

## SALES - COMPANY PHILOSOPHY OR DEPARTMENTAL SILO?



Steve Thurlow: employees affect sales.

Huthwaite International's [Steve Thurlow](#) says your whole organisation should be 'Living Sales'.

At the end of a recent training seminar, the sales director of a major company was heard to remark: 'I thought we only had eight salespeople here. I now see that we have hundreds.'

This reflected a dawning recognition on his part that, throughout his organisation, there are many employees who can influence a sale to some degree, either positively or negatively.

### Job title

None of these has 'sales' in their job title – indeed, some might even recoil from the view that they have any connection with selling. Yet their behaviour directly

affects how a customer or prospect may view the organisation overall. And, like anyone else of whom this is true, they can be trained and developed to deploy behaviours that will improve both the recognition and conversion of new sales opportunities and retention of existing clients.

Ostensibly a telephone receptionist might appear far removed from the sales effort in terms of a defined job role, yet can actively influence the orientation of a prospect or existing customer towards the organisation as a whole. And, by recognising this, the nature of such contact can be improved through training, so benefiting the longer-term relationship between the two organisations.

The same might be said of the office handyman who occasionally picks clients up from the airport, or the procurement specialist who talks to companies who are often your suppliers but, just occasionally your prospects.

### A company of salespeople?

At one level, this may seem little more than a trite restatement of basic good customer service. Yet it is much more. In the case of Huthwaite's own Living Sales approach, for example, the concept of putting sales at the heart of the business in this way underpins highly pragmatic sales performance-improvement programmes.

As a result, rather than the traditional 'siloed' view of sales as a separate department within the organisation, this becomes a philosophy which defines an organisation's whole culture and is fundamental to the way in which the company does business.

At this point, a health warning. Don't seek to make everyone a salesperson. That would be both unattainable and counter-productive to the broader sales effort.

You would no more want the purchase ledger clerk imagining themselves a 'super seller' than you would the regional sales manager trying to balance the books. What you do want is for people to think: 'How is my next action going to make it easier for this business to make sales?'

### Multiple touch points

It is sometimes said that 'every customer touch point is a sales opportunity' and, as manufacturing industry has become more commoditised, so real differentiation is increasingly dependent on service – and, in particular, the quality of the buyer/seller relationship. Further, as B2B (business-to-business) purchases are often complex, costly and multi-tier, so the number of such touch points will both increase and operate at several levels between the two organisations.

A brief look at a typical bespoke manufacturing project, for example, highlights the diversity of non-sales personnel interacting directly with the customer – and how opportunities to realise the sales potential such contacts provide are commonly missed.

Throughout the development phase, a variety of product development specialists, technicians and manufacturing engineers are often ideally placed to ask questions, yet fail to gather information which could be used to inform the sales process. Similarly, post-installation over time may involve training, upgrades and maintenance, all of which involve customer contact, with the opportunity to enhance – or spoil – the broader relationship between the two companies.

### Clients can be open

Critically, such employees are not seen as 'sellers' by the client, who is more likely to be open about the nature of the problems faced and resulting needs. In addition, non-sales staff will almost certainly spend significantly more time at the customer's premises implementing the solution or – if they are wise – increasing the potential to identify up-selling and cross-selling opportunities.

This offers two further advantages. The more the vendor organisation becomes enmeshed with the client – by adding essential value to their processes through the quality of these contacts – the more difficult it becomes for the vendor to be substituted. And further, unless there is an external regulatory imperative, the less likely it is that the satisfied client will go through a formal tendering process when placing additional related business.

### The role of training

In implementing such an approach, in one sense, trainers are already pushing at a partly-open door in that, unlike some professional services businesses, for example, manufacturing industry inherently recognises the concept of selling as critically important to its success.

So how can staff be trained to adopt the right behaviours? As a first step, sales training methodologies such as SPIN can be adapted for a non-sales audience, to establish the concept of the buying cycle in their minds, to define where typically they might fit within that cycle and to determine how they can be influential in moving the process forward.

### Implied needs

The key here is to be able to recognise areas of dissatisfaction within the client – so-called 'implied needs' – and then communicate them to their sales counterparts, using a common language.

Yet, just as sales is not a silo, so effective training cannot simply be an isolated event. A senior manager who simply says 'Yes, some customer-related skills for the non-sales teams wouldn't be a bad idea' is only underlining the problem.

Without a deeper level of commitment, in which training goes hand-in-hand with attitudinal change across the enterprise, the company will not be Living Sales.