

Creating Selling Organization Accountability

by Ken Evans

Most salespeople appreciate the value in bringing cross-functional teams together for account and business planning. The teams are invigorated when they leave such sessions, but for most, life returns quickly to business as usual. How can sales leaders predictably manage their teams to accountable actions and results?



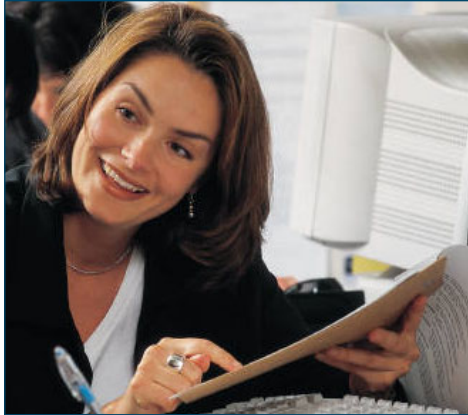
The Ideal vs. Reality. You've just returned from a great strategic account planning session. All the players were there—sales, delivery, SMEs, marketing, customer service. The energy brought to a particularly complex account was supercharged, following a year when not everyone had been on their game and you lost ground with the account. You left the session with a comprehensive plan, including some new, high-potential offerings. Everyone had signed on for it, and your executive sponsor had blessed it. As you approached your car, tired but jazzed, you thought, "This is the way account planning is supposed to work."

Fast forward. Reality sets in—emails, voicemails, customer complaints, month-end issues, a call from Legal on a contractual issue. The team is determined to advance the account, but it's like chipping away at an iceberg with an ice pick.

The follow-up team call 30 days after the session is a disaster. Planned for one hour, it turns into three. Only half of the team makes the call, and even fewer deadlines have been met. Oh, and one of your customer sponsors has left. Time to regroup.

One of the most powerful ways to keep momentum in the sales organization and drive consistent results is to establish a pattern of accountability through regular reviews. This keeps account teams focused on short-term targets that take them toward long-term goals. It also reinforces a culture of accountability in the sales organization, which continues to take participants closer, step-by-step, to the exciting results everyone is seeking.

Back to the meeting. You reenergize the team by reminding them of their collective extraordinary goals. They promise heroics to each other in the next 30 days to make up for lost time. Instead, you clearly frame your expectations, and gain agreement to a milestone-based project plan, which will be reviewed in a weekly, 15-minute call. Personal accountability to best next actions is paramount to each milestone of your strategy.



Key Characteristics of Powerful Operational Reviews

- **Format.** Short, consistent parameters, regularly scheduled, fact-based
- **Function.** Recognize progress and drive accountability through the selling organization
- **Technique.** Ask good questions, gain insight
- **Result.** Improved short-term actions

A week later, you couldn't have asked for a more productive conference call. In a crisp 15 minutes, everyone was quickly informed of progress and issues, and assigned next week's best next actions. The entire account team was beginning to act collectively in the same way. They know the review is scheduled, and learn to accommodate their day-to-day work to meet their commitments to the account team.

Reviewing results is important; reviewing commitments to action is critical. A regular review process is applicable at all levels of the sales organization. Cascading accountability, assessment, and best next actions triggers improved sales force management in numerous ways. Management asks better questions and people closest to the customers supply the answers. In addition to inspecting progress and performance and invoking accountability, the review allows a public opportunity to offer help and to thank and reward people for their success.

So how does a sales leader manage the selling organization to accountable actions and results? A predictable, calendared review process is informational, energizing, and encourages behavior as well as results.

The Review Process		
Level	Incumbent	Accountability
4	Executive management	Measures progress and business unit performance
3	Second-line management	Accountable for budgets and measuring leading indicators
2	First-line managers	Accountable for quality and currency of plans and attaining milestones
1	Account team leaders	Accountable for taking strategic as well as tactical actions

