



THE **DILIGENCE** FIX



HOW STRIVING FOR MORE REVENUE
STRESSES YOUR SALES ORGANIZATION
AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

DAYNA WILLIAMS

THE DILIGENCE FIX

**How Striving for More Revenue
Stresses Your Sales Organization
and What to Do about It**

Dayna Williams

© 2023 by Dayna Williams

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

ISBN: 979-8-9864846-0-0 (paperback)

Table of Contents

Preface	vii
Introduction	xi
Part 1: Confronting Inconsistency	1
Chapter 1: Growth Breaks Things	3
Chapter 2: A Fortifying Framework	19
Part 2: Developing Diligence - The Ten Dimensions	29
Chapter 3: Growing Relationships	31
Chapter 4: Situational Intelligence	39
Chapter 5: Securing Information	47
Chapter 6: Intentional Listening	57
Chapter 7: Persuasive Communication	65
Chapter 8: Personal Ownership	75
Chapter 9: Time Planning	83
Chapter 10: Service Mindset	93
Chapter 11: Winning Drive	103
Chapter 12: Inner Resolve	111
Part 3: Implementing Sales Effectiveness	121
Chapter 13: Leading with Diligence	123
Chapter 14: Developing Diligence	139
Chapter 15: Selecting Diligence	165
Chapter 16: Maximizing Diligence	179

About the Author

Preface

One particular bright spot over the past five years of my life was my opportunity to serve as a contributor to the Association for Talent Development, a prominent organization that supports the many facets of the talent development profession. My work ranged from writing for their print magazine or website and supporting the sales enablement community of practice as programming chair for their annual conference. Since its inception, the event has been branded as SELL (Sales Enablement Learning and Leadership), with a focus on bringing together professional education for industry practitioners. The speakers were invited based on their working knowledge of relevant topics such as training, coaching, onboarding, manager enablement, and the like.

Whether designing the programming strategy for SELL or reflecting back on my eighteen years of working with sales organizations, I have always been intrigued by how those topics and other sales development realities will transcend industry, size, and maturation. Inherent within the business of *any* business, regardless of specific circumstance and nuance, within our companies there's this shared sense of responsibility for sales and revenue. If you are reading this book, chances are you shoulder some portion of that responsibility—and if you are like many of the wonderful people I've met throughout the years who chose this profession, you personally own the commitment you've made to advance the strategy within your organization. Thank you for that leadership.

The Diligence Fix

A few years ago, I was on a rather spirited call with a group of experienced sales enablement leaders. These individuals were in the final lap of preparing to present at the upcoming SELL conference. As the discussion was winding down, the group touched on some of the development issues that were top of mind for that quarter. Here are a few of the highlights from our informal chatter

We launched our sales process last year, but the sales team is still doing their own thing.

Earlier this year, we brought all our managers together for a two-day coaching class, but we're not seeing much traction—they are still telling salespeople what to do.

Our company made a huge investment in a new platform to give the sales team deeper insights, but we haven't been able to get the full-scale adoption that we wanted. My sellers are really good people, and they've been with us for a long time. During our sales kickoff, we brought in a sales trainer to work with them on questioning skills, but transactional selling continues to be their comfort

I'm curious—can you relate to this list? For my part, the impromptu back and forth was interesting to observe. Sometimes the richest dialogue whips up rather spontaneously!

This banter continued for several more minutes. Then someone from the group invited my input: “Dayna, what do you think?”

I paused for a few seconds and then shared my honest feedback: “It sounds like a consistency issue.” While these sales enablement practitioners were working on different initiatives, I couldn't help but notice a common thread running through

Preface

each one—behavioral inconsistency. Each example suggested a strong start to the work effort, but as time passed, issues with maintaining traction began to emerge.

Fast-forward a few years, and with more research and insight into the underlying root cause, if they asked me again, I'd modify the response I gave. If we were to play back that same group conversation today and run down the challenges that they were working through, I would offer this revised feedback: *It sounds like a diligence issue.*

Diligence is both a matter of methodical, excellent work and a matter of character. Its various dimensions can become a template for individual behavior and can be operationalized within the business to drive the best results. When diligence blooms, you see consistent outputs like persuasion, grit, resilience, accountability, and more. In the pages that follow, we will explore diligence from both a philosophical perspective and as a set of salesperson capabilities that influence their behavior. When diligence is woven into the fabric of your organization, it introduces a standard that chips away at inconsistent behavior and its consequences on the business.

Together we will look at diligence within the context of a scientifically validated framework that underwrites the way you lead the team, develop your salespeople, and execute on your sales plan. For companies in growth mode, diligence is also the gateway to attracting the right talent while deeply motivating your existing team. Comprised of two distinctive elements—core selling and personal leadership qualities—diligence can become your blueprint for building next-level capabilities within your salespeople. This combination of both sales *and* personal leadership will position sellers to win more with clients now and increase their value as professionals by preparing them for the next level of career success. When this happens, you have the added bonus

The Diligence Fix

of amassing a pipeline of internal candidates who are equipped to become leadership successors within the sales function or more broadly throughout the company.

Imagine the possibilities if, in addition to driving revenue, part of your sales organization's internal brand was its ability to select, grow, and export the best talent within the company. That recognition is within your reach.

Introduction

A great change sits on the horizon. Just fifteen years ago, we thought the internet and the speed at which we were now able to access information, comparison shop, and connect with others was enough evolution to last us for a lifetime. But now a new reality bears down on us. Artificial intelligence (AI) has stealthily moved from the pages of science fiction to the workplace. As of this writing, companies that are integrating this technology into their business are still the exception—but not for long. We are in the predawn hours of a widespread intelligence revolution. So how ready are we?

If the COVID-19 phenomenon taught us anything, it was an object lesson in how unprepared we were for handling a massive disruption in life and in business. Literally overnight many companies had to convert their operations from office-based formats into more of a distributed work model. Most lacked the norms, systems, processes, and policies to support this seismic shift. Managers had to learn how to lead virtual teams without the comfort and reliability of face-to-face interactions. Likewise, many individual contributors found their resilience tested as they learned to cope in an isolated environment, lacking collaboration and experiencing some serious Zoom burnout. After a while, there arose this dueling sense of craving the return to normalcy while recognizing that the pandemic has, for better or worse, left its thumbprint on our work forever.

If the onset of a relatively transient virus had this kind of lasting impact on our work, it's not hard to imagine what's potentially in store as the barriers to entry with AI get lower and as acquiring

The Diligence Fix

this technology becomes more practical. In the race to stay competitive, growth-oriented companies will make increasingly greater investment in targeted AI solutions that promise to save time, bring actionable insights, automate tasks, increase accuracy, and guide outcomes leading to greater return on investment. It is easy to see how this sort of advantage could get addicting quickly. You could almost see acquiring more AI-powered solutions as an arms race of sorts between competitive companies or within certain industry segments. Even reluctant adopters will be forced to catch up quickly or risk becoming like the many retailers who dug in their heels, refused the mandate for change, and suffered the consequences.

As AI becomes more integrated into the everyday life of business, the sales profession, like many others, is destined for a massive disruption. Of course, some things will get easier. Salespeople will be able to rely on machines to guide them on which clients to pursue or which solutions or pricing formulas will work best given all the different variables. However, this also means that the role of the salesperson will become much more specialized. As this happens, they will need to master a hybrid dynamic that includes human and machine intelligence working together to drive revenue and other critical outcomes. As clients adopt AI on their side, they will demand more from their salesperson interactions—more data, comparative insights, and quantifiable recommendations. They will want this information faster, and they will expect the salesperson to package up this detail and deliver precise recommendations.

Research by Sirius Decisions estimates that today, 67 percent of the buyer's journey now happens digitally. No doubt this will only

1 Matthew Parker, "67% of the Buyer's Journey Is Now Done Digitally—3 Ways to Deal with This," Profitable Print Relationships, accessed June 18, 2022, <https://profitableprintrelationships.com/67-of-the-buyers-journey-is-now-done-digitally-3-ways-to-deal-with-this>.

Introduction

increase as we see AI gain more prominence in sales and marketing to help inform the prospective buyer well before they ever engage with a salesperson. This means that salespeople will need to be able to seamlessly take the baton from marketing and demonstrate mastery within an accelerated, data-driven digital sales environment.

Before we get too caught up in the future, we have to address where most sales organizations are today in their own evolution. Salespeople are not ready to thrive in this intelligence revolution. In fact, year after year, sales leaders find themselves revisiting the basics over and over again with their teams to try to form good solution selling habits, often with mixed outcomes. A quick glance at a few statistics paints the picture:

Business-to-business (B2B) buyers report that fewer than one out of three salespeople can hold an effective conversation with senior executives ²

Executive buyers believe that only 20 percent of the salespeople they meet with are successful in achieving their expectations and creating value. Only one in four get agreement from these buyers to meet again.

As many as 90 percent of buyers would meet with sellers earlier but are delaying these conversations because they believe that sellers don't take the time to understand their business and add value ⁴

-
- 2 Steve W. Martin, "7 Reasons Salespeople Don't Close the Deal," Harvard Business Review, August 2, 2017, <https://hbr.org/2017/08/7-reasons-salespeople-dont-close-the-deal>
 - 3 Mark Lindwall, "Why Don't Buyers Want to Meet with Your Salespeople?," Forrester, September 29, 2014, www.forrester.com/blogs/14-09-29-why_dont_buyers_want_to_meet_with_your_salespeople.
 - 4 CSO Insights, "The Growing Buyer-Seller Gap: Results of the 2018 Buyer Preference Study," 2018, https://pleinairestrategies.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/CSO-Growing-Buyer-Seller-Gap-White-paper_FINAL-1.pdf.

The Diligence Fix

Of the executive buyers surveyed on their meetings with salespeople, 70 percent report that sellers are not prepared for the questions they ask, and 77 percent don't think that sellers understand the issues they deal with and where to help.

This is the current state for many organizations. So if we woke up tomorrow and mass implementation of AI was the new normal in the same way that COVID-19 roared onto the scene, most teams would get caught utterly flat-footed and underprepared.

We aren't there yet, but we can't sit back either. The greatest opportunity many sales leaders have right now is to prepare their teams for increased growth as the market continues to rebound. It means leading a complete top-down maturation of the sales function. In other words, taking steps to formalize total alignment among communicating the sales vision, activating managers-as-coaches, developing salesperson capability, and fine-tuning processes across the board. In the pages that follow, I will refer to this alignment effort as a Sales Effectiveness Program and focus on how to systematically implement it.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, we'll have a brief window of time before the next disruption hits home. AI is coming, and for better or worse or both, it will bring with it a tidal wave of change. It will be important to lead from the front on this, to lay the groundwork within your organization and build capability in salespeople that will ensure that they are resilient and equipped for success in a brand-new reality. Sales leaders who take these steps now will enjoy the early advantages that come only from being proactive and prepared.

5 Mark Lindwall, "Why Don't Buyers Want to Meet with Your Salespeople?"

Part 1

**Confronting
Inconsistency**

Chapter 1

Growth Breaks Things

Companies in growth mode have to relentlessly drive revenue quarter after quarter. The responsibility for ensuring that happens largely falls at the feet of sales leadership. Whether this charge is handed to a CEO within an early-stage growth company or a head of sales in a midsize company, leading this function is unquestionably one of the most challenging positions in business. Of course, if you are one of those team members who works tirelessly in a supporting management or sales operations role, chances are you too feel the pressure to perform. A company's very existence will rise and fall on its sales performance.

Sales leaders are responsible for synthesizing marketplace realities with company capabilities, fostering lead generation efforts, executing on a plan to meet revenue expectations, and managing through any number of internal constraints. For companies in aggressive growth mode, a sales leader's work is largely focused on rapidly addressing performance gaps and fine-tuning their approaches to keep pace. These leaders often need to drive results through their existing sales teams, which may be a mixed bag of talent and abilities. When performance falls short, sales leaders must quickly appraise the situation, adapt, and take action to effectively course correct.

The Diligence Fix

CRACKS AND QUICK FIXES

The pace at which most sales leaders have to work today to remain market competitive is both understandable and problematic at the same time. Without realizing it, things can get myopic quickly. It is easy to become too focused on the daily grind—those everyday activities of running a sales practice—and lose sight of the big picture. This is also commonly known as working in the business

Oftentimes, when the pressure is on to drive revenue and the work pace is accelerated, things can break. The demand for more productivity is always a reliable stress test for your people, process, and platforms. When cracks begin to appear, the temptation to reach for quick fixes is real. Anything that promises to address the inconsistencies that start to set in when driving for next-level growth seems attractive. Especially if you can throw money at a problem and have someone else take care of it for you—that seems like a best-case scenario!

Perhaps the quick fix looks like an outsourced sales training program to help your team get better at negotiating or handling objections. Or maybe it's a customer relationship management (CRM) enhancement to help salespeople get more regimented about how they prepare for calls. In either case, chances are the vendor made all sorts of assurances that these solutions were exactly what you needed to solve your challenges, so you purchased and ran with it

Fast-forward a few months, and you think that your eyes are deceiving you—the same performance cracks that prompted you to go vendor shopping are starting to show again! That's because these proverbial Band-Aids don't work over the long haul. Instead, these quick fixes are like wallpapering over a gaping hole. If you don't address underlying structural issues in your sales operation, then all the one-off vendor solutions or internal

Growth Breaks Things

special projects won't move the performance needle. In the worst-case scenarios, they can even confuse or frustrate the sales

The weight of being in growth mode can compromise the infrastructure you've built to date. In order to keep meeting higher and higher revenue targets, a sales operation—which was likely built to perform at a lower growth interval—will need to stretch and contort itself to pursue more clients and bring in more money. While this is going on, your team doesn't have enough bandwidth to work on the business and ensure that the team's operational chassis is strong and stable enough to support new demands. It's one thing to push hard to finish the first quarter strong. But if that same push happens in Q2 and Q3, the sales team is now officially operating on a different plane. If during this growth-driven evolution, reactive quick fixes were the only go-to answers for people, process, or platform issues, then those cracks are inevitable. These cracks start off looking like inconsistent behavior or performance, and with time they can worsen to a point of dysfunction and counterproductivity.

START WITH AN HONEST ANALYSIS

Most business leaders are good at noticing cracks. In fact, the more severe the cracks, the more likely they will get a lot of attention. Planning discussions around what upgrades are needed so that the sales team can keep pace with growth will undoubtedly ensue. The challenge is that these same leaders who are feverishly working in the business each day to devise strategy and drive performance are too close to the problems to be truly objective in solving them.

Before decisions are made around the right fixes, it is important to do some forensic work to uncover and analyze the origins of the performance-related and functional gaps. This important

The Diligence Fix

analysis begins with a review of four key areas within the sales organization:

1. Methodology and Process
2. Sales Development Strategy
3. Seller Performance (individually, team based)
4. Manager Effectiveness

For each area, determine the ideal state and business impact for each. Work through the list and ask the following questions:

Does this area exist today in our organization?

How formalized is it? Who owns it?

In what ways is it aiding our sales strategy and growth efforts

Where are the gaps? Will this area be sufficient one to two years from now?

Related to this area, do our people understand their role and why it matters to their work?

This legwork helps you see whether current less-than-ideal outcomes stem from something missing or broken at the sales function level, whether it is more about seller performance, or both. It provides a first glimpse into pockets of inconsistency that may be weakening the sales team's operational chassis. Armed with this insight, a sales leader can also determine what's working so that they can leverage it further.

Take, for instance, new hires and their ramp-up curve. If new salespeople are hitting targets within the first six months, and these new team members are crediting posthire training with giving them a solid knowledge base, then this is strong, confirming evidence. Your onboarding program (as part of your Sales

Growth Breaks Things

Development Strategy) is producing consistent results. It's a pillar that you can lean on to support future growth within the sales function

Now let's consider for a moment that the opposite is true. Suppose the onboarding program is ineffective. Maybe the idea was for it to be manager led, but those managers have very full plates, and as a result, new salespeople are left to their own devices. Within the first six months, these individuals seem busy, but they are not producing. Taking a closer look, you realize that varying degrees of knowledge are in play. Sellers are fuzzy about your company's ideal prospect profile, product catalog, or pricing model. They lack the confidence and basic building blocks necessary to be successful. All signs point to a near-certain conclusion. The current approach to onboarding new salespeople is producing inconsistent results.

When left unchecked, inconsistency slowly but steadily works against your interest as a sales leader. When it infiltrates companies in aggressive growth mode, inconsistency is a progressively destabilizing force that eats away at your efforts to fine-tune the sales operation. Its constant presence and the fires it ignites are a personal energy drain. For every hard-won step forward, the consequences of inconsistency can push you five steps back.

INCONSISTENT BEHAVIOR

While inconsistency is inherent within human behavior and therefore may never be fully eradicated, it can be subdued and controlled. The potential benefits of tackling this subtle but effective growth killer makes it a worthwhile leadership pursuit. Consistently run sales organizations generate more predictable outcomes, reduce overall risk, and attract the best talent while increasing team morale.

The earliest indicators of inconsistency tend to reveal

The Diligence Fix

themselves within the context of salesperson behavior. John isn't asking enough questions. Tamara doesn't use CRM the way she should. When seller behavior misses the mark, it is just so easy to observe. At first glance, it might look like inconsistent behavior stems from a few rogue individuals. However, it is almost always a symptom of larger problems within the sales function itself. These pesky behaviors are a mirror of sorts that reveals deeper issues

For example, in B2B selling, we often emphasize the importance of salespeople being more relationship oriented with clients rather than being transactional. In other words, we want salespeople to be motivated by helping the client meet their objectives. This often means that the salesperson needs to be working toward cultivating a longer-term commitment with their client, as opposed to just closing a deal— *any* deal

Despite manager coaching on this topic, let's say that you have a sales team that is still focused on winning deals and then quickly moving on to other opportunities. They aren't taking the time to forge relationships with their client contacts. This could be a comfort zone thing. Or it could be that salespeople are picking up on some mixed internal messages. On the one hand, they hear that relationship building is important, but on the other hand, the only thing that seems to truly matter is quota. They aren't sure what they will win if they focus on relationships, but it's clear what they'll lose if they don't meet their quarterly goal. In the prior scenario, the sales team's behavior, specifically their lack of consistent effort to build client relationships, may be a symptom of a common root issue: mixed internal messaging about what matters most to the company.

Mixed messaging happens when two dueling topics compete for prominence with each other. One topic involves the methods and behaviors that sales leaders want to see their teams put

Growth Breaks Things

into action. The other relates to sales goals. While methods and behavior will get some planned and spontaneous attention (especially when someone makes an error), messaging around sales goals often wins the top spot.

This is, of course, because results matter. Sales leaders also spend a great deal of their own time on goal planning, forecasting, and reporting. This includes reverse engineering annual revenue expectations, carving it up, and assigning it across the sales team. This work is nearly always top of mind for sales leaders, so it's easy to hyperfocus on it with the team. However, when the sales planning approach and subsequent messaging to salespeople becomes all about tactics and goals, it tends to take on the characteristics of a duck hunt—territory, targets, and tracking.

After leaders share this tactical plan with the sales team, the three Ts often become the subject of an endless conversation loop. Every manager check-in, every communication, is about pipeline, CRM, documentation, reporting, and the like. Each quarterly update is focused on—you guessed it—territory, targets, and tracking. When this happens, salespeople will take you literally—the three Ts are all that matter here. Even if you communicate these metrics with some additional guidance or direction, the majority of your team will still conclude that it's really just about the three Ts.

SALESPEOPLE ARE CHAMELEONS

When salespeople see that territory, targets, and tracking are the exclusive focus, heavily reinforced within the workflow, they'll adjust their tactics accordingly. Although these elements are important, when the focus is too narrow, it leaves things like methods or approaches up to individual interpretation. When sales leaders are messaging three to one in favor of the three Ts, salespeople start drawing their own conclusions about what it means

The Diligence Fix

to sell at your organization. This can be ground zero for widespread behavioral inconsistency.

Salespeople don't just take their cues from your messaging. They also observe the accepted behavior around them. Most salespeople have this wonderful, chameleon-style quality of becoming like the environment they are in. When they deploy this ability with clients, it tends to serve them well. Clients are likely to perceive these malleable qualities as relatable or personable. However, salespeople will bring this same quality into their workplaces. They will look for clues about what actions are allowable within their sales organization. While salespeople may hear your messaging around expectations, they will also compare that with what they see others do and whether that behavior gets acknowledged, recognized, ignored, or swept under the carpet. Then they will act in the way that most serves their interests, so long as it is either rewarded or allowed to continue without consequence. Consider this candid and important truth: *Salespeople will almost always discount spoken standards if they see contrary actions being rewarded or tolerated.* If they hear you say that sales process is important, but the top performer on the team has a reputation for skirting that process and still gets applauded, the takeaway is that making your numbers is the only thing that matters. The more frequent these sorts of disconnects are allowed to persist within a sales organization, the more likely salespeople will adopt a by-any-means-necessary mindset. When this happens, salespeople slowly become their own arbitrators of what behaviors or actions are necessary to drive activity and meet their goals. This reality is compounded when sales managers overlook or excuse bad behavior because it's connected to winning a big deal.

Of course, flexibilities may be necessary to produce short-term wins. The difference is that if your sales organization has a by-any-means-necessary current running throughout, a

Growth Breaks Things

long-term cost is accruing. Think about it as a steady drip of fuel for inconsistency. The more chronic inconsistency becomes over time, the more it seeps into your system and can become completely unmanageable.

INCONSISTENCY WITHIN THE SALES FUNCTION

Inconsistent behavior is one type of headache. However, when the problem becomes more systemic, as it begins to infect the sales function, it can be harder to fully assess what's going on. Such attempts are like a murky expedition to the bottom of a steep riverbed—you just never know what you're going to find as you continue the descent. For that reason, it may be tempting to skip the dive altogether. Sometimes it just seems safer to press on with the tactics of territory, targets, and tracking, leaving matters of inconsistency unaddressed for the moment. Of course, time has a way of stratifying these issues, which only makes the potential consequences that much more severe.

Consider the plight of one particular business leader with a sales organization of about thirty-five people. Focused on ambitious growth, the company looked the other way as each salesperson did their own thing within their territories. They ganged up on any attempts to standardize process or approach, and each time leadership didn't push the issue. However, when it came time to accelerate a new go-to-market plan by migrating the team to Salesforce, it took months of costly consulting and analysis to piece together a common Sales Process that was supportive of the company's sales strategy and could be used to customize the platform. Efforts to then train the sales team as well as other business partners required not only teaching the CRM but also the newly standardized Sales Process—which was now a nonnegotiable. On top of that, leadership introduced about a half dozen

The Diligence Fix

new presales and post-sales processes at the same time that were necessary to support this more formalized approach. After the training and socialization efforts, team productivity ground to a halt. The shock of having to introduce too much too fast left this sales team drowning in a confusing sea of process and standardization. Most found it nearly impossible to take even the smallest steps forward.

While this example highlights extreme issues with anything-goes salesperson behavior, it is easy to see how the issues also connect back to gaps in the sales function. Failure to keep pace with business growth and get ahead of opportunities to formalize things creates systemic inconsistency. Every sales organization has its tipping point, and for this particular company, it was the implementation of Salesforce and all that went with it. In their slow but steady march to CRM migration, leadership faced many decision points along the way. They could have confronted consistency issues one-by-one before everything combined for an ill-timed avalanche. The lesson here is straightforward: the presence of inconsistency in any sales organization offers a choice—a leadership decision to confront the issues or punt until a later day.

The previous example primarily illustrates how inconsistent process is a common gap within companies that are growing quickly. However, there are other ways that inconsistency shows up within a business. These include the following:

The company's value proposition is weak without enough perceived value.

The go-to-market plan is not aligned to market needs or to the capabilities of the business.

The sales team composition (roles, staffing levels, organization, manager-to-seller ratio) is not sufficient to support executing on the sales plan.

Growth Breaks Things

The sales team does not understand or chooses not to execute the sales plan; they either don't meet role expectations or their performance isn't aligned with how they will be measured or compensated.

At the start of a new year, the organization may be in between sales plans and is sending mixed messages to the sales team to follow the former plan while openly speculating about changes due to take place within the new plan. There is no defined Sales Process (what you do), stages, key activities, evidentiary outcomes, or Methodology (how you do it) to create shared language and understanding among the team.

There are no enforced standards around proper deal documentation within the CRM or expectations around strong internal handoffs.

Technology infrastructure does not support the needs of the sales team (it may be old, outdated, not customized, underutilized, or misused).

A product or service offering and its corresponding pricing structure is underdefined, allowing room for the sales team to improvise and potentially resulting in lower margin deals.

Sales managers were promoted from being individual contributors without any prior experience leading people.

Sales managers struggle to effectively coach and develop sellers, especially those who are different from them.

Sales training efforts are not connected to a strategic development plan, and thus actual results from these fragmented offerings become difficult to track.

Salesperson recruiting efforts lack objective data and insight to determine whether the candidate's personality

The Diligence Fix

traits and prior experience will translate to success at their new organization.

New seller onboarding is a firehose of information, lacking real-world context and structured on-the-job practice to accelerate effectiveness

The sales team culture is loosely defined and inconsistently holds people accountable for activity and behavior.

It might be helpful to read over this list a few times and to consider highlighting the issues that could have an impact in your organization. Is it possible that a few of these might make for some good conversation starters at one of your management meetings?

ILLUSTRATING CONSISTENCY

Next, let's look at the potential impact when these issues are in play. For illustrative purposes, we'll descend upon a fictitious sales organization that is experiencing some growth pains, including having missed revenue targets the last two quarters. Assume for a few moments that you have a bird's-eye view of the happenings within this business. From this high perch, you can observe a few drivers of inconsistency at work and draw some of your own conclusions about the potential consequences.

The first thing you notice is the way this company's sales team is set up. It doesn't look like it is adequate enough to support the needs of its approved go-to-market plan. The job description for its B2B sellers requires a mix of both hunting and farming skills to originate and close deals. Yet the current sales team roster is full of farmers. They don't have the skills or the confidence to successfully hunt for new logos.

As a result, these sellers gravitate to lower-hanging deals—the kind that will close easily. Of course, there aren't enough of

Growth Breaks Things

those turnkey deals to meet their goals, and so as the pressure to perform mounts, it creates some undesirable outcomes. As soon as these salespeople get in front of new clients, they turn into order-takers. Their skill set isn't strong enough to confidently lead a consultative sale, and so many of the deals they write up are outside of the company's core capabilities. Yet for the sake of quota, their manager pushes them through, creating all sorts of downstream headaches. Having the wrong people in the wrong seats on this sales team means fewer new clients and lower deal quality from existing clients.

Adding to the ability gap, this sales team is also shorthanded.

They are down two full-time salespeople, and this open headcount means that at least 20 percent of new leads and existing accounts aren't being covered. To make matters worse, you notice that the company is recruiting sales candidates using the same hunting-and-farming job description. If they bring on two ill-fitting new team members, the talent gap is poised to widen, and the cycle of inadequate performance will surely repeat itself.

Next, you observe the company's sales managers. This group was primarily promoted from within and were formerly individual contributors. Now as managers of people, they have a stubborn habit of telling their sellers what to do. They take a one-size-fits-all approach to these conversations, which drains a lot of time from their day. Instead of these salespeople getting better at solving their challenges, they are becoming more dependent on their sales managers' direction. Despite the time and effort, performance remains mediocre.

Taking a closer look at what development options are available to close some of these performance gaps, you notice that the company offers a large catalog of sales training courses through their learning management system (LMS). Two on-site workshops occur each year. At the annual kickoff, leadership

The Diligence Fix

always makes a point to include a fairly engaging skill-building session. At first glance, this blended approach seems to check all the training boxes well enough. But when you see how it plays out from a higher vantage point, the development plan seems rather ad hoc, almost disjointed.

To a salesperson, this training approach might feel almost like binge-watching a series on Netflix or Hulu. While they're immersed in the content, there's an interesting and possibly even an entertaining quality to it. However, after the last episode, chances are the viewer removes the title from their watchlist and shifts their attention to whatever's next. The downside of content overload is that it has become the norm to passively consume information without any responsibility to do something with it. You can see how the same may be true with episodic, disjointed sales training. As the sales team consumes the content, there may be a moment or two of relevance, but if it's not connected to a broader plan that addresses the big gaps you're seeing, it's doubtful that there will be any real change.

This hypothetical exercise teases out three common causes of inconsistency within the sales function and how these issues play out in real time:

1. The wrong sales team composition
2. Underdeveloped managers
3. Unaddressed salesperson skill gaps

Of course, this same fictional company could have just as easily had more like five or eight issues simmering and compounding beneath the surface, all working against growth efforts.

As with any journey, awareness is the first step, so let's start with this truth: Inconsistency is an indisputable progress killer. Now for some good news. There is a way to correct these

Growth Breaks Things

imbalances and gradually fortify your organization so that it's well positioned to support the continued growth of your business. The answer is getting serious about implementing a Sales Effectiveness Program within your organization. This approach is about creating total alignment from strategy through implementation and evaluation that begins to chip away at inconsistency. The Sales Effectiveness Program is anchored by a fortifying framework and spans the three critical elements of Methodology, Process, and Development to help move the sales team, and the organization, forward.

As a leader weighing this prospective challenge, perhaps you're feeling an internal fire starting to ignite. The choice to confront and tackle inconsistency is bold, but it's also one of the most important investments you can make. In so doing, you can bank on a spectacular payoff in more ways than one.

Chapter 2

A Fortifying Framework

Whether the origins of inconsistency lie within the behavior of our salespeople or whether it lurks within the corners of our sales function, we've explored how it can keep our important initiatives from gaining traction and stymie growth efforts.

Confronting this problem begins anchoring your sales organization to a broader framework. There simply has to be an overarching umbrella—a North Star of sorts that drives consistency by guiding behaviors and actions. Something directional beyond just territories, targets, and tracking that helps the sales organization's tires grip the roadway. The idea is that this fortifying framework will underwrite the various components of the organization's new Sales Effectiveness Program. In time, this program becomes the blueprint for how work gets done, why technology or tools are rolled out, and what we expect out of sellers.

Introducing a fortifying framework as a first step on the journey toward sales effectiveness might feel like a culture play, and to some degree it is. However, simply adorning an office wall or website with a shiny set of core values or buzzwords won't suffice. Any framework worth organizing around must be inherently practical. It must be fully implementable within a real-world sales team and have enough science, substance, and sustaining

potential to actually impact the consistency issue—both behaviorally and within the sales function itself.

The Diligence Framework fits that bill. Its content flows from some of the top literature in the sales field today and is comprised of ten well-researched dimensions. Most importantly, it has been shaped and pressure-tested according to what it takes for salespeople to successfully perform in today's complex environment. As a set of well-defined principles and capabilities, this modern framework is a well-suited candidate for becoming that overarching umbrella for growth-minded sales leaders who want to preside over more consistent organizations.

[End of Complimentary Preview]

More at: TheDiligenceFix.com

About the Author



Specializing in sales performance improvement, Dayna Williams has developed award winning training content to serve hundreds of companies and thousands of salespeople over the last 20 years. She is currently leveraging those trends and insights to help venture backed firms build capable and efficient sales organizations that are ready to drive revenue growth and scale. Dayna has also co-created the Association for Talent Development's annual SELL conference and continues to support its broader sales enablement programming strategy.