

The Dynamics of Cooperation within Sales Teams

by Art Wilson and Daniel Bettens



In today's complex selling environment, a virtual sales team formed around a nucleus of key people from across an organization is commonplace. The team may have no past track record, no heritage of success, no long-term customer relationships and, in many cases, little customer data. So what are the key elements that impact the success of such a team?

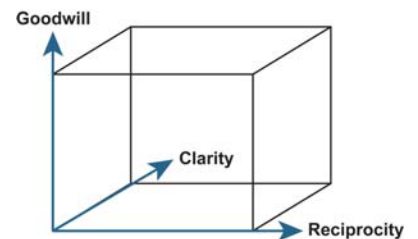
Cooperation is one of the fuels that drive a sales team to success. Cooperative team members harness their collective experience, talents, and skills with one goal in mind: to create value for their customer.

The "Cooperation" Strategy

There are three key attributes leading to cooperation: goodwill, clarity, and reciprocity.

In the graphic to the right, the value of cooperation within a team is measured by the volume of the cube. This means that all three attributes must be developed. If one of them is missing, cooperation is almost nil, even if the two remaining attributes are strongly developed.

Let's look in more detail at each attribute of cooperation and the atmosphere critical to enabling them.



Goodwill... *Kindly feeling of approval and support; willing effort*

Customers look to their best sellers/suppliers as a valued resource. Likewise, individual members can be a resource to their sales teams by consulting and collaborating on ways to succeed. Consider the following examples of high-value actions:

- Accomplish small tasks for the team brilliantly
- Take on team projects that seem impossible
- Offer perspectives and recommendations
- Prioritize follow-up activities as important as closing the sale
- Solve some small issue incredibly well
- Provide competitive analysis
- Be an active listener - Do more listening to learn than telling to teach
- Give away ideas
- Show interest in each member's success

The most successful relationships are not typically built as a result of a single defining event, but rather are developed over time with many small incremental steps. Just as successful sales teams are oriented toward their customers' business issues, individual sales team members are in tune with the needs of their fellow team members. With a common understanding of what the customer wants, team members can help each other to effectively and efficiently meet them.

Clarity... *Clearness of expression, thought, and reproduction with a quality of transparency*

A critical message for all selling teams is clarity. Customers want a unified effort on the part of sales teams in support of their business. Without clarity of purpose, sales teams will not be able to deliver that unified effort.

At the same time, cooperative sales teams ensure that each salesperson knows how they contribute to their team's mission. Everyone on the team clearly understands the overall goal, the metrics of success, and what role they play. They know their accountabilities to action. This personal trust encourages creativity and problem-solving, and elicits each individual's best efforts to advance the team.

Reciprocity... *Something done mutually or in return*

Zig Ziglar said, "Get everything you want by helping others get what they want."

Just as they do with their customers and with each other, the best-of-the-best salespeople proactively develop relationships with their colleagues in their company's supporting organizations. They share their organizational and personal agendas, are keen to understand their colleagues' organization (personal objectives, key initiatives, and pains) and then enroll them in jointly creating a strategy that focuses on optimally serving the customer. They sell their colleagues in a passionate and professional way by jointly creating a value proposition that is a win-win-win. And they make sure that their colleagues feel like they are getting something in return for their efforts on behalf of the customer.

Keeping cooperation alive

Over time, the dynamics of sales teams change; they ebb and flow. In the long term, cooperation declines unless creativity enters the picture. Creativity is the dynamic that helps sales teams consider how to help each other. By bringing their divergent thinking and creative understanding to the forefront, team members perpetually improvise, inspire, and innovate. This maintains the cooperation among team members at its best (especially along project time lines) and, ultimately, this will significantly influence the customer.

In addition to creativity, we have observed the following common attributes among the most successful sales teams:

- They think of themselves as collaborative problem solvers.
- Their communications are filtered through a problem/solution prism.
- They proactively promote joint collaboration and investment towards common goals.
- They engage subject matter experts on their teams.

And the dynamics of cooperation requires one more success factor: respect. People want to be treated with respect and caring. Cooperative sales teams demonstrate respect for their colleagues—for their role, their intelligence, and what they contribute to the customer experience—in their communications and in the manner in which they communicate.

Putting cooperation to work

As you begin to form your sales teams, look for the valuable attributes of cooperation that each salesperson brings to the table. The goodwill, clarity, and reciprocity that reside within your teams—coupled with their creativity and mutual respect—will have a direct and positive impact on future team performance. Teams that cooperate—that work with each other for their own mutual benefit and, more importantly, for that of their customer—generate higher productivity and dramatic results, which lead to an energized work environment (and much more fun).

Wishing your sales teams extraordinary success,


Art Wilson


Daniel Bettens

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Source: Key attributes for cooperation are derived from the book "Stratégie de la Bienveillance" (Benevolence Strategy) by Juliette Tournand



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