

IMPROVING YOUR SALES IS (ALL) ABOUT *leadership*, REALLY

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Focussing on the behaviour and approach of your sales leaders will generate fast and lasting results in your top line. Most likely, the investment you make will pay itself back in less than half a year. The key to success is to avoid over-complicating sales tools and processes and to identify and focus on the two to three behavioural changes that speed up your sales.

Do you have an ambition to improve your top-line results? If so, you are definitely not alone. Every chief sales officer, sales director, sales manager and sales rep go to work every morning with the purpose of increasing revenue growth.

Because of this, many spend a considerable amount of time and resources contemplating and trying to find good ways to achieve this goal. This frequently

results in a myriad of initiatives, and most often, the initiatives are focussed on the commercial frontline, i.e. the sales reps and account managers who are doing the day-to-day sales operations. The initiatives often take the form of training programmes, revised sales scripts or maybe even a brand-new CRM system.

Short-lived improvements rarely deliver lasting impact

While these initiatives may provide some benefits to the commercial frontline, they are often short-lived. In other words, after a few months of optimism and some top-line effect, the commercial frontline is back to square one. Another month or two later, new initiatives are introduced – and the cycle starts all over.

During the past 20 years, we at Implement have witnessed a multitude of these cycles take place across a variety of industries. Admittedly, we too have had the perception that this was probably the way to go.

Fortunately, we are wiser today.

Sales leadership holds the key to top-line growth

When we evaluated the more than 200 B2B companies that we have helped improve their sales force in the past 20 years, we noticed an interesting pattern. No matter the industry, sales methodology or CRM system applied, there is one thing which works every single time, and which also continues to work for years going forward: changing the behaviour of the sales leadership team.

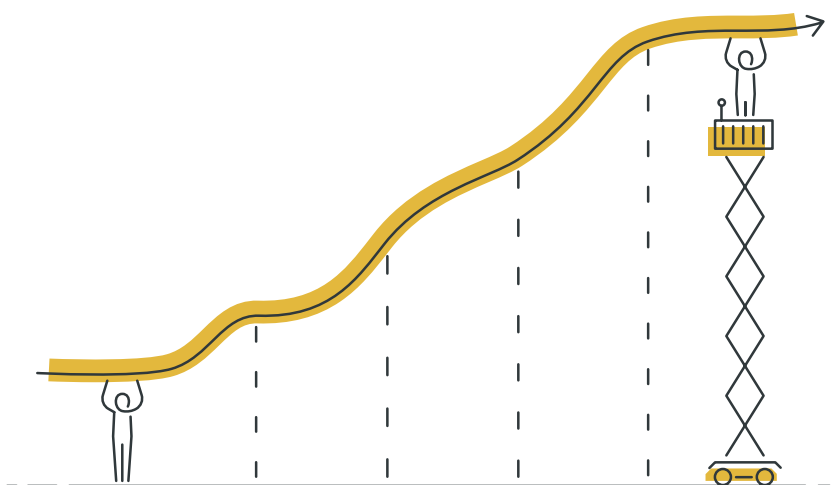
Why does this work? One very simple answer is to look at change in the same way as one of our heroes, Professor Ralph Stacey from the University of Hertfordshire. He has put it very simply: if you want to change behaviour in an organisation, you need to change the conversations you are having. In other words: What are the topics of our conversations? What words are we using, and what do we emphasise? According to Stacey, leaders – and in your case, sales leaders – are instrumental in defining how we talk, the structure we apply to our conversations and the quality of them.

5 simple steps to improving sales leadership behaviour

It is our experience that there is a very simple, yet extremely powerful, way of changing the conversations in your sales leadership team. The process roughly follows five steps:

1. Ask yourself what you would like to change. Looking at the sales equation, this would typically constitute one or more of the following four elements:
 - Increase the number of opportunities
 - Improve your win rate
 - Increase the average order size
 - Decrease your sales cycle time
2. Work with your sales leadership team to zoom in on the dialogues between sales leaders and sales reps and define the guiding/coaching elements that sales leaders should provide in everyday work to increase the performance of the chosen elements.
3. Formalise the dialogues and ensure that they take place in an organised manner and in a set cadence.
4. Support your sales leaders in being comfortable with engaging in these new dialogues and allow them the right setting to gradually improve and share their experience.
5. Kick off the new way of working and stick to it.

And it works. In a recent project with a global B2B company in the manufacturing industry, our client succeeded in increasing its number of opportunities by 18% and the value of the pipeline by 33% in just six months.



Another recent client, this one in the financial services industry, managed to increase its revenue by more than 9% in just 10 months. In this case, across 14 countries from Finland to the United Arab Emirates. Both companies did so merely through changing their sales leaders' behaviour – and without adding any additional resources to the sales force.

- Last but not least, the process itself ensures strong ownership in the sales force, as it is based on a process of co-creation and of utilising best practices that already exist in your organisation. As anyone who has worked with change management knows, this is the number one way to ensure lasting change.

In addition to generating strong business results, focussing on your sales leaders and following the five-step process is advantageous in other ways:

- First of all, it allows sales leaders to become true leaders of sales – to guide and coach their teams to win. After all, this is why most of them chose their line of work.
- Secondly, sales becomes less of a one-man show and more of a team effort. This profoundly increases employee engagement and reduces churn – the latter unfortunately being a well-known challenge especially for younger sales reps.

We are not saying that focussing on your sales leaders is the only way to quickly improve top-line performance. What we are saying, however, is that focussing on your sales leaders is an extremely effective and efficient way to generate rapid and profound top-line impact, while at the same time boosting engagement in your sales force.

If you are interested in seeing some examples of how the approach is applied in practice or would like some pointers on where to start, feel free to reach out to one of us.

