



Don't Sell the Value - BE the Value!

"What causes prospects to take action and buy - from you?"
Dave Kurlan has the answer

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World Class Sales Performance – The Defining Difference

Jonathan Farrington interviews Tamara Schenk, Research Director for the MHI Research Institute.

JF: *Most organizations seek top performers who can help to grow the company, but I know that you and the team at MHI Research Institute continuously research this idea of top “performer”. What would you say is the defining difference that sets a world class top-performer from the rest?*

TS: As our research shows, most organizations know their top performers, but often, they don't know why these people are top performers. There is a defining difference that can be observed and mapped to performance, and that's the individual behavior. Three behaviors are key to top

performance, and that's providing perspective, conscious collaboration and performance accountability.

JF: *How would you define perspective?*

TS: Providing Perspective is a customer core engagement and messaging principle that is based on the idea that we really need to understand the customer's business needs in order to provide

a solution that meets the customer's desired results. Sales professionals who provide perspective work backwards from the customer's specific context, their challenges, and their situation. They also analyze the entire customer community - that means all involved stakeholders and their different approaches how to solve the problem or how to master the challenge. Based on that, top performers also analyze the specific decision dynamic of how this customer is going to make a decision this time, since all customers make decisions in different ways. Based on this wisdom, they map these findings to their own portfolio of products, services and solutions to come up with a tailored approach that enables the customer to achieve their desired results and wins. Providing perspective is a "this is how you can achieve your goals" approach rather than "this is what I want to sell to you". More on that can be found in this [infographic](#) and this [blog post](#).

JF: Insuring that there is this tailored approach doesn't guarantee success but increases the likelihood of success. One size fits all just doesn't work anymore does it?

TS: Absolutely--all aspects are different—Customers are different, the buying situation is different, goals and the people who are involved are different. Sales professionals need adaptive competencies to connect the dots between their experience, skills,

knowledge, strategies and expertise to really understand the customer's situation and to provide a valuable perspective that makes a difference in terms of value creation.

JF: What are the key success tactics to provide perspective?

TS: Yes, there are a few prerequisites that have to be in place that are also success factors: Coaching is a key leadership element that has to be in place at the frontline sales managers. Value messaging in a customer core way is sales enablement's responsibility and of course - collaboration as a mindset and a practical way of working together to achieve better results in a shorter amount of time.

JF: Obviously you have studied this concept of coaching quite a bit, and head up our community on Enablement. Most sales coaches know that they should be coaching, but what makes for effective coaching?

TS: The data shows that coaching is effective, when it follows an integrated approach and when it's focused on improving the quality of the right sales activities and behaviors that lead to the desired sales objectives. That means the coaching framework and the coaching guidelines for frontline sales managers have to have the same foundation as the enablement approach. If so, coaching is a natural reinforcement of all enablement and training services. If coaching doesn't

happen or if it follows a different approach, it is setting all the enablement investments at risk. No sales leader can afford such a situation – this is why understanding the dependencies between coaching and enablement services is so important.

JF: I read a statistic that less than 25% of sales managers are spending more than 15 hours per week coaching. Is that your experience?

TS: It is different in different industries depending on the complexity of the business. The research shows that getting started on a regular practice of coaching is much more important than focusing on the amount of time. Preliminary results from our latest research indicate that coaching has a high priority but does not have a time-wise urgency.

JF: I also read that less than 50% of sales managers do no coaching at all.

TS: This is where sales execution should happen and obviously doesn't happen. It comes down to the fact that this role is often not very well defined. Often, they were the best sales person and if so, the new sales manager continues to sell and manages the people but and is not leveraging the potential of the team.

JF: Let's take that second success tactic to provide perspective—value messaging. We've heard that expression but

what is most critical to be able to deliver value messaging?

TS: The most critical thing is to understand the customer journey; the entire journey from when they first discover the problem and a challenge to understand potential solutions then through the buying cycle and into implementation. It also means to accept that there is no longer a “one size fits all” value proposition. Value messages to be successful follow a dynamic and a modular approach; they have to be tailored to the different phases of the customer’s journey and to the different involved stakeholders. Value messaging parallels perspective and works backwards from the customer context and value messaging has to show customers different ways to achieve results and how they can create more success for themselves. Many times organizations provide the value messages and say here it is, but sales professionals have to learn how to deliver those value messages especially if they are addressing different buyer roles. Value messages address the customer’s context, help them to think differently, and they help them to understand the broader scope of a problem and its business impact and how to solve and to achieve the desired results. This is why content services and training services have to be well integrated and to go hand in hand.

JF: In order to deliver value messages do you think that a level of commercial bandwidth, experience, knowledge, know-how is needed?

TS: Absolutely. This gets down to what is the strategic enablement approach, and it is not only about knowledge. Knowledge is key, but the sales professional needs even more knowledge in different areas; in industries and verticals, in markets, in products and services, understanding the business, understanding value chains, verticals and they need to have the selling and conversational skills in place and the ability to play with the situation. Adaptive competencies are necessary to quickly adjust behaviors to a different, new or complex situation. All of that has to come together.

JF: Collaboration was the third key success tactic to providing perspective. Are there specific ways that top performing sales groups demonstrate collaboration?

TS: First an organization has to be calibrated for collaboration that means that we have to remove barriers. And barriers can be responsibility or budget barriers and sales leadership needs to remove these barriers and then collaboration has to be enabled based on a framework approach. Then technology can help. Conscious collaboration is one of the defining elements of world-class sales performers, as our 2014 Sales Best Practices Study showed. The purpose of collaboration is always to achieve

better results in a shorter amount of time. Collaboration allows individuals with disparate areas of expertise and different roles to work together in ad hoc scenarios through a common language and strategic frameworks. Collaboration connects teams, organizations and companies. It’s how they work together to multiply their individual contributions.

JF: The MHI Sales Best Practices Study captures and measures the behaviors, attributes and performance of World-Class Sales performance around the globe. How can we learn more about these concepts and how can people participate?

TS: People can participate by clicking on this [link](#).

What’s special for the readers of Top Sales World magazine is that we have created a page where people can also get access to an infographic on perspectives. And of course, survey attendees get exclusive first access to the full study results in Q1 2015 and immediate access to our research note “The Next Level of Transparency”.

We are grateful and happy for everyone to participate; it’s a giving and receiving process. ■

You can also listen to the audio version of this interview [HERE](#).

Tamara Schenk is the Research Director for the MHI Research Institute. Visit [here](#).

