



HOW DO I BUILD A WORLD-CLASS SALES TEAM?

BY JUDY GUIDO

A The one point all Green Industry folks agree on is the importance of sales. Let's face it, sales is the engine that drives your business and your salespeople are the drivers. As the competitive landscape continues to grow more fierce and becomes increasingly more difficult to create a competitive advantage, it's imperative you have a strategic sales plan in place to attract, grow and retain a world-class sales team. That team is your competitive advantage.

IT'S IMPERATIVE TO CREATE A SALES CULTURE THAT'S UNDERSTOOD AND RESPECTED BY THE ENTIRE ORGANIZATION. TOO OFTEN, SALES IS SEEN AS THE ENEMY, ESPECIALLY BY OPERATIONS.

How does a company develop a world-class sales force? Successful sales organizations focus on four key areas:

- › strategy and process;
- › talent and training;
- › customer relationship management; and
- › sales management.

The first steps to success begin with the owner (who's often the sales manager and is generally unqualified and unhappy doing so), sales team and key field personnel collaboratively designing a sales strategy based on an accurate analysis of their market dynamics and skill sets.

The next step is ensuring the sales strategy is communicated accurately to the entire team. It sounds

simple, but this important step is overlooked more than 80 percent of the time. Professional sales and operational talent are attracted to companies that can prove they've done their homework and have a road map for success. Everybody wants to feel they're a part of a winning team with an intelligent vision.

It's imperative to create a sales culture that's understood and respected by the entire organization. Too often, sales is seen as the enemy, especially by operations. Those companies that have a sales-centric culture and collaboration between sales and operations are market leaders. Aligning sales and operations is a key component in world-class sales organizations. Make sure your plan includes tactics fostering both groups working together while sharing accountability and rewards. The Green Industry is competitive enough, why make it any more difficult by creating internal challenges and obstacles that may sabotage the company's success?

Next, match your core competencies and unique value proposition with your customers' needs. This is called customer segmentation and qualification. It seems like common sense, but aligning customer needs with your offering and qualifying and assessing the potential value of customers happen much less than you think.

Account planning is another important step. It includes identifying your geographic footprint (the areas where you'll conduct business) and the specific industries and market segments poised for growth (or that are underserved) within your geographic locale. Then you must assign your sales

team accordingly. Will you assign them geographic territories or specific industries to grow? Will you assign them to markets where they have experience and a network of contacts? For example, stating your market segment is commercial maintenance isn't a good example of account planning. Stating that multifamily, specifically high-end residential apartments and condominiums within a 20-mile radius of your headquarters, is your market segment is much more predictive and focused. Assigning somebody with experience and contacts in the multifamily market is even smarter.

Once you've completed your companywide account planning, develop specific, clear and customized action plans for each account the salespeople are serving or new customers they've acquired. Sales isn't a one-size-fits-all game, so it's a must to have a strategic account selling methodology with specific tactics identified for each customer. Customers demand you understand them and only them.

Next, focus on sales-channel management. Make it easy for your customers to buy from you by providing them with the most accessible, efficient and convenient sales channels available. Sales channels may include external independent sales reps, web-based sales channels—such as social media networks—or strategic sales partnerships with people who share the same customer targets (think janitorial, pest management or security companies).

Develop a replicable, sales process (mirror your high-performer methodologies and processes) focusing on winning opportunities. Have your salespeople shadow your best performers and make sure those stars share best practices regularly. Ensure your salespeople know how to work their sales

funnel and focus on high-value activities, such as identifying and qualifying leads, conducting site audits and reviews, performing competitive analyses, setting up meetings with decision makers, presenting solutions and asking for the sale. Identify drivers of high sales performance.

Just as your field operators need their equipment to be successful, your salespeople need their tools. Provide them with the most effective mobile sales force automation and customer relationship management technologies possible. Many low-cost smartphones, sales force automation and customer relationship management software packages, templates and dashboards are available.

One of the primal keys for sales success is providing your staff with an experienced sales manager who's capable of aligning the company's sales goal with important metrics, such as:

- › revenue;
- › retention;
- › increased wallet share;
- › market share;
- › gross margin;
- › referrals;
- › win ratio; and
- › sales cycle time.

An effective sales manager also helps set strategy, coaches the staff, manages the numbers, provides leadership, conducts training and assists with presentations when necessary. Less than 9 percent of Green Industry professionals conduct sufficient sales training and 93 percent of sales forces are managed by owners who, as aforementioned, are unqualified and unhappy in their roles as sales manager. Sales training saves time and money and increases revenue, retention and value.

Additionally, provide salespeople with the necessary administrative resources they need. Salespeople should be selling, not spending the majority of their time performing administrative tasks. Hiring efficient administrative help, even part time, is paramount in building an excellent team. It also saves money while increasing the sales usefulness and revenue.

Don't forget to clearly align your marketing with your sales goals. Effective marketing makes it easier for your sales staff to sell. If you plainly spell out your sales goals, roles, responsibilities and metrics, and you hire, train and reward your staff based on those success metrics, you'll build and retain a world-class sales team. **LM**

Planning pointer

The four building blocks of sales success are: strategy and process, talent and training, customer relationship management and sales management.



Guido, chairwoman and founder of Guido & Associates, helps contractors grow their people and profits. Reach her at jmguido@sbcglobal.net.