

COST EFFICIENT SALES ACTIVITIES – MAKING YOUR “NEW SALES NORMAL” OUTSTANDING

This whitepaper breaks down into nine topics the insights sales leaders need to consider in this post COVID-19 world:

1. FURLOUGH: MAINTAINING SALES TEAM ABILITY DURING AN INACTIVE PERIOD
2. SALES TEAM PLANNING
3. BEST PRACTICE REVIEW
4. SALES TEAM MATCH FITNESS
5. FULLY FUNDED SALES DEVELOPMENT
6. ZOOM - IS THIS OUR ONLY SALES FUTURE?
7. SHORT TERM FIXES
8. BEWARE FALLING BACK INTO OLD HABITS
9. THE SUN WON'T SHINE FOREVER!

1. MAINTAIN SALES TEAM ABILITY DURING A PERIOD OF INACTIVITY

Some things need to keep operating or they are in terminal trouble. Blast furnaces and sharks are two examples – the first must keep burning, the second must keep swimming. Salespeople also are part of this group. If they don't stay sharp performing the mentally challenging activities of finding and winning business, there is a big problem. Dealing with daily rejection, expending emotional and intellectual energy on conquering 'No' and feeling the huge adrenalin surge of hearing 'Yes!' are essential to staying on top of the role. No one can realistically be expected to hit the road at full power and speed from a cold start. How have you kept the fire burning in the sales furnace?

- **What is your fitness programme for the sales team?**
- **How long will you give them as a run up to full power?**

2. SALES TEAM PLANNING WILL LOOK DIFFERENT FROM 2020

It may be time to buy shares in a coffee company. When the current challenge is finally behind us, salespeople will be on turbo. Diaries will fill up, phones will be red hot, a backlog of months of customer meetings will be arranged via a deluge of Outlook calendar invites. Mega-litres of caffeine will be consumed as the coffee tourism carousel begins to revolve once more. Smart organizations will however, abstain from this unproductive and redundant habit.

It doesn't win much more business than was likely to come inbound. Smart organizations have already rethought their market approach and will be implementing a new programme of customer interaction. Technology, the long-time bête noire of the salesperson, will find itself centre-stage in driving effective, eco-friendly and cost efficient sales activities. Those organizations who will think about it when things return to what will pass for normal will have arrived at the gig just as the band finished the third encore. It's already happening and if you haven't seen that, smell the coffee.

- **Don't go back to what you did before.**
- **Make smart choices and break old habits.**
- **Analyse which sales activities customers want and are most effective.**

3. AWARENESS OF THE NEED FOR REVIEW OF SALES BEST PRACTICE

The UK Government strapline resonates loudly in the world of sales. Beyond the context of the current market hiatus something more individually focused but equally worrying is happening. Match fitness levels are dropping rapidly. Vital skills around questioning, listening, presenting, handling competition and closing are not being deployed at all. Call it ring-rusty, call it whatever you please, what keeps sales teams performing and alert is currently locked away in the cupboard. Combine this with lack of practice and a fundamental repositioning of technology in the commercial world. Big changes are coming over the horizon and there is a limited window of opportunity to be ready for it. In Sales, we need to Stay Alert!

- **Act now.**
- **Challenge every sales practice.**
- **Evaluate your team's capability.**

4. WILL YOUR SALES TEAM BE FIT ENOUGH TO BE SUCCESSFUL?

We relax on our annual holiday. It is well deserved. Two weeks of doing what we like, when we like and, as much as we like. It recharges our batteries and de-stresses body and mind so that on return to work, we're pumped up and raring to go.

Soon, massive numbers of people will be restarting after a twelve-week enforced holiday. Most have been confined in one place and probably doing a little too much eating, drinking, getting up late and worrying about the future. Athletes beginning to lose muscle tone after three weeks. Sales requires not only physical energy but, extremely high levels of mental agility and more particularly, mental resilience. Switching off for twelve weeks means many sales engines will misfire badly when the ignition key is finally turned. Market conditions on re-entry will not be benign. It will be hugely competitive, highly pressurized and massively unpredictable. Jumping into an ice-cold plunge-pool is a massive system shock. What has your sales engine been doing since March 2020?

5. SERIOUSLY CONSIDER FULLY FUNDED DEVELOPMENT

Two reasons why sales training is occasionally perceived as a challenge by some employers are the cost and lost productivity. The former is not an objection levelled at Apprenticeships because levy contributions eliminate it. 20% off the job, albeit much misunderstood, remains a stumbling block for companies which clearly recognize the value of Apprenticeships. It has prevented commitment to a nationally recognized, performance enhancing and result strengthening qualification. If the sales team is cooling its collective heels on furlough, the 20% off the job objection just disappeared. Some sales teams on furlough are at the sales gym getting ready for the starting gun which marks the beginning of the hardest and most competitive race of their lives. Others, are eating popcorn and binge watching On-demand TV. What are your team doing right now?

6. THE SALES FUTURE IS MORE THAN JUST ZOOM

The past has passed. Comfortable patterns of face to face selling will dwindle rapidly from the traditional levels. The reality is, too many companies have already been forced to look straight into the face of the future. Like Janus, there are two dimensions to that face. One is scary, the other is bursting with opportunity. In that future, servicing a customer base will be undertaken differently. For differently you could read cheaper, or, more effectively, or, through technology, or, without traditional sales infrastructure. Many are already planning the financial dimensions of this new normal that's the easy bit.

How many are really considering the process, behavioural and skills necessary to make that happen. A quick switch to automation alone is not the answer. Salesperson 3.0 is what is required to pull off the trick. It is already possible to create Salesperson 3.0 because it is already here. You just need to know where to look.

- **Develop people Before they need it not after.**
- **Introduce a sales fitness regime.**
- **Recognize that your start may be slower than you need to survive.**

7. ADRENALIN SHOT TRAINING IS A QUICK AND EXPENSIVE FIX

When might a quick fix cost more than a long-term commitment? Creating sustainable sales performance is one instance. As organizations ponder how to jump start their sales teams after three months of stagnation, the pragmatic question of balancing investment against return is magnified. Of course, there is a lot to do after such a long period of paralysis but, much of that will be short-term firefighting with no strategic contribution beyond fixing immediate problems. Some adrenalin shot into the collective arm of the sales team might appear enough for now. It's a quick fix and, it may be expensive. Its impact is at best, uncertain. At least something has been done if there is neither time nor will, to commit to anything more substantial. A sales apprenticeship means longer-term commitment but, offers root and branch upskilling aligned with the rapidly changing norms of sales. Financially, the cost is covered. The impact on performance over its duration will more than repay any perceived loss in productivity. Short-duration training will cost more in money terms but, its real cost is in the long term. (*ES Research showed that around 90% of all sales training knowledge is usually 'lost' after 120 days.*) Reinforcing outmoded sales practice will strategically weaken many companies.

- **Have a development strategy for your sales team.**
- **Diagnose what they need and how good they are before investing.**
- **Revisit your options.**

8. DON'T FALL BACK INTO OLD HABITS

Of course, the pendulum will swing back a little. We are already experiencing nostalgia for the familiarity of the past.

Few of us are ever ready for change but, in the race we all run, it sets the pace. The reality of our collective future is more virtual than the past. Technology which many avoided or rejected, provided a lifeline and its impact on business life is indelible. Who will be nostalgic for twelve-hour days on the motorway? How much will you miss travelling 400 miles to meet a customer for an hour? Will the absence of 4am starts to catch the red-eye and sitting for hours waiting on delayed flights really leave a hole in your life or, will their confinement to the dustbin of business history release a whole lot more time to be successful?

Selling was already being redefined by the internet and other factors. That process has just been massively accelerated and if you always do what you've always done, you'll get a whole lot less than you ever did in the past. Virtually everyone is moving on, that's the reality.

- **Review what you do and make decisions.**
- **Reject what is ineffective.**
- **Change even if that is difficult to do.**

9. THE SUN WON'T SHINE FOREVER

Not every organization appears to have been damaged by the events of 2020. Some companies have been busier than ever. Too busy to pause and take stock of events, too busy selling or, too busy taking orders? When demand outstrips supply your organization is order taking. Anyone can do that. When normality returns, a contracted, competitive, crowded marketplace will make it difficult for weak voices to be heard. Organizations which were either too busy to evaluate new ways of doing things or, have ignored all of the obvious warning signs of change will soon feel the heat of market friction as hungry competitors rebound and kick the ball back into play. Professional selling is often about helping customers understand how to utilize opportunities they were unaware of. When the supply and demand equation is recalibrated, the order makers will succeed in the Darwinian struggle for commercial survival.

Only the fittest survive.

- **Order taking is not selling.**
- **When things settle down, new Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours are required.**
- **Your sales organization must be modern to attract the best talent.**

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