



The Sales Leader... Delivering a Sales Playbook with 8 Tactics

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Sales leadership involves setting a vision and direction that define the business development culture within your organization. It includes setting goals, objectives, and top priorities for your firm and empowering those who have sales responsibilities to achieve success.

The creation of a sales culture is ultimately the most important thing a firm can do for all its stakeholders. Yet, most agencies cannot definitively answer the question of who leads the firm's recruiting and development efforts. The all-too-common "we're all responsible" approach is a perfect recipe for getting nothing meaningful done, as no one is ultimately responsible or accountable for the strategy's success in any practical sense.

A gifted sales leader delivers a sales playbook that defines the vision, strategy, capabilities, processes, behaviors, tactics, resources, services, target markets, and performance indicators to enable his or her team to consistently win. Sales leaders come in many forms. He or she may be an agency principal, practice group leader, part-time producer, or person solely dedicated to producer development. In contrast to a sales manager who directs, influences, and controls, the sales leader coaches, mentors, and empowers.

Leading Sales Organizations

Reagan Consulting authored a study related to sales leadership in 2012: *Leading Sales Organizations*. You may find the following findings to be of interest:

- Only 17% of the agencies surveyed employ a full-time sales manager. And interestingly, the results of these firms fall short (by 2.2% revenue profit) of those firms without one.
- For the majority of firms (51.5%), one or more members of the agency's executive team is responsible for sales management.
- The investment in a new producer is a significant expense...especially understanding that the attrition rate hovers around 45% after three years. It is not uncommon to see an investment of \$200,000 to \$300,000 or more over the first three years of a producer's development. This investment does not contemplate the significant time and resource allocation required.
- Far too many agencies do not have an "intentional approach" to producer training and development, often letting producers sink or swim on their own. The survey evidenced that almost half of the producers have no mentoring system. Yet, research confirms that mentoring is especially effective in boosting success rates among producers.
- There are three primary elements to sales leadership: 1) Equipping producers for success, 2) creating a culture of accountability, and 3) recruiting and development new producers. That being said, someone has to own sales leadership. This person must be fully empowered to take responsibility of addressing each of the three elements.
- Agencies that have developed resources for its sales team for client acquisition and retention are growing faster than those firms that choose not to invest in value-added services and solutions. Furthermore, these resources enhance the agency's ability to attract and retain talent.
- The development of a defined "sales process" is also within the DNA of top-performing organizations. The sales process encompasses how to initially identify a prospect all the way through the delivery of services and stewardship once they have secured the business. The sales process is a key ingredient to the new producer's training platform. It is also important to note that there is also institutional buy-in of the process within these firms.
- High-performing agencies measure what they want to manage, and manage what they measure using a level of detail that creates a culture of accountability. This includes, but is not limited to, prospect pipeline maturity, new business hit ratio, key accounts under competition, customer engagement, retention, and cross-sell results.

- When producers are not meeting expectations, leading sales organizations take steps to find out why. And customize support strategies. For some, this involves deeper training and education. For others, it may be a change in their target market. While others need coaching in areas ranging from active listening to priority management to the art of closing the deal.
- The traditional lead generation approach of dialing-for-dollars and blindly calling for expiration dates does not exist in the cultures of high-performing agencies. It has been replaced by more sophisticated initiatives that are highly focused on targeted industries or geographic segments.

The Sales Playbook

The sales playbook is a collection of tactics or methods that characterize the roles and responsibilities of the sales leader as well as his or her business development team. The playbook lays out clear objectives, identifies metrics for measurement, and provides a common framework and approach for client acquisition and expansion.

Beyond Insurance has the privilege of developing sales playbooks for agencies within the Beyond Insurance Global Network (BIGN). The following eight tactics serve as a sampling of recommended strategies that drive success:

1. **Start with WHY.** WHY is one's cause, purpose, or belief. It is the essence of a person's professional existence. It is the reason you got out of bed this morning. Today's consumers want and need to know WHY. Why you? Why your producers? Why your organization? An effective sales leader knows WHY and instills it in his or her sales force.
2. **Unique Abilities Assessment.** A gifted sales leader also understands the unique abilities of each sales professional. One's unique ability is best characterized as 1) a superior attribute that other people notice and value, 2) love doing and want to do it as much as possible, 3) energizes the producer and others around him or her, and 4) the producers keeps getting better, never running out of possibilities for further improvement.
3. **Skill Development Plan.** As a football coach evaluates and develops the skills of his players, so does a sales leader. And, when development needs are identified, a skill developmental plan is put in motion. Skill development areas encompass creating positive first impressions, active listening, value proposition development, relationship management, the art of negotiation, personal branding, reading body language, emotional intelligence, work/life balance, handling objections, and more.
4. **Goal-Setting.** The ability to create visions and set goals is essential to the personal and professional growth of your business development team. Visions allow them to see themselves at some point in the future, while goals offer a roadmap to reach these

visions. The sales leader is keenly aware that there is nothing more rewarding than serving as a mentor in enabling each producer to set goals to reach these visions and focusing in as the visions become reality. An astute sales leader empowers each member of his or her team to set SMART goals: S-specific, M-measurable, A-achievable, R-realistic, T-time-bound.

5. **Prospecting Strategy Map.** A strategic prospecting system starts by facilitating the sales professional's ability to have a clear picture of his or her ideal prospect. Knowing the target market takes on many scenarios including industry-focused and product-focused specialization. The sales leader is also aware of the importance of arming the producers with a potent value proposition, pipeline management plan, and phone and first interview scripts.

The most telling attribute of a top-notch producer is his or her ability to consistently fill the prospect pipeline with qualified opportunities. It is here that the sales leader shows his or her value through establishing a plan through which producers develop their networks, research industries, get involved in trade associations, community involvement, and social media strategies.

6. **Tools, Tactics, and Processes.** *Leading Sales Organizations* revealed that the first element to sales leadership is equipping producers for success. While the tactics and methods outlined in 1 through 5 above are foundational to producer success, it is equally important that the sales leader equip his or her producers with tools, tactics, and processes to distinguish themselves in the marketplace. A tactic is a method, procedure, or strategy. A process, on the other hand, is a sequence of interdependent and linked procedures...a series of actions or steps taken to achieve a particular end. The acquisition of new business as well as the cross-selling of existing business requires discipline and strategy supported by tools, tactics, and processes.
7. **Prospect Qualification Filter (PQF).** It is also the role of the sales leader to require his or her producers to show discipline in determining the degree to which prospective clients meet predetermined criteria. The PQF protects the time, confidence, reputation, and money of all involved in the agency. The savvy sales leader requires that his or her producers 1) understand the depth of the relationship the prospect has with the incumbent agent, 2) gain access to the management team or head of household, and 3) determine the prospect's enthusiasm for the firm's unique processes before committing time and resources.
8. **Accountability.** The Reagan Study evidenced that few agencies actually possess a true culture of accountability as relates to producer development. Accountability starts with putting someone in charge with defined tools and responsibilities.

Accountability encompasses producer recruiting, skill development, goal-setting, prospect pipeline plans, the utilization of a prospect qualification filter as well as the

design and execution of tools, tactics, and processes for client acquisition and cross-sell. The sales leader must also measure what is to be managed and confirm his or her firm's compensation system is directly tied to agreed-upon success indicators, including activity, skill development, and goal actualization.

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About the Author

Scott Addis, CPCU, CRA, CBWA is the CEO of Beyond Insurance and is recognized as an industry leader having been named a Philadelphia finalist for *Inc. Magazine's* "Entrepreneur of the Year" award as well as one of the "25 Most Innovative Agents in America." Beyond Insurance is a consulting firm that offers leadership training, cultural transformation, and talent and tactical development for enlightened professionals who are looking to take their practice to the next level. Since 2007, the proven and repeatable processes of Beyond Insurance have transformed individuals and organizations as measured by enhanced organic growth, productivity, profitability, and value in the marketplace.