



Customer Service is Critical to Your Sales Growth Strategy



Whether it was part of the plan or not, every organization went through a dramatic transformation over the past year. In an instant, strategies changed, activities shifted, and remote selling became the norm.

For many salespeople, even those with long track records of impressive performance, it wasn't easy to adapt to this new dynamic, especially when their customers were also busy reacting to the circumstances, often delaying or even canceling orders and contracts.

Now that the dust has settled, companies are looking at ways to upgrade their sales capabilities to meet new growth goals, and a lot of them are eyeing not just the sales team but the service organization as well. They recognize that the success of their growth strategy depends on increasing customer acquisition and loyalty.

Put another way, the key to rebounding sales is as much about your service team as it is about your salespeople.

In some ways, service teams had an advantage when the world went remote. While outside salespeople had to find new ways to build and maintain relationships with customers they could no

longer visit in person, customer service teams for the most part have always operated virtually, at least in terms of their customer interactions. The shift to remote sales meant salespeople had to adjust their mindset as well as their toolkit to be more confident and competent in this new environment. Service people were already used to it.

As you start talking about shifting to a service-selling culture, however, you're inevitably going to push some service reps outside their comfort zones. Service teams take great pride in their responsiveness to customer needs and their ability to serve their markets and their customers with a high level of personal touch. They bristle at the thought of "bothering" someone or being pushy, manipulating them into buying something they don't need.

Of course, none of those are tactics used by the most effective salespeople. Successful salespeople know that most customers don't want to be sold—but they do want to buy. So their focus is on skillfully

identifying their customers' specific wants and needs and then demonstrating how their products and services can fulfill them. It's about a mutual exchange of value.

When viewed through that lens, sales doesn't sound all that different than service. But you'll have to address this mindset issue to bridge that service-selling gap.

Overcoming Resistance

Because many service organizations have a negative view of selling, they struggle with the notion that embracing a sales philosophy is in the best interest of customer. They're convinced that if you're going to execute a growth strategy, it means superior service will end up taking a back seat.

Many have come to believe that building the bridge between service and selling is too difficult, too expensive and/or too traumatic to their cultures. So they focus on more controllable efficiency projects, like CRMs, marketing automation and others. The result is that efficiency actually replaces effectiveness as the key driver for their growth initiatives. Although these initiatives occasionally succeed, they are still dependent on new service behaviors to make them work. And it's unusual for an organization in any industry to "save" its way to revenue growth.

In our experience, to successfully transform a culture, you must implement solutions that engage the hearts and minds of your employees. To accomplish this, they must learn to embrace the definition of selling and service as one and the same.

Once employees believe that selling and service are both noble activities that focus on identifying and fulfilling the needs of customers and creating value for them rather than pushing products, you can achieve higher results. If selling is redefined as doing something for someone, your team may give themselves "permission" to create more value for customers. And when this happens, you'll be on the path to transformational change.

Transitioning to a Service-Selling Culture

In a pure service culture, the focus is on how skilled your team is at responding to customer inquiries. In a service-selling culture, employees proactively seek to understand customers' wants and needs and increase the value created in every customer experience. Here are three steps to help make this transition successful:

- Allocate the appropriate time, and focus on developing the attitudes, beliefs and skills that align with your organization's values, mission and purpose.
- Emphasize behavior change, application and accountability. Learning and development should incorporate spaced repetition, consistent feedback and a process for holding people accountable for applying what they've learned.
- Engage managers in leading the change, and make sure they have the attitudes, skills and commitment to coach and grow their employees.

Service organizations that don't make this transition will find organic growth difficult. In fact, having a positive service reputation is no guarantee you'll be the customer's first choice. As the competitive landscape becomes more challenging and the lingering effects of the pandemic continue to upend the way companies do business, the effectiveness of your service-selling team is the critical success factor for revenue growth and customer loyalty.

This isn't about sacrificing great service. On the contrary, if you can build the bridge between service and selling, your team will be able to find and close sales opportunities while delivering extraordinary service. And once your team consistently approaches service and selling as two sides of the same coin, you will have solidified your commitment to maximizing the value you create for customers. ■

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