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2017

THE YEAR OF

SALES

ENABLEMENT



By Leanne Hoagland-Smith, M.S.

Sales continues to be the lifeblood of any organization from the solo entrepreneur to the Fortune 500. Without sales, there is no money to pay the bills, the employees, or the stockholders.

In the last several years, we have witnessed considerable evolution in selling. This evolution has created a different perspective, one in which we must continually adjust from a microscope (little picture) to a kaleidoscope perspective (big picture).

Definitions

2016 saw a tsunami regarding this phrase: “sales enablement.” Many small to medium business (SMB) owners and even sales professionals, have not recognized just how this phrase can dramatically impact their sales results.

With all this focus on sales enablement, one would think there is just one definition. Think again.

A posting in the Forrester Blog shared this definition: “A strategic, ongoing process that equips all client-facing employees with the ability to consistently and systematically have a valuable conversation with the right set of customer stakeholders at each state of the customer’s problem solving life cycle to optimize the return of investment.”

CSO Insights provided this definition in their 2016 Sales Enablement Optimization Study: “A strategic,

cross-functional discipline designed to increase sales results and productivity by providing integrated content, training, and coaching services for salespeople and frontline sales managers along the entire customer’s journey, powered by technology.”

A Hubspot infographic identified three key elements of sales enablement:

- Process, practices, and technology improve performance and productivity
- Skill set of sales team increases sales
- Result of impact on sales team’s ability closes more deals

Believing simplicity is better than convoluted, wordy definitions that leave SMB owners or salespeople scratching their heads, this is my sense of the term sales enablement: *simply facilitates sustainable business growth in all organizations through people, processes, strategies, and tools.*

This definition recognizes the importance of technology as noted by CSO Insights as well as all people involved in the sustainable business growth. To ignore the other internal, non-sales people; non-sales managers; or non-sales executive employees, who indirectly work to create a sales culture of sustainable business growth, is frankly stupid. Just think how many customers have been turned off by an unfriendly customer service person, someone in accounting, or even an automated telephone process.

Components

A fully-embraced sales enablement process will require sales friendly tools such as customer relationship management (CRM) systems and learning management systems (LMS) along with integrated social media channels. To have a fully functional sales enablement process will demand a thorough, complete, written strategic plan.

No longer will a basic business plan submitted for bank financing suffice.

Sales enablement is truly an outgrowth of an integrated sales culture within the organization. Everyone in every business from the delivery person to the CEO is in sales.

Today, the word “culture” has replaced “organizational development.” Many SMB owners, top C-level executives, and employees are recognizing the importance of organizational culture. The more forward-thinking leaders realize organizational culture is really all about having a unified sales culture.

Working with mostly SMBs to top sales performers, I have come to believe that a sales culture is where everyone accepts personal accountability for his or her attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors and how those attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors will directly impact the revenue (sales) growth.

SMBs do not have the luxury of multiple departments staffed with numerous employees. With 97.7 percent of all U.S. businesses having fewer than 20 employees, each person in that SMB

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must take personal accountability for all interactions to ensure sustainable business growth. The impact of one non-accountable employee is far more damaging for these SMBs than for the much larger organizations.

It is important to note sales cultures are not limited to just for-profit businesses but are also evident in any organization from not-for-profits to education to even government.

Enablement or Culture?

As with any new term or idea, the question of what comes first arises and creates confusion as well as inertia as to what to do next. To help eliminate or reduce some of this confusion, I believe sales enablement strengthens a sales culture because it potentially

removes all the limitations, barriers, and obstacles that prevent sustainable business growth. Also, without personal accountability as noted within the sales culture, it is hard for sales enablement to achieve the desired end result of sustainable business growth.

When new ideas are embraced by SMB owners to executives, one can usually hear these questions being asked. Where should the focus be? What is the number one priority? What is more important: sales enablement or sales culture?

This discussion should not be about prioritizing one over the other but recognizing how these two terms work together to create sustainable business growth. Unfortunately, focusing on one or the other is scarcity thinking and diminishes abundance thinking.

The next question is who is responsible for sales enablement? The answer is simple: executive leadership is responsible for both sales culture and sales enablement. They direct the people, the processes, the strategies, and the tools in both instances.

This executive leadership responsibility then is carried downstream to all employees within the organization and not just the sales team. For example, with the increasing impact of technology, IT people must be involved for the software to run as efficiently and effectively as it should. To regulate sales enablement to just the sales team is a serious misstep on the part of the sales managers or executive leadership.

Forward thinking executive leadership may also impress the importance to other stakeholders within the supply chain. When vendors miss promised delivery dates, this limits the effectiveness of sales enablement.

Then there is the issue of cyber security. A data breach can have serious implications respective to sales enablement and ultimately sustainable business growth.

Yes, there exists numerous opportunities within the sales culture to remove barriers or address limitations that impede sales enablement. Funny thing is that many of these barriers or limitations also impede a high performing sales culture.

Misalignment between people, processes, and strategies as noted by Linda Martin and David Mutchler

in the book *Fail-Safe Leadership* is a symptom of not only ineffective leadership, but it also indicates this often missed symptom when it comes to sales effectiveness.

Rationale

What I find completely intriguing is the question not being asked: Why should I or we care about sales enablement or sales culture? For any organization to achieve sustainable business growth requires an understanding and a focus on both sales culture and sales enablement. Both are necessary in today's ever-evolving market.

Sales enablement and sales culture work together. You can't have one without the other.

With 2016 coming to an end and 2017 just beginning, this is a great time to bring out the strategic plan and do a culture assessment. Reviewing data from the assessment makes determining the gaps between sales



culture and enablement much easier. Unfortunately, in the rush to get with the flow or ahead of the flow, some executives in management or sales leadership roles fail to invest the time necessary to ensure clarity and, hence, effective execution of sales enablement within their existing sales culture.

From everything I have read and continue to read, sales enablement is taking hold and is not going away. Many

of the changes experienced within the selling and buying interactions have led to this concept of sales enablement.

I predict in 2017, there will be greater emphasis on aligning sales enablement to the buying behaviors. Given that sales research suggests anywhere from 40 to 60 percent of the buying decision is made before reaching out to any solution providers, it would appear logical to focus more on the buying behaviors of the decision makers. To be able to embrace this focus will require all businesses to align their sales enablement process, hence their sales culture, to anticipate the far more educated buyer's decision making process. **N**

Leanne Hoagland-Smith is THE People and Process Problem Solver. As a thought leader who challenges the status quo, she earned the position of judge for the 1st 2015 North American Women in Sales Awards. Follow her on Twitter @CoachLee.