



# Building a winning culture: a legacy of sales leadership

Perhaps nowhere does purposeful, inspiring leadership have the ability to bring about more radical transformation today than in the realm of the sales organisation.

The assumption in the past was that if you wanted greater sales, all you needed was great salespeople. But that's no longer true: customers' demands are too high, and the selling environment is too complex. Buyers now know more than ever about their needs and choices, and your competition. They engage sellers later in the buying cycle, after needs, budgets, and options have been identified.

Leaders who are in tune with the current reality recognise that building an enduring legacy of success doesn't come from creating great salespeople, it comes from creating a superior sales culture.

Our research shows that somewhere north of 50 percent of customer loyalty is established before customers experience a service or take delivery of a product. This means that *how* you sell matters more than *what* you sell. It means that the buying and selling experience is a big part of your brand.

What if your salespeople were well-informed, insightful, trustworthy businesspeople, who were looking to create value with and for clients? A sales force like this runs on a combination of critical communication skills

**“Talent wins games,  
but teamwork  
and intelligence win  
championships.”**

— Michael Jordan

coupled with disciplined business thinking and focused execution. This enables your salespeople to talk honestly and put insightful thinking on the table, explore important issues, and collaborate to craft solutions that exactly meet clients' needs. The goal is to help clients succeed.

This model of selling engages and motivates your entire sales culture, empowering them to do something *for* clients rather than *to* them,

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and unleashes extraordinarily productive behaviours that can lead to unprecedented success.

The truth is, you don't need **sales superstars**. You need a super **sales culture**, where **ordinary** people do **extraordinary** things.

### CASE STUDY: A WINNING SALES CULTURE

Our Sales Performance Practice leader, Randy Illig, speaks with admiration about one client of ours, a chief sales officer, who was recruited to join an ailing company that, despite multibillion-dollar sales, had lost its way.

Among other troubles, the organisation was experiencing extensive turnover in the executive ranks, and the sales force was fractured across operating units. "There was nothing consistent in how they worked with customers or how they thought about selling," Randy says. "The sales organisation was a group of individuals who sold. It wasn't an organisation with its own heartbeat or positive sales culture."

The new sales leader decided that what the company actually needed wasn't new or more salespeople. Rather, they needed to figure out how to become a great selling organisation, and how to create a culture of high performance around selling.

Working with FranklinCovey's Sales Performance Practice over the course of three years, he consolidated the group into one selling organisation and gave the individuals an identity, both in name and purpose. He made performance expectations and processes clear. He invested in education

and tools. He aligned salespeople's compensation more clearly to their objectives. He outlined how each member of the team would contribute and trained them to execute well. All levels of the team knew what to do and how to do it. He got the sales organisation to work as a system.

One year into the transition, a leading industry analyst interviewed several of the company's clients and reported back, "Whatever you're doing, keep doing it. Because your customers notice and value the difference." This unsolicited praise reinforced the fact that it wasn't just *what* the team was selling but *how*



they were selling that was registering as a competitive advantage.

The outcomes were dramatic:

- By the end of the first year, the company's total sales went from declining to increasing by 35 percent.
- Sales to new accounts went up 154 percent.
- Add-on sales increased 133 percent.
- The total number of sales rose 14.7 percent.
- Average deal size increased by 18 percent.

And for the first time, people who were part of the sales organisation were proud to be affiliated with that part of the business. They were engaged, they had an identity, and they had the performance to go with it.

How does your sales force feel about representing your organisation? Are they proud to be affiliated with your brand? Are they clear about your expectations? Are the processes for developing business clear? Have you invested in both the education and tools to help them succeed?

### SOLUTIONS HAVE NO INHERENT VALUE

Building a culture that has a focused intent on helping your customers succeed fundamentally changes the way you do business—and requires a different mindset and skillset than has typically been engrained in organisations.

Nobody likes problems, so there is a mutual conspiracy between buyer and seller to talk about the solution. Salespeople love talking about the

The better you **understand** what the **client** wants and **needs**, the **better** the **choices** you can **bring** to the table.

solution. It is their comfort zone. They understand it, they know it, it's about them, it's *their* solution, and it's really great. What about the client? They like to believe there is a magic formula—that they can throw some money at the situation and everything will be okay.

But since the job to be done now is to bring value to your clients—to help them truly succeed, not just sell your ready-made solution—you must inspire your sales force to go deeper, to look at the issues surrounding the problem. You need to be prepared with insightful thinking. Clients will answer your questions, but *only* after they conclude that doing so would be valuable.

### WORLD-CLASS SALES CULTURES BALANCE ADVOCACY AND INQUIRY

Most people know how to ask questions and hear what others are saying, yet few are consciously competent at developing a high degree of mutual understanding. They lack either a powerful methodology of questioning, the ability to truly listen with all their senses, or both. Lacking superb inquiry skills (often while thinking that this is surely not the case), sales professionals commonly resort to three traditional approaches to interacting with clients.

#### 1. YOU TELL.

“Telling” is not always bad. Sometimes trusted business advisors help their clients cut through fear, uncertainty, and doubt by advocating what the client must do. Telling, however, has a low probability of producing a solution that clients feel exactly meets their needs.

The downsides of telling include:

- What you choose to tell the client is not interesting or relevant to the client. You waste their time and your own, and reduce the desire for more interactions.
- What you tell them to do might be wrong.
- There may be no buy-in from the client, which could cause the sale or initiative to fail.
- They see you as arrogant, ignorant, or both.
- You potentially leave money on the table by telling clients about one opportunity, when asking them about others could have produced many more.
- You lose the ability to speak their language, address their priorities, foresee and counteract pitfalls early, and build trust through understanding

## 2. YOU ACCEPT

You can always tell how much **salespeople** are **guessing**: the more they guess, the **longer** the **proposal**.

The client tells you what they want, and you give it to them. Easy, isn't it? Yet how often do you propose a solution based on what the client said they wanted, and the client either feels it misses the mark, chooses to do nothing, or picks a solution from a competitor that is different from what they requested? How many times have you won the sale, given the client what they said they wanted, and still ended up with an unhappy client?

The downsides of passively accepting include:

- The client could be wrong — and they will still blame you.
- You have not demonstrated any thought leadership.
- You may not understand exactly what you are solving or how to measure success.
- You could leave many opportunities uncovered.

## 3. YOU GUESS.

You talk with a client for an hour or two, and then you start guessing. “What do we think they really need? Why haven't they fixed this before now? What should we propose? Do you think we're talking to the right people? Do they have money to pay for this? Who do you think the competition is?” and so on.

Salespeople have formalized the guessing process — it's called a proposal. And you

can always tell how much salespeople are guessing: the more they guess, the longer the proposal.

## AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH: MUTUAL EXPLORATION

But there is a fourth option: you explore with the client a solution that truly meets their needs— whether they eventually get that solution with you or with someone else. It means doing the critical spade-work to uncover the issues the solution is supposed to resolve, to find



evidence that proves the client has a problem, to develop metrics for success, to explore systemic implications, and to identify and overcome constraints.

Mutual exploration has two imagined downsides:

- It's believed that it takes more time.
- You may find you do not have a solution that truly meets the clients' needs, and thus “lose” a sale.

However, we assert that this approach uses time differently and more effectively. If you do not have a solution that meets the client's needs, it is more time effective to find that out early rather than late. Additionally you can't lose a sale you never had. Even if they do buy your solution and are displeased afterward, you still “lose.” Thus we contend that you can get the upsides of mutual exploration while turning the perceived downsides into advantages.

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### HELPING CLIENTS SUCCEED: INSTRUCTIONS FOR DOWNLOADING

Here are two sets of exercises to use in building a culture that wins by helping clients succeed. The first lists some key steps that your sales professionals can take with clients.

STEP	DISCUSSION POINTS
1: Check Your Intent	Write your own personal intent statement in which you define what you are committed to do to ensure that your clients succeed. You might share your intent with your customers. Clarifying your own personal intent can go a long way toward building trust.
2: Move Off the Solution	Keep asking questions until you can describe the “Win” for your clients better than they can describe it themselves. Ask about all the ways in which your clients can succeed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Revenue improvement?</li><li>• Cost reduction?</li><li>• Market share?</li><li>• Return on investment?</li><li>• Product/service/process improvement?</li><li>• Risk reduction?</li><li>• Their own career enhancement?</li><li>• What else?</li></ul>
3: Create a Win-Win Solution	Based on the evidence you’ve compiled, think creatively about what kind of solution would exactly fit your customer’s perception of success.

The second exercise lists the key steps that sales leaders need to take — in order — to institute a superior sales culture. Do you see your organisation doing these things? In this order?

STEP	DISCUSSION POINTS
1: Choose Your Audience	Does your culture focus on salespeople to the exclusion of everyone else in the organisation? Select your audience for your initiative vertically: Include not only the salespeople, but also those to whom they report, and in turn the people to whom they report.
2: Define Your Target	Don’t try to take on 50 things at once. If you could hit one or two targets, which ones would really make a difference?
3: Design the Training	Training is most effective when it simplifies what people are asked to learn to achieve the target. It’s also critical to focus on leaders – not just the individual contributors. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What would your training include if you were teaching no more than needed, but leaving out nothing that matters?</li></ul>
4: Engaged Execution	When leaders are engaged and can say, “This is my solution,” they really take charge and drive the process. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is your execution expertly designed so that it’s easy for continually stretched sales managers to implement? Is it spaced over time?</li></ul>
5: Measure, Results, Rinse, and Repeat	Did you achieve the target you defined earlier? If you’re not going to use what you’ve learned to refine and reengage, then there’s no point. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What needs to happen for you to hit the target?</li><li>• How can you refine and reengage in the process to meet your goal?</li></ul>

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### CREATE A TRUE WIN-WIN SOLUTION

In the new paradigm, sales isn't about selling. It's about helping your clients succeed. This means that your role is to create the conditions for clients to make good decisions — decisions that serve the clients' best interests and help them achieve their highest priorities. It's a paradigm that fully embodies the principle of win-win. The more passionately and skillfully you focus on creating success for your clients, the more successful you will be.

The new paradigm is about creating a culture of mutual exploration, and offering the solution that truly meets the client's needs is its goal. It may not happen every time, but it definitely can happen far more often than it does now.

Learn more about the sixth key practice to engage your people in our final article, *Building a Winning Culture: Create Intense Loyalty*.

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Ready to build a winning culture in your organisation? **Contact us at 0800 475 078 or visit [franklincovey.co.nz](http://franklincovey.co.nz)**

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