and the distinctions in how to address concerns effectively to create an opportunity to move the sale forward.



Best Practice

Don't Jump The Gun On Negotiations

Salespeople can make negotiations difficult or even disastrous by negotiating when they don't really need to, or by jumping into the negotiation process too soon. To avoid putting your organization in a weak position, **salespeople should negotiate only after they have met four criteria:**

- Gained a conditional commitment from the customer
- Proposed deliverables, terms and conditions, and price
- Attempted to resolve each customer concern with selling skills
- Confirmed that all customer concerns have been expressed

Drawbacks are the most challenging of customer concerns. A salesperson who hears a drawback would be wise to make sure they understand the concern first, then to focus on the bigger picture and outweigh the drawback with benefits already accepted by the customer.

SKILL CHECK

Make sure your sales professionals know how to discern the four signs that tell them when it's time to switch from selling the value of what they originally proposed, into a negotiation situation.



Best Practice

Approach Negotiations From A Win-Win Perspective

To maintain positive relationships with stakeholders in your sales process, you'll want to avoid transactional negotiations. These are agreements in which one side of a negotiation gains at the expense of another. On the other hand, **consultative negotiations** (“Win-Win”) are much more effective, as the salesperson, sales organization and customer all perceive equal value to be gained from the exchange of business.

SKILL CHECK

Help your sales professionals learn to identify and prioritize customers’ “must-have” needs from “would-like-to-have needs” to guide the solutions you create. During negotiations, it will be important to ensure “must-have” needs are fully addressed to keep the tone positive and productive.



Best Practice

Align Buying And Selling Processes

When your customer's buying process seems to be out of sync with your organization's selling process, a promising relationship can grind to a halt. Make sure your salespeople are familiar with every step in your organization's selling process (initial call, presentation, demonstration, proposal, etc.). If a sale stalls, they should review the steps in the target account's buying process by talking with the customer or with someone familiar with the account.

SKILL CHECK

Consider implementing a **tool that will help your sales associates align buying and selling processes**. Areas where steps seem to be misaligned will become clear and can be addressed before it's too late. (You will also gain a more realistic idea of how long it might take to close a sale.)



Best Practice Make “Go–No Go” Decisions Wisely

Walking away from poor sales opportunities is as important to success as winning the rich ones. Sometimes you discover that a sale will take more time and effort than you thought, or that an account might be incompatible with your company’s resources, business plan, or way of doing business. In those cases, it’s time to decide whether to walk away to focus on more promising opportunities. Ask yourself these questions:

- Can we deliver?
- Can we deliver with an acceptable cost of sale?
- Do we have a positive relationship with the customer?
- Can we compete?
- Is this opportunity worth winning?

SKILL CHECK

In your coaching meetings, **help your salespeople apply criteria to decide whether or not to pursue an opportunity**, before getting too embroiled in trying to win a borderline account’s business.



Best Practice

Align Sales Targets To Your Account's Revenue Trends

Trying to quantify sales opportunities within a particular account often feels like a guessing game, but it doesn't have to be. By identifying trends in past sales to an account, relative to the account's growth, **you can put prior business in perspective to forecast the future more accurately.**

To determine buying patterns, list your account's expenditures on products and services like yours or if unknown, use the account's total revenue. Divide your sales to the account by total expenditures/revenues. Do this for a few specific time periods. If percentages are going up over time, you're on the right track. If percentages are going down, it's time to formulate a strategy to halt the decline.

SKILL CHECK

Work with your sales professionals to identify revenue trend figures for key accounts. If sales are declining in a particular account, help them explore the possible causes, and use your analysis to create a short-term sales goal and action plan.



Best Practice

Tailor Your Sales Approach For Key Players In Each Account

Successful salespeople excel at tailoring their sales approach to match the needs and roles of each person with whom they interact in their accounts.

It's important for the salesperson to figure out how each contact perceives their own organization's needs (the main categories are finance, performance, and image). **Finance-oriented people** want to increase revenue/profit or control costs. **Performance-oriented people** want to maintain productivity and workflow. **Image-focused people** want to improve the organization's prestige and credibility.

Underneath organizational needs are the personal needs that drive each player's business agenda. Most people are motivated by a need for **power, achievement, affiliation, recognition, order, and/or safety**. Shrewd salespeople expose their customers' personal needs and consider how they may affect sales efforts. Simple conversations can reveal much about a person's needs, and words and actions can be subtly adjusted to satisfy those needs. For example, you might make headway by responding quickly to those with high achievement needs, or by devoting time to small talk for those with high affiliation (relationship) needs.

SKILL CHECK

Make sure your sales team knows what sort of trigger words and phrases to listen for in customer conversations, so they can identify and cater to each individual's organizational and personal motivators.



Best Practice

Identify Ways To Stamp Your Enduring Presence Into An Account

Our studies of top sales performers reveal three roles that define successful consultative salespeople. Many salespeople excel at one or two of these areas, while top performers excel at all three.

- **Long term allies** work closely with the customer, even when there's no immediate sale involved. They maintain regular contact, demonstrate concern for the customer's interests, and build a track record of providing value.
- **Business consultants** educate customers about products and services in the context of the customer's "big picture." This requires a thorough knowledge of the customer's business and marketplace, a keen awareness of the customer's competition, and an accurate assessment of what the customer needs to gain market share.
- **Strategic orchestrators** gather all of your company's resources to meet customer needs, becoming, in effect, the customer's single point of contact. This may involve recruiting colleagues to solve customer issues. The ability to maintain good relationships within your own company is critical in this role, to be able to coordinate information, resources and activities needed to support the customer before, during and after the sale.

SKILL CHECK

Make sure your salespeople know what they should concentrate on to hone their skills in each of these three customer-facing key roles. And keep in mind that salespeople can't perform all of these roles on their own; they need strong organizational support to develop enduring customer relationships.



Best Practice

Go Higher, Wider and Deeper In Customer Accounts

One of the best ways to shield accounts from competition and other adverse influences is to **establish relationships at a variety of levels within the organization**. The key is to sell higher, wider and deeper. Try to connect with contacts at upper levels in the organization, even if they don't need to buy from you. By expanding the scope of relationships, you'll gain solid support and increase your visibility.

When you're dealing with a buying team, learn what role each member of the team plays if possible. This will ensure each player receives the proper attention. And when you identify new people you want to contact, ponder critical success factors that might be important to them, based on what you know of their role.

SKILL CHECK

Use external research resources, as well as internal influencers within your own organization, to help your team identify contacts and penetrate more deeply into key accounts.



Best Practice Create A Potent Value Proposition

This one is critical. **Every member of your selling team should be able to create a statement specifying in measurable terms how your product or service will provide value that gets customers excited about the potential of working with you.** This is especially important for complex sales or for instances when you don't want to compete on price alone.

Begin by reviewing your account's business issues and path to market leadership. Then identify the specific improvements your product will provide that support your account's path to market leadership. For each improvement, note the specific improvement measure and time frame. Assemble these elements in a single proposition. Be prepared to discuss your value proposition confidently.

SKILL CHECK

Make sure that every salesperson has the tools and training to be able to craft and deliver a powerful value proposition for each account.



Best Practice Inform To Empower

As we've said, the salesperson should focus on customer business needs and how your solutions might address those needs. But to be able to direct their energy into understanding the customer's business, your salespeople must first fully understand and embrace your own business.

Effective leaders build trust, empowerment, productivity and positive results by **keeping their teams informed of internal circumstances that impact their work**. In addition to honing your own communication practices, you might also broaden the level of communication up or down. Consider initiating a senior leadership presentation to your team about the organization's perception of the team's purpose and contribution. Or, encourage your associates to scan your business environment and share what they learn with the team; topics might include customer demographics, competition, technology, etc.

SKILL CHECK

Ask your sales team for feedback on how they prefer to receive communications, what they like about your current communication practices, and what might be missing.



Best Practice

Use Peer Coaching To Transfer Talent Between Team Members

When it comes to nuanced sales skills like ferreting out high potential customers, or crafting value propositions that resonate, **your seasoned “pros” often have honed practices that really work.** Why not take advantage of their knowledge to benefit less experienced or lower performing team members?

Start by identifying a learning opportunity and the appropriate peer coach. Be specific about what you want the individual to be able to do as a result of being coached. As you develop a plan for peer coaching and follow-up, consider encouraging the coaching to happen during real-time work. It's faster, more efficient, and more relevant. And above all, express your support and enthusiasm with the peer coach and the learner.

SKILL CHECK

Peer coaching works best when both people want to participate, so make it all right for either party to decline graciously (in which case, the sales leader should pick up the coaching).



Best Practice

Meet Four Customer Expectations To Own The Customer Experience

In today's business world, delivering an outstanding experience for customers is the key to competitiveness and business survival.

Your frontline team is responsible for delivering on your brand promise and owning the customer experience. In fact, while organizational policies and procedures do impact the customer experience, **it is the behavior and skills of people who engage with customers that will ultimately make or break your business.**

AchieveGlobal's extensive research has found that associates who work with customers must be able to understand emotions, express empathy, be good listeners, and above all, show genuine respect and care throughout every interaction. To attain customer satisfaction at a level that fosters loyalty, referrals and repeat business, associates should meet **four universal customer expectations:**

- Respect: Caring individual attention
- Simplicity: Behind-the-scenes activities to make life easier for customers
- Solutions: Honest effort to help solve customers' problems
- Responsibility: Timely delivery of exactly what is promised

SKILL CHECK

Associates who excel at delivering positive day-to-day experiences truly drive your business results. Make sure your frontline team has embraced the right attitude and approach to deliver on the four universal customer expectations.

Conclusion

In our research with sales professionals, we asked an open-ended question, summarized here as “what are the skills, abilities and behaviors that make a salesperson successful?” While the answers were colorful and varied, the most consistent responses focused on meeting customer needs:

- *“Ability to empathize with the customer, to be able to determine how to best satisfy their needs.”*
- *“Ability to listen and ask questions about a prospect’s key initiatives and strategies moving forward.”*
- *“Being honest, empathizing with the customer, never going back on your word.”*
- *“Customer service ability to adapt and adjust to any situation.”*
- *“You need to be able to read your customer.”*

Salespeople who demonstrate a deep understanding of their customers’ business environment and needs build the strongest, widest and deepest client relationships. It’s all about striking the delicate balance between listening and advising, uncovering information and sharing knowledge.

Salespeople who have a complete suite of sales tools and skills will be able to keep their focus on offering value that resonates throughout the customer organization – making even complex solutions tangible, encouraging joint ownership of solutions, and helping to ensure success.

By collaborating to create solutions with the customer, the salesperson climbs closer to becoming a truly trusted business advisor. The result is greater ability to achieve today’s sales goals and to maximize customer lifetime value.

Appendix A

Sales Performance Diagnostic Tool: Instructions for Sales Leaders

Step 1: Ask your sales professionals to complete Sales Diagnostics Parts I and II (see Appendix B). Allowing for anonymous responses will facilitate more candid and accurate results. Collect their results.

Step 2: For Sales Diagnostic **Part I**, add the number of points in each row for all of your sales professionals combined. Divide by the total number of responses. This will give you a total combined average score for each item. Enter the scores in the worksheet on page 39.

Example: *John's score (2) + Jill's score (4) + Joe's score (5) = 11 / total number of responses (3) = 3.67. See Example Item on page 39.*

Step 3: Repeat Step 2 for Sales Diagnostic Part II. Enter the scores on page 39.

Example: *John's score (3) + Jill's score (3) + Joe's score (3) = 9 / total number of responses (3) = 3.00. See Example Item on page 39.*

Step 4: Subtract the Part II scores from Part I scores. Enter the results on page 39.

Example: *3.67 – 3.00 = 0.67. See Example Item on page 39.*

A **negative number** indicates that your sales professionals generally believe their skill level is satisfactory in this performance area.

A **positive number** indicates that your sales professionals recognize their need for improvement in this area. This represents opportunity for skills training and development to sharpen sales performance in your organization. Contact AchieveGlobal for a consultation on how we might partner to meet your specific needs.

Appendix A

Sales Performance Diagnostic Tool: Worksheet for Sales Leaders

	Level of Importance (Combined Average Scores from Part I)	Skill Level (Combined Average Scores from Part II)	Difference (Part I-Part II score)
	Enter results from Step 2 below	Enter results from Step 3 below	Enter results from Step 4 below
Example Item	3.67	3.00	0.67
Creating advocates within the buying firm			
Gaining alignment across stakeholders			
Identifying your customer's goals			
Effectively allocating personal resources (time)			
Effectively allocating external resources (budget)			
Identifying gaps in your customer's business processes			
Understanding your customer's buying process			
Understanding your customer's business			
Identifying the risks associated with your customer's buying process			
Overcoming objections			
Understanding your business			
Identifying the key players in your customer's buying process			
Leveraging the key players in your customer's buying process			
Providing value at each stage in your customer's buying process			
Positioning solutions			
Engaging your customer in the consultation process			
Locating high potential customers			
Developing unique value propositions			

Appendix B

Sales Performance Diagnostic Tool: Part I for Sales Professionals

When thinking about your sales experience, please rate the level of importance of each activity below in being successful in selling situations:

	Unimportant (1 point)	Not Very Important (2 points)	Somewhat Important (3 points)	Important (4 points)	Very Important (5 points)
Creating advocates within the buying firm	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gaining alignment across stakeholders	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Identifying your customer's goals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Effectively allocating personal resources (time)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Effectively allocating external resources (budget)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Identifying gaps in your customer's business processes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding your customer's buying process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding your customer's business	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Identifying the risks associated with your customer's buying process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overcoming objections	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding your business	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Identifying the key players in your customer's buying process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leveraging the key players in your customer's buying process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing value at each stage in your customer's buying process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Positioning solutions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Engaging your customer in the consultation process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Locating high potential customers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing unique value propositions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix B

Sales Performance Diagnostic Tool: Part II for Sales Professionals

When thinking about your sales experience, how would you rate your own skill level in the following activities:

	Poor (1 point)	Fair (2 points)	Average (3 points)	Good (4 points)	Excellent (5 points)
Creating advocates within the buying firm	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gaining alignment across stakeholders	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Identifying your customer's goals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Effectively allocating personal resources (time)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Effectively allocating external resources (budget)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Identifying gaps in your customer's business processes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding your customer's buying process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding your customer's business	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Identifying the risks associated with your customer's buying process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overcoming objections	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding your business	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Identifying the key players in your customer's buying process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leveraging the key players in your customer's buying process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing value at each stage in your customer's buying process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Positioning solutions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Engaging your customer in the consultation process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Locating high potential customers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing unique value propositions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix C

Mapping Performance Gap Areas to Best Practices

To Improve Performance In...	See Best Practices:
Creating advocates within the buying firm	7, 15, 17, 21
Gaining alignment across stakeholders	7, 10, 11
Identifying your customer's goals	5, 7
Effectively allocating personal resources (time)	4, 13
Effectively allocating external resources (budget)	4, 14
Identifying gaps in your customer's business processes	7
Understanding your customer's buying process	12, 15, 17
Understanding your customer's business	1, 6
Identifying the risks associated with your customer's buying process	6, 10, 21
Overcoming objections	9, 10
Understanding your business	3, 19
Identifying the key players in your customer's buying process	15, 17
Leveraging the key players in your customer's buying process	15, 17
Providing value at each stage in your customer's buying process	16, 21
Positioning solutions	2, 8
Engaging your customer in the consultation process	6, 10
Locating high potential customers	1, 20
Developing unique value propositions	1, 18, 20

About AchieveGlobal

In the 21st century, the level of human skills will determine organization success. AchieveGlobal provides exceptional development in interpersonal business skills, giving companies the workforce they need for business results. Located in over 40 countries, we offer multi-language, learning-based solutions—globally, regionally, and locally.

We understand the competition you face. Your success depends on people who have the skills to handle the challenges beyond the reach of technology. We're experts in developing these skills, and it's these skills that turn your strategies into business success in the 21st century.

These are things technology can't do. Think. Learn. Solve problems. Listen. Motivate. Explain. People with these skills have a bright future in the 21st century. AchieveGlobal prepares you for that world.



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