

How to Establish Effective Sales Teams



In today's world, most important selling pursuits are accomplished not by individuals, but by many people. Some of them are under a sales leader's control, but most of them are not.

Successful selling organizations have their best possible sales teams focused on their most important customers. However, despite the hope of many sales managers, the vast majority of successful sales teams do not self-form. Getting teams working well together is one of the most difficult and important jobs of sales management.

Why are cross-functional teams so important in a selling organization? The simple answer is that there is no other way to do what needs to be done. In the face of white-hot competition, complexity, and economic swings that are a part of commercial life, every selling organization needs the best resources it can muster, both inside and outside the selling group, in order to be effective. Team collaboration—sharing and leveraging each member's inherent skills—enhances the probability of winning a sale and provides the proper structure for superior performance.

Based on our observations of successful sales organizations, we suggest focusing on three areas when forming sales teams.

1. **Make sure the reason is important according to the customer's definition.** Sales teams are formed for different purposes, at different times, and at different levels. Customer-facing teams can form around a specific sales opportunity/solution, market, or account relationship.
2. **Pick the right people.** Be selective about the composition and number of teams that are established. Sales teams should be formed to address the short list of the most important priorities of the selling organization. Each team, for each purpose, needs to have the right constituents—people with the required talents and people from appropriate functional groups. Each team also needs an owner—the team leader or project manager.
3. **Communicate the importance of the team.** To establish sales teams around priority selling objectives, the CSO must mandate this team environment. When the CSO injects team management mechanics into the sales culture, the teams perform. If not, teams spend a lot of time talking to each other rather than to the customer.

Forming effective teams aligns right-skilled salespeople with customer needs.



We assert that the following team mechanics must be in place in order for the team to operate successfully.

- Everyone on the team clearly understands the overall goal, which is exciting and challenging from the customer's and sales team's view-point.
- Everyone on the team knows how the team will get there, and what part they will play.
- Everyone on the team knows his or her accountabilities to action.
- The project leader refines the strategy and work plan on the basis of new information and the knowledge gained from progress to date.
- The project leader communicates effectively, securing commitment of actions and holding people accountable for those actions.

Sales team selling is critical. The more complex the solution, the more essential team selling is for success. Successful sales leaders recognize and leverage the unique qualities that each team member brings to the job, and deploy them in combinations that reap optimum rewards for the customer—and the sales team.

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