



# Ready, Fire, Aim---Who Cares About Having A Selling Process?

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**Dimensions of EXCELLENCE™ is based on the four dimensions of performance and organizational excellence. These are the foundation for our development programs oriented to achieving performance and organizational excellence in sales, marketing, and customer service.**

**These white papers provide concepts and ideas based on the application of these principles of these programs and our work with our clients. We welcome your comments and observations on these topics.**

Many sales managers I meet don't want to talk about their sales process. Their focus is on activity. They measure their sales people by numbers of sales calls they make, how many meetings are scheduled, how many proposals are generated, how many leads the sales person follows-up. These managers often confuse activity with producing results. Many activities their people undertake are the wrong or unproductive activities. Talking about selling processes is frustrating to these sales managers because it gets in the way of more activity.

Many sales people and managers confuse a process-based approach with bureaucracy. A reaction we often get is: "I don't have time for all that stuff, my job is to be out selling!" However, all successful sales people use a sales process. They simply are doing the things that they have done in the past that have made them successful. After all, isn't that what a process is?

Consciously or unconsciously, all successful sales people use a sales process. They consistently repeat the steps that they have successfully used in the past. Recognizing the patterns of success with your best sales people is the first step to understanding the importance and impact of a sound selling process.

Developing and managing your sales process is critical to the success and growth of the sales organization. The selling process focuses the organization on executing only the activities critical to creating value to your customers and to closing sales. It leverages both the best practices of the sales people in the organization and identifies uncompetitive practices. The selling process not only enables the organization to improve its focus, but it improves the effectiveness and efficiency of communication within the organization.

The sales process provides the organization a consistent language to review opportunities and forecasts. It helps the organization focus on growth, because the nature of managing the process is forward looking. Many traditional sale measures are lagging indicators. Identifying critical sales process activities maintains the focus on the leading indicators--Are we doing the right things the right way?

Each organization has a unique selling process. Sure, there are elements that are common to all sales people, but the most effective organizations identify and manage the activities critical to achieving their desired objectives. Critical elements of any organization's selling process include:

- A thorough understanding of the customer critical business problems, issues, and needs-to-buy.
- Understanding and communicating our value and differentiation in helping the customer solve their business problems.
- Quantification of the impact of the customer business problems and the value of our solutions in solving their problems.
- Identifying and validating the customer buying process, their buying criteria and how we demonstrate value in each step of the process.
- Matching the critical steps of the customer buying cycle with the sales process.
- Identifying the critical steps and activities necessary to progress through the customer buying cycle and where we are with each opportunity in the cycle.
- Identifying our odds of winning and critical exposures to our solutions strategy.

Establishing the selling process can be as simple as creating a simple checklist of the steps critical to success. We do this by examining why we have won or lost in the

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past, common patterns we see in our customer buying cycles and benchmarking best practices within and out of our industry. An easy way of developing the process is to identify critical activities in each major phase of the buying process. Figure 1 demonstrates a potential approach.

**Figure 1**

<b><u>Customer Buying Cycle</u></b>	<b><u>Sales Process</u></b>	<b><u>Critical Activities</u></b>
Problem Identification	Contacting	<input type="checkbox"/> Customer appears to have a real business problem that we can solve. <input type="checkbox"/> The customer is interested in pursuing discussions.
Identifying Explicit Needs/Requirements	Qualifying/Discovery	<input type="checkbox"/> The real business problems and their impact on the customer's business have been identified and quantified. <input type="checkbox"/> We have solutions to the customer business problem. <input type="checkbox"/> We have identified our differentiated value add. <input type="checkbox"/> We have identified all people involved in the customer buying process, their criteria, and priorities. <input type="checkbox"/> The customer is committed to invest in a solution and has approved funding for the project. <input type="checkbox"/> We understand the competitive alternatives available to the customer and our strengths and weaknesses relative to each alternative. <input type="checkbox"/> We are working with the customer in building a justified business case for the solution.
Evaluating Alternative Solutions	Proposing/Presenting	<input type="checkbox"/> We agree on our best solution to the customer problem. <input type="checkbox"/> We have identified all personal and business benefits derived from our solution. <input type="checkbox"/> We have satisfied all the buying criteria established by the customer. <input type="checkbox"/> The customer will make a decision within X days <input type="checkbox"/> We have submitted our final proposal and addressed any open issues. <input type="checkbox"/> The customer agrees to our differentiation and value. <input type="checkbox"/> The customer agrees with the business case and return generated by our solution.
Selecting Solutions	Closing	<input type="checkbox"/> The customer and we have agreed on the final solution and the expected benefits. <input type="checkbox"/> The implementation plan and resources have been committed by both the buyer and seller. <input type="checkbox"/> We have agreed on the methodology for measuring and tracking the desired results.
Implementing Solutions	Implementing	<input type="checkbox"/> We are teamed with the customer in implementing the project per agreement. <input type="checkbox"/> Early results are being demonstrated.
Continuous Improvement	Growing The Account	<input type="checkbox"/> We are tracking customer satisfaction and identifying opportunities for improvement. <input type="checkbox"/> We are identifying enhancements and modifications to the solution that create greater value to the customer. <input type="checkbox"/> We are identifying other opportunities for solving related customer business problems.

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The critical activities identified in Figure 1 become the yardsticks by which we measure our progress through the customer buying cycle and our selling process. Skipping any of these steps increases the likelihood that we will not satisfy the customer's business problems and that we will lose the sales opportunity.

These critical activities also provide a common basis for forecasting all opportunities being addressed within the sales territory or organization. Forecasts are no longer made by the "gut feel" of where an opportunity is in the selling cycle, but on criteria based on demonstrated success. For each opportunity, we know precisely where we are, based on the activities completed and those activities remaining to be successful. We can now look at all opportunities, where they are in the selling process, identify our odds of winning and forecast the business we will generate.

This process also gives us important productivity measures including sales cycle, conversion and win rates, business balance and other indicators.

Finally, this process gives us an ability to focus on critical activity, creating a selling process that better enables you to hit your targets. Stated otherwise:

### **Ready, Aim, Fire, Win, Grow**

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