

Can CEOs Drive Sales Growth?

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It may appear to be critical these days, but the fact is that CEOs have lamented for years over their need for more sales. Whether it's a small business or a large corporation, growth is king. **Numerous studies and a variety of personal interviews state that growing sales is #1 or near the top of the largest issues CEOs face.**

SO, WHAT ARE YOU DOING ABOUT IT?

This is one of the first questions I ask leaders when they tell me they need to increase sales. The responses are interesting to shocking. Here are a few of my favorites:

- “We’re going to just ride it out. When the economy comes back we’ll get our share.”
- “I’m not happy about it, but it’s up to our sales leader. If he doesn’t get it going soon I’ll have to replace him.”
- “We’re cutting back the sales staff. If we can’t sell enough at least we’re going to spend a little less. And, we can weed out the lower performers.”
- “We brought the sales team in for a three-day training workshop to improve their skills.”
- “We invested in a CRM system so we can see what they are working on and get more accurate forecasts.”
- “We’re cutting our prices so at least we can generate some volume.”
- “I’d like to get rid of the entire sales team, but people keep telling me I need them.”
- “I’m personally getting a lot more involved in deals to make sure we win.”

These responses, and the ones going through your mind right now, prompted me to ask the logical follow-up question, “How’s it working so far?”

Overwhelmingly the responses included gems such as “Not very well,” “We spent the money but didn’t see any change,” and “Things actually got worse.”

If these are the alternatives available to us and they don’t seem to be working, WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

*Let’s start by reflecting on how the CEOs beliefs and behaviors contribute, **OR NOT**, to sales. Answer the questions in the box to the right to see how you are helping your sales team succeed or are hindering their improvement.*

ARE YOU, AS A CEO, CONTRIBUTING TO SALES?

*By answering 10 questions, you can discover how you, as a CEO, are personally impacting your sales team and how the entire company feels about them. Answer the following questions quickly with a **YES**, **SOMEWHAT** or **NO**.*

1. Do I foster a culture (policies, recognition, stories) that enables the entire company to support the sales team?
2. Have I invested in our sales team to give them a competitive advantage?
3. Have I worked with my sales team to understand the critical steps our customers take in evaluating our products and services and have documented the best approaches for all to use?
4. Do I have a clear strategy for where our growth will come from, determined our most probable customer, and communicated it to the entire organization?
5. Have I encouraged my sales leaders to understand what behaviors and activities lead to sales and supported the development of the tools they’ll need to implement them effectively?
6. Do I understand a sales leader’s job is to develop a team of sellers, and do I devote part of their pay to making it happen?
7. Do I continually invest in my sales leader to be sure they have access to the best education, tools, and practices to drive continual improvement?
8. Do I routinely make sales accomplishments visible to the entire organization recognizing sellers and those that support sales.
9. Do I believe that sales is a process that can be taught versus a skill that’s inherent in certain people?
10. Do I look at sales as an investment in the business verses a cost to be managed?

If the majority of your answers were **YES**, you are most likely helping your team succeed . Continue to reinforce the behavior and support your sales leader.

If the majority of your answers were **SOMEWHAT**, you are doing some of the right things but need to take a closer look at ways you can improve.

If the majority of your answers were **NO**, you have an opportunity to make some changes that can make a big impact toward improving your sales.

If you want to grow sales it all starts with you!

CEO STEPS TO GETTING RESULTS

Below are a few of the changes our clients have made that are getting results.

- **Publish a growth strategy.** Let everyone in the company know what type of client you want to work with and show them how to get the leads to sales people. Follow it up with a routine communication that shows people how their efforts are driving sales. You'd be surprised how many of your employees are connected to people that could become customers.
- **Invest in your sales leaders (if that's you, still do it).** Sales is a discipline like any other function in the organization and it's driven by the boss. Sales people do best with a clear set of expectations regarding what they're supposed to do, how they should behave, how frequently and what results they should be getting. Most managers learned their job from their former manager who never learned to do it well. Be clear their job is not to sell, but rather develop a team of people that can sell your products and services. Then, provide them the education and support they need to do it well. If you dedicate a portion of their compensation to how well they do it, you'll definitely see improvement.
- **Create a step by step method for engaging your customers, but understand you can't fix people over the weekend.** Put in a methodology that clearly outlines what activities help your prospects make effective decisions. Document which steps, tools, and resources advance the sale, and reinforce them over time. No one changes their behavior over the weekend. If that were true we would all stop smoking, lose weight, and strike the ball like Tiger Woods. If you want the new approach to stick, think of it as the beginning of several months of teaching, or re-teaching, skills to resistant adults. It takes time and it's up to the manager to teach and coach until a new habit is formed.
- **Stop making your manager the score keeper.** When I ask sales leaders their biggest challenge, they tell me they just don't have enough time to do it all. When I inform their boss, I hear "They'll just have to work harder." As we dig into what they spend their time on we often find that more than 50% of their time is spent adding up forecasts, sitting in meetings to communicate the latest projection, working with the CRM team on the latest upgrade, or helping marketing with what signage to use for the next trade show. Studies show that when they spend time in the field coaching their reps, sales go up significantly. Reduce their administrative time wherever you can and help them focus where they're needed most, teaching their team to be better.
- **Take as much pride in your sales team as you do your products/services.** In a world of the internet and products that are obsolete by the time they get to market, how you go about engaging and working with your customers may be your biggest advantage. The best sellers want to work for companies that believe in, invest in, and continually develop their sales leaders and teams. If you're not doing this, they know it and it shows up when they talk to your customers. Participate in significant sales events. Send an email to the entire company recognizing key wins, let the sales team know they are the lifeblood to your cash flow.

The exciting part is that this is all within your control and it works. And, it works in every economy. Your customers are always looking for the best value. **Sales teams that help their customers make good business decisions by understanding their needs, concerns, and risks, will always have a competitive advantage.**

We've worked with, studied, and witnessed a transformational change that takes place when the CEO modifies how they look at the sales team and its purpose in the organization. Modest investment, new focus, and a sales philosophy driven from the top will get your sales team moving confidently and quickly.

Mike Braun is a speaker, author, and co-founder of Pivotal Advisors. He's dedicated to providing sales leaders the knowledge, tools, and support they need to succeed. His experience includes many years as a consultant/facilitator providing advice, coaching, and support to hundreds of sales organizations from large public companies to small businesses. His work with clients such as G&K Services, Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, Williams Sound, and Medical Technologies allowed them to quickly improve their results from 7% - 32%. Mike also has 25 years of selling, sales management, and executive level experience. He's led small start-ups, professional service firms, and was Vice President of Sales and Marketing at a \$1 billion technology company. Mike holds an MBA from the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota and received his Executive Education from The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania.

Pivotal Advisors, LLC is a national sales improvement firm dedicated to helping companies drive sales performance through the development of their sales management. Sales leaders that follow best practices for managing their teams outperform their peers consistently generating 17% more revenue with 22% more of their team members on plan. We provide leaders the knowledge, processes, and tools they need to implement these best practices.

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