Personal relationships are a strong component of every successful business development organization. As the business landscape changes and companies grow and diversify, they must continually refine their business-development organizations to ensure that customers experience a focused, adaptive, and valuable relationship with every element of the company.

Focusing on consistent company-wide relationships efficiently promotes products and services across business units while reducing costs and driving revenue. It allocates scarce technical resources to the best opportunities for margin improvement across product lines. And, most importantly, it keeps business developers aware of the needs and perspectives of their customers.

Industry leaders aggressively nurture focused customer relationships that actively align and re-align their company with their customers' needs. Less successful organizations—even some that perceive the benefits of careful customer alignment—may dismiss the idea as being too complex an undertaking or may not organize their priorities in a way that allows the necessary ongoing change. Bringing adaptive relationship-focus to a diversified sales team may seem to be a daunting task, but companies that emphasize the right things at the right time achieve significant results, even in the short run. The transformation proceeds in four steps.

Step One: Assess Pressure for Change

Identify and interview people with key relationships internal and external to the organization. The internal interviews concern where your company—and your business development team—is today, and where you would like to see it in twelve months. External interviews capture your customers' vision of how their business relates to yours, and where they would like to see the relationship in the coming year. Inherent in those visions are the customers' perceptions of where their own companies are headed, and how their needs will change.

- Is there a threat to the business now?
- Is there a future threat to the business?
- Is there a major opportunity in the business now?
- Is there a future opportunity in the business?

Often these interviews reveal potential threats to profit margins or market share. They may disclose information about the competition, or gaps in technology or service. And frequently they uncover new business opportunities.

In aggregate, these interviews will reveal whether there is sufficient pressure for change, and the appropriate sense of urgency to initiate the change. If change is a high-priority, then the next step is to develop a consensus about how to implement change.

Step Two: Develop a Shared Vision

A few short, facilitated meetings among internal stakeholders will develop the following:

- The purpose of the change
- The vision of the change over time
- The key success factors required
- The values, attitude, and behavior required for success

With those decisions in hand, senior management can gauge the sense of urgency, the need for change, and a commitment to make the change happen. Without high-level urgency and commitment, the change is unlikely to occur.

Step Three: Develop Targets and Teams

Target a select group of ten or fewer customers where the company can leverage its capability across divisions or product lines, then develop an account team to execute a clearly understood strategy. This does not require a major organizational change; it may be executed by a tiger team or other special project team, so long as the team membership integrates and enhances the existing customer relationship.

Step Four: Develop Goals, Plans, and Timelines

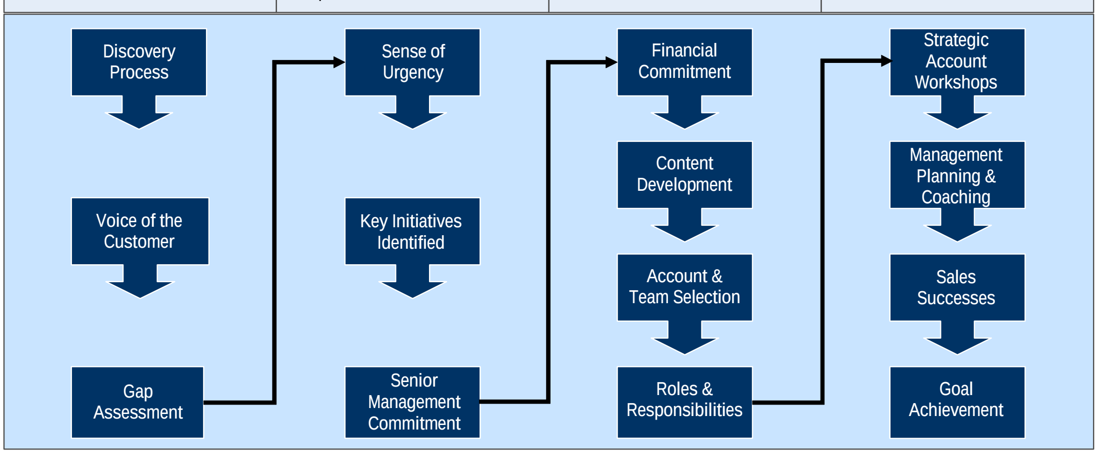
Each targeted account should be the subject of a facilitated two-day strategy workshop, collectively aimed at getting a quick win or two. The meetings should include carefully selected team members representing business development, technical expertise, project management, and other key stakeholders. The workshops should yield a clear goal, action plan, and timeline for each team member. Every team member should come away with a clear sense of their next best action. Involve experienced coaches to provide expertise in project management, operational execution, and relationship management.

As the teams achieve successes, the process will expand to additional accounts. And as the teams analyze their successes, organic change paths will emerge in organization, process, and motivation, forging the way to a continuing process of customer relationship improvement.

The following chart outlines the process and the key actions at each step in the process.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT PROCESS FOR STRATEGIC ACCOUNTS

Assess Pressure for Change	Develop a Shared Vision	Develop Targets and Teams	Develop Goals, Plans, and Timelines
• A threat to the business now (profit, market share, technology gap) • A threat to the business in the future • A major opportunity for the business now • A major opportunity for the business in the future	• The purpose and mission of the change • The vision of the change (the solution) over time • The key success factors required (from the competitive advantage) • The values, attitude, and behavior required for success	• Appropriate human and financial resources • Appropriate inventory of skills • Appropriate organization design • Appropriate systems for measuring and rewarding people's behavior	• A specific timetable of activities starting with actionable first steps (best next actions) • Clear understanding of the risks to deviate from the plan



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