

Why You Need a Sales Playbook

*Define Your Company's Best Practices
at Each Step of the Buying Cycle*

A growth-oriented 10-year old telecommunications company with 350 salespeople worldwide had achieved a successful start-up by targeting a market niche with a quality product at a lower price-point. But competitors then responded by lowering their prices, so the company's salespeople were no longer able to sell based on a lower price.

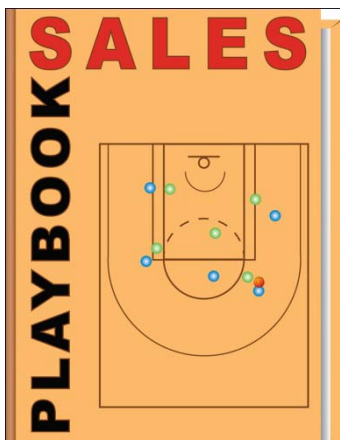
This triggered a need for an entirely new sales strategy. Instead of calling on price-focused buyers, the company's salespeople needed to sell larger, more profitable communication *solutions* to core-function business executives (the end users).

The dilemma was how to make the switch in sales strategy happen quickly and smoothly. The company had not trained its salespeople on a single sales process so there wasn't a common starting point. There was no sharing of best practices.

Nor did the company have a defined process for large-account "solution selling." They knew that different decision makers in potential client firms would view their value proposition differently, and their different product offerings added still another variable that increased the complexity of the sales process. The Company had no documentation on the kinds of differences that salespeople would encounter in this new environment, nor how to sell effectively in each situation.

Naturally, training its sales force on a single process was part of the answer for this company. But they used that training for a secondary purpose: creating a company sales playbook.

In one of the first training workshops, the company brought together a group of peak sales performers and sales managers. The basic workshop we deliver teaches salespeople an 8-step sales model built around the steps of a customer's buying process.



Throughout the workshop, different subgroups of participants each focused on a different decision maker type seen in client accounts. Salespeople documented their recommendations on the best sales practices for each step of the buying process along with a sales call planning tool. The company then captured these recommendations in a new Sales Playbook—which became an integral part of subsequent sales training workshops (for the rest of the sales force). It has also been used for new-hire ramp up plans and situational coaching discussions at specific milestones during the sales process.

A Practical, Tailored Tool

For the telecommunications company, having a Sales Playbook was a critical tool in helping them adopt an entirely new and consistent sales approach across the globe. But every company with a sales force can benefit from having one source that describes best sales practices.

A Sales Playbook is a situation-specific tool that describes that company's sales best practices. Is a new salesperson about to meet with a Director of Marketing to perform diagnostic questioning in order to identify and develop customer needs? The Sales Playbook will provide the specific problems that your company can solve for that type of decision-maker, and the suggested questions to ask to uncover those issues and concerns. Capturing information like this for the entire sales process means the Sales Playbook provides the right information to the salesperson at specific points in the buying process.

Some Sales Playbooks can also include best practices for sales managers, such as specific milestones for managers to coach the salesperson through.

Developing a Sales Playbook

Developing the playbook in the manner described here for the telecommunications company—using your company's sales superstars in a training session—carries a number of advantages:

- **Low cost:** There really is no additional or incremental cost associated with developing a Sales Playbook this way, other than desktop publishing. Provided you select a comprehensive sales training program, such as the one

my company provides, that covers the entire buy-sell cycle. Invest a little more to plug it in to your CRM application.

- **Tailored:** Because it's your own salespeople who are contributing the content for the playbook, it is automatically tailored to the specific kinds of sales situations your sales force will encounter.
- **Complete:** Assuming that the sales training program your company chooses examines the entire buy-sell process, the exercises used to generate the Playbook content will produce a "picture-perfect" collection of best sales practices for the entire sales process. It should contain best practices in areas such as diagnostic questioning, solution positioning, sales presentations, understanding relationships between members of the buying team, sales negotiations, etc.

The documentation in an internally developed Sales Playbook can be especially helpful if your salespeople have to deal with different types of decision makers in client companies. For one thing, your company's value proposition is likely different depending on whom you're selling to—the problems and needs of a Director of HR are different from those of a Director of Marketing or a VP of R&D. Who better to guide your new salespeople through the minefield than your own top salespeople?

- **Credibility:** Because the Playbook is created by your company's best and brightest the Playbook has instant credibility with everyone else in the organization.

In short, a Sales Playbook is a way to capture sales expertise from your peak performers, and download that expertise into a tool that everyone can use. It extends the value of a single sales training session far beyond the end of the seminar.

Start Now!

No professional sports team would even consider taking the field without their players having studied and mastered their team's Playbook. Shouldn't your sales team do the same?

Still wondering if having a Sales Playbook would benefit your sales organization? Well, perhaps a better question to ask would be this: Suppose you bring your top salespeople together for a sales development workshop, would they have something to say that would benefit everyone else in the sales

organization? The obvious answer is, “Yes!” So why not “capture” best practices and repurpose them into a tool for the entire sales force? That’s the power of a Sales Playbook.



Kevin Davis, president of TopLine Leadership, is the author of ***Slow Down, Sell Faster! Understand Your Customer’s Buying Process and Maximize Your Sales***, available wherever books are sold. His company provides custom workshops based on the “Slow Down, Sell Faster!” sales model, as well as a Sales Management Leadership workshop for sales managers. Contact Kevin through his website at www.toplineleadership.com