



STRIKING THE BALANCE BETWEEN SALES CULTURE SHIFT & SALES SKILL DEVELOPMENT



A WHITEPAPER BY THE BROOKS GROUP

It's no secret. The face of sales has changed.

In the past, the focus was on closing deals: get the customer to buy your product at virtually any cost. Cut price, overpromise, commit to things that your organization may or may not be able to deliver on, but get them to buy.

As a result, people have developed an innate distrust of salespeople and a subsequent dislike for the companies that they represent. The old ways of selling are no longer effective.

What's the solution? A shift, not just in your basic tactics, but by recalibrating your entire sales culture. The focus needs to be not on the company, but on the customer and their experience with you.

Quite frankly – and this is important – the new focus needs to be on how their company will somehow improve as a result of doing business with you. What do they need? How can you help them meet those needs, and how can you give them a positive view of your company? This sales culture shift is being affected at companies all over the world.

However, this culture shift doesn't preclude the need for training in basic sales tactics and developing essential sales skills. Even when shifting your focus, the ultimate goal still is to sell to the customer. So how do you strike a balance between this sales culture shift and essential sales skill development? Here are a few things to keep in mind.

Start at the Top

The first steps to take in any sales culture shift should be defining your purpose and developing the ability to articulate it at the senior executive levels.

Then, senior leadership must drive that purpose into the minds of those at the sales management levels. This point is critical: buy-in at the sales management level will either make or break your sales culture shift initiative. Your front-line sales leadership needs to support the changes that are being made and be able to advocate those changes to the sales reps on an ongoing basis. If the people in positions of leadership in your company don't buy into the changes, then there's no way your sales reps will.



So how do you get sales management to buy into the culture shift?

First, they need to understand it and that means training. Too often, all the emphasis in a sales strategy is placed on training the sales reps. Sales training is important, of course, but sales management needs to be trained first on how to position and coach to the new culture.

Those in leadership need to be trained in the strategies and the policies and tactics that support them, so that they can be in a better position to coach them. They also need to be shown the ultimate purpose of these changes. Why is your company implementing these changes? What are the benefits? Understanding that makes them better equipped to communicate them.

Changing your sales culture should include having your finger on the pulse of what's going on in your company. That includes knowing what customers are looking for, so that your sales reps can help them. It also includes making sure that management is in touch with the sales reps, so they can help them get a handle on the changes that are being made. Too often, management is out of touch with what sales reps are actually dealing with in the field. Training them will provide a better idea of what the policies being implemented are like, and how they work.



Choose the Right People

Good training is essential to sales skill development.

When affecting a culture shift inside of the sales organization, your sales process training procedures are one of the first things you should look at. Are the skills and tactics you're teaching to your employees conducive to creating a meaningful customer experience? However, training will only get you so far.

If you really want to shift your sales culture, you need to look at the personalities of the people on your team currently as well as the people you'll be hiring in the future. We've found that the salespeople who can thrive inside of a sales-driven culture have the following:

- **Job Skills** – Product and marketplace knowledge to include experience either in your industry or an industry like yours.
- **Sales Skills** – These are capacities related to a person's capacity to understand and apply state-of-the-art selling skills relative to appropriate levels of prospecting, selling and account management functions.
- **Personal Skills** – Those individual capacities that determine a person's ability to implement the job and sales skills they possess. These are attributes like self-starting capacity, self management, personal motivation, consistency and literally scores of other, essential skills.

More importantly, their combination of the skills above match up with your unique cultural environment... the "new norm."

That isn't to say that you should fire your current sales team because they have the "wrong" instincts. But it might be a good idea to add some new blood. And when you DO hire new people, look for people who are naturally suited to your new sales environment. To do that, use behavioral interviewing. Give them various stimuli and gauge their reactions in certain situations. See if they exhibit the qualities that you're looking for. It's a more effective way of vetting new hires than simply looking at their history.



Speak the Right Language

One of the necessary skills to develop as you shift your culture is the language with which sales reps speak to their prospects and customers. When your main concern is making the sale at all costs, the language sales reps use has a certain feel to it. That feel includes a sense of artificial urgency and a non-consultative approach, among other things, trying to get the customer to commit as quickly as possible. As a result, whether intentionally or not, they end up making the customer feel uncomfortable. That general discomfort is why people tend to distrust sales people and get suspicious whenever they start to hear a “pitch.”

That’s why you need to shift away from those traditional sales pitches and to a culture that’s specifically geared towards helping the customer get what they want. The language used when doing that is very different from typical “sales language.” It has a softer, friendlier feel. It’s less immediately action oriented language and more oriented toward problem solving. It means asking questions, pinpointing the customer’s area of interest or concern, and helping them find the best solution for the best value. You need to teach these shifts in language use to your sales reps, and make sure that it’s done uniformly across your company. Shifting away from typical sales language is one of the most important ways to make customers feel more comfortable. It will help put the focus on them, rather than on you and your company.

Develop Sales Tools

One of the most important ways of balancing your culture shift with skill development is with the tools you use. If you’re going to change your selling environment, then you’re going to need new sales tools. Then, once you’ve got those tools, you can train your team in how to use them effectively.

How do you go about developing new sales tools that are better suited to your new objectives?

Collaborate with marketing. They can create content that’s designed to draw in potential customers and build their trust in your company and your brand. For instance, they might run a blog that answers important questions customers have about your field and products. They can create whitepapers and ebooks that provide instructions in how to do something the customer is having trouble with. There’s no limit to the kinds of content they can create to get your brand out into the world.



Once they've created this content, though, your salespeople need to incorporate it into their selling strategy and tactics. Knowing what content a potential customer has viewed/downloaded from your site gives your salespeople clues as to where their interests lie within your field. This in turn helps them target their sales interactions to address customer wants and needs. This also works the other way. When a potential customer expresses a particular need or interest, salespeople can nurture it by sending content that's geared to that interest.

Conclusion

The suggestions above are more than simple policy changes. They represent a fundamental change in the philosophy of your entire sales organization...and in fact your entire company. You're changing the standard you use for hiring sales reps and the way in which you train them. You're integrating your marketing department into the mix in ways you'd never dreamed of before, and setting a focus on creating content. The entire structure of your company needs to reflect the shifts you're making in your sales culture. If you don't fully commit, then the changes you're making won't hold, and you'll slowly start shifting back to the way you were before.

This may seem like a lot of work to go through, but it's worth it.

It's not only beneficial to your company, it's necessary if you want to stay competitive. Shifting to a focus on customer wants, rather than sales at any cost, will change the way customers see your company. It will make them more likely to buy from you, thus increasing your sales and revenue. Not only that, this change in your company's image will make people more likely to approach you the next time they need something, and the next, leading to repeat business. The face of sales is changing. If you change with it, you can increase your sales like never before. If you don't, you'll just end up getting left behind. If a salesperson can't bring anymore value than what the prospect can get on their own (on the Internet, in catalogues, etc.) then there's absolutely no reason for them to meet with you.



Key Takeaways:

- Start at the Top
- Choose the Right People
- Speak the Right Language
- Develop Sales Tools

About The Brooks Group

With nearly 40 years of industry experience, The Brooks Group achieves sustainable sales culture transformation for clients by delivering targeted training that becomes operationalized by threading into an organization's existing systems.

The Brooks Group takes a holistic approach to practical culture shifts and focuses on customized "street smart" sales and sales management programs, with a high level of relevance and practicality for the individual learner. Training gets reinforced with an industry-leading cloud-based sales and sales management coaching platform.

For more information

The Brooks Group can be reached by phone at (800) 633-7762, by email at Contact@TheBrooksGroup.com or online at TheBrooksGroup.com.

