

Is there anything the sales team can learn from the lean achievements of their production colleagues?

Lean selling

The migration of lean across an entire organisation is having a positive impact on performance - there is lean management, the lean supply-chain and the lean boardroom - but what about lean selling? Typically, when companies are looking to extend their lean philosophy into the supply chain they tend to only look up-stream, seeking to rationalise suppliers, purchasing processes and the like. While this is valuable, they should not ignore downstream operations, the sales activities, to which lean is equally applicable. Even when lean is applied to sales it generally only looks at the 'internal' aspects. So order configuration systems, sales processes and similar areas get addressed. What's ignored, or overlooked, is the sales interface - the points where people from the manufacturer have real contact with their customers and prospects.

Let's look more closely at what lean selling really means. A prime objective of lean is essentially to eliminate waste, often defined as 'any human activity which absorbs resources but creates no value'. For example, initiatives based on six sigma seek to achieve minimal defects. So, in the selling environment, a 'defect' is, for example, a wasted sales call or a superfluous meeting with a customer - resources (time, travel costs etc) are used but if the customer doesn't think the meeting was worthwhile and no order materialises as a result, then no value has been created. Lean selling, therefore, is about reducing this waste.

From prospecting, approaching customers, preparing proposals and attending meetings to negotiating the final contract and signing on the dotted line, selling is a production line like any other. But, because this production line involves elements you can't control (the customers) it's impossible to predict with 100 per cent accuracy what the outcome of each production run (that is, sales campaign) will be. As some 'waste' ie failed sales,



Steve Thurlow, Huthwaite International

are inevitable we assume we can't control it. Wrong! True, some sales campaigns will fail despite our best efforts but what about those activities that we can control?

- Meeting a prospect and not exploring and prioritising their needs - waste
- Failing to communicate how our solution fits their requirements - waste
- Failing to add value at every customer touch-point - waste
- Not building the value of your key differentiators - waste
- Overloading presentations with technical features - waste
- Proposals that contain little to persuade key decision makers - waste
- Failing to reach a deal, or giving too much away, at the negotiation table - waste

Taking waste out of your company's sales activity will be unique to you. To find out how we can bring lean selling to you, contact Steve Thurlow at Huthwaite International. •

Published in association with:

Huthwaite International

Hoober House, Wentworth, South Yorkshire, S62 7SA

tel: +44 (0)1709 710081 email: info@huthwaite.co.uk www: www.huthwaite.co.uk