



# TAKE A TAILOR-MADE APPROACH TO ENABLEMENT

Achieve sales growth with industry-specific  
skills assessments.

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An organization is only as strong as its growth engine, and the sales function is the fuel for that growth. Organizations continue to be challenged with hiring, onboarding, promoting, and developing sales teams for long-term success. One solution to such challenges is a sales-specific approach to data strategy and application.

Companies often hire sales professionals solely on qualitative data (such as interviews) and base promotions into sales leadership on an individual contributor's past sales accomplishments. In addition, sales enablement teams don't always tailor skills programs to sales teams' strengths and weaknesses or keep them aligned with organizational sales strategy.

Sales results and engagement can significantly improve through better context and confidence when it comes to hiring, onboarding, promoting, and developing key skills within sales teams. And the sales enablement function will build a better partnership with the greater sales organization by using industry-specific data to better align enablement activities to sales team needs.

### **Barriers to sales growth**

The sales landscape has changed significantly and permanently during the past three to four years. Do your existing sales teams have the mindset and skill set to adapt and succeed?

**False sales growth metrics.** Many sales organizations are experiencing growth through price increases, rather than by adding new customers or expanding existing ones. While it looks good on paper, it's a false metric that erodes future growth.

**Many transactional sellers require a skills upgrade to consultative selling.** Although there is still a need for transactional selling in some business segments, most sellers are in complex sales scenarios. Their skills must change to be more value focused.

**Remote and hybrid workforces have become the norm.** A shift is required on the part of leadership because there is less in-person interaction. Sales leaders must understand what motivates their teams to succeed in hybrid environments. As such, they can better coach and hold team members accountable.

**Identifying and accessing decision makers requires more acumen.** With so much movement in and out of organizations, not only has the *who* changed when it comes to decision makers, but access for sales conversations require a more consultative and less transactional approach as well.

**Digital presence is no longer optional.** A sales professional's presence has an increased spotlight in a variety of environments. Customers and prospects now research the companies and sales professionals from which they may buy, and customers and prospects view the lack of a meaningful digital presence as a negative factor.

**Sales skills have stagnated.** Inflation, ongoing supply chain disruptions, and price increases have created an order-taking environment, and it's likely that overall sales skills have declined.

### Why take a sales-specific approach?

There is no shortage of assessment options available, all with a variety of lenses for individuals and leaders. However, sales enablement shouldn't take strategy and tools from generalized personality or behavioral assessments and then adapt them to the sales function.

Think of it as taking a laser-focused approach to get the exact data you require versus a generalized approach that will leave you making interpretations and assumptions. A sales-specific approach helps sales enablement in several ways.

**Hire with predictive validity, not only qualitative data.** Most organizations rely on hiring tools with low success rates. In *The Science of Hiring Quota Busting Sales Teams*, Andy Miller cites multiple strategies available to organizations for hiring, along with their respective predictive validity for success. Culture tests (13 percent), resumes (18 percent), personality tests (20 percent), traditional interviews (20 percent), reference checks (23 percent), and structured score-card interviews (57 percent) all leave significant gaps in understanding. However, according to assessment firm Objective Management Group, a sales-specific, multimeasurement assessment can provide 91 percent predictive validity.

One of my clients was considering a significant sales leadership hire. They used several of the aforementioned strategies during the hiring process, and the job candidate interviewed well. By adding a sales-specific hiring assessment, the client identified strategic and tactical skills gaps that weren't apparent using the other methods. They were able to use that data to eliminate second-guessing and make a confident, science-based decision on next steps.

**Minimize the hard and soft costs of failed onboarding.** Success or failure begins with sales hiring and extends through sales onboarding. When onboarding isn't successful, there are typically a few culprits: The role is the wrong fit, the hire misinterpreted the role in the hiring process, the onboarding process lacked clarity and accountability, or the company didn't provide enough time for the new hire to reach productivity.

According to the Brainshark article "The Cost of Poor Sales Onboarding: 9 Stats That Tell the Story," the cost of poor onboarding per sales professional is nearly \$200,000. The article cites a DePaul University study that

found that it costs, on average, \$97,960 to replace a sales professional. Further, Sirius Decisions (now Forrester) cites the opportunity cost, or potential lost business, to be at \$100,000 per sales professional.

**Identify the sales team's targeted skill strengths and weaknesses.** Doing so enables you to tailor learning programs with greater success. Let's say that the current sales strategy calls for significant growth in new markets and with new customers. Sales professionals will require a suite of skills in hunting, including identifying target accounts and decision makers, accessing those decision makers, as well as qualifying potential opportunities. Does the current data indicate which sales professionals possess those skills or have the potential to build them? That's the power of an approach that uses sales-specific competencies to help sales enablement make more informed decisions.

**Assess the state of existing processes and tools and how they are helping (or hindering) sales performance.** Consider sales performance as a holistic combination of people, processes, and tools. Many assessments do not consider the effects of sales processes and sales tools on results. That includes the existence of a sales process and whether salespeople consistently use it, whether sales teams leverage the customer relationship management (CRM) platform to its full potential, and how well salespeople use technology tools such as video and social selling platforms.

### The sales competencies that matter most

In today's sales environment, assessing for these three skill categories will make a tangible difference in the sales enablement function understanding and building sales team performance.

**Mindset competencies.** This category is the one that drives success in the others. It includes the desire to succeed in sales; the level of commitment to consistently follow through on the activities necessary to create success; personal responsibility; an individual's outlook on the industry, the organization, and the sales role itself; plus the multitude of ways that an individual finds motivation.

The mindset competency that consistently ranks at the top of the list is commitment. When a sales professional or leader demonstrates high levels of commitment, it influences not only the other mindset competencies, but the other categories as well.

**Tactical competencies.** These are the competencies that sales training programs tend to emphasize because they're visible behaviors seen with prospects and customers. They include prospecting, qualifying opportunities, relationship building, presentation, CRM proficiency, use of video and social selling in the sales process, as well as closing business.

Three competencies in this category are worth pointing out further because they are especially important in the face of repeated disruption. The first is access to executive decision makers and

stakeholders. The second is the ability to lead consultative sales conversations, both in person and virtually, that continually add value to a customer's business. The third is the ability to understand what the customer values, as well as positioning value over price.

**Methodology and process competencies.** While mindset is the foundation and tactical skills are the outward behaviors, this third skill set dictates how a sales professional will apply them. Methodology and process competencies connect mindset skills with tactical skills. The category includes an understanding of how a seller's buying processes affect their ability to sell, their comfort level with financial conversations, their resilience in the face of rejection, their need for approval

## THREE STRUCTURES TO SUPPORT SUCCESS

Structures help sales leaders and the sales enablement function to build and sustain high-performance sales teams. Three foundational sales enablement structures include a sales process, sales methodology, and customer relationship management (CRM) platform.

**The sales process is the staircase.** It's a linear, stepped approach to moving an opportunity through the sales pipeline. The sales process could include steps such as:

- Lead generated
- Opportunity identified
- Opportunity qualified
- Demo or proposal in process
- Conditional agreement and negotiation
- Opportunity won or lost

**The sales methodology is the chess match.** It includes a variety of sales elements available to the sales enablement function, including strategies, skills, and tools that the team can customize for progress in a discrete opportunity or in a strategic scenario. Examples include client-selection strategy, designing and presenting sales proposals, designing sales conversations, coaching, or leveraging negotiation skills. Each supports successful sales outcomes, and sales enablement may draw on them at different times.

**The CRM is the performance hub.** Consider the CRM as a data hub and central repository for sales performance. When implemented well, the CRM assists sales professionals, sales leaders, and sales enablement teams in understanding overall revenue and profit health. Two keys to CRM success include commitment to quality data and determining the minimum number of necessary metrics for accountability.

from customers, as well as the beliefs they hold that will either support or hinder success.

One competency in this category that most influences the others is the measurement of a seller's or sales leader's buying habits. A professional subconsciously injects their approaches to research, interactions, and decision making into their outward approaches with customers. That data can help sellers recognize where their own biases may prevent sales success.

## Implementation

The following best practices can assist sales enablement in creating the right strategy and plan for integrating sales-specific assessment across a variety of areas.

**Review your existing sales training programs, structures, tools, and processes.** The process can provide an important baseline for understanding current strengths and gaps; it includes investing time in confirming the organization's overall growth strategy.

**Identify the areas in the organization that would most benefit,** including talent acquisition, hiring and onboarding, leadership development, and skills development programs. To begin, determine one area of the business on which to focus, such as new employees with hiring and onboarding or the existing sales team. One recommendation is to focus on existing teams first, then leverage lessons learned for hiring and onboarding.

**Assess the sales enablement team to identify team members with existing expertise or an interest in data.** Building bench strength will help ensure consistency and long-term success.

**Understand the level to which the sales enablement and sales training teams are versed in overall sales strategy.** Those responsible for sales enablement and sales training will create better results when their work is in alignment. For example, do those teams clearly understand the company's key growth areas for the upcoming year? Do they know which markets, products, and solutions are of the highest priority? Do they have a solid understanding of the customer base? It's not enough for sales enablement and training teams to know their specific disciplines; their success will depend on investing time to understand and integrate their company's sales strategy.

**Research assessment options available through the lens of sales specificity.** Assessments that are more general in nature but

include a sales component won't provide the level of depth required. Confirm that you can measure sales mindset, competencies, and structures. The science will support future recommendations sales enablement makes relative to skill development and sales strategy.

**Realize that a sales-specific assessment approach isn't a zero-sum game.** It doesn't require eliminating other assessment tools. Rather, layering a sales-specific approach onto the strategy will complement other assessments while providing unique insights on sales performance.

**Play a role in the metrics conversation.** At a minimum, be aware of the sales metrics most meaningful to the organization. Ideally, leverage sales-specific assessment data to make recommendations and influence the chosen metrics.

**Resist the temptation to stay surface level with the data.** Understand the story the data is telling and become a data interpreter for others, which sends the message that data application is integral and assists with the business case for ongoing investment.

**Integrate coaching for both sales professionals and sales leaders on how to interpret and use assessment data.** Invest additional time with sales leaders on interpreting and applying the data for their teams.

**Add a component to sales training programs that entails sales professionals applying their skills to real-life sales opportunities.** Load those opportunities into the CRM, tagged for the program, and tracked to the identified metrics. Doing so will provide the added benefit of using data for opportunity coaching and strategy.

**Identify sales professionals and leaders who are engaged in and actively using assessment data.** They can champion usage across the organization and conduct learning sessions for their peers.

Sales will continue to evolve and affect how organizations operate, so organizations can't afford to not invest in sales-specific assessment approaches. Build a business case that includes outcomes, metrics, and value to the company, along with investments and timelines. Sales enablement teams at the forefront of the strategy are best positioned to help their companies thrive into the future.

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