



VIEWPOINT

What makes a great Vice-President of Sales?

By David R Ednie, President and CEO, SalesChannel Europe a consulting and sales transformation company specialising in Sales Performance Motivation.

One of the key roles in any organisation is the VP of Sales. What are the critical success factors that our newly recruited VP Sales must demonstrate to transform the sales organisation into a high performance team of over-achievers?

The role can be divided into four components: internal alignment, external visibility, process and people.

Success at the internal level is linked to political skills at the executive level but also across the whole organisation. The ability to energise and align the entire company with the sales function is vital. The first step is to align marketing with sales. Sustainable top line growth comes from a constant stream of new customers. These start out as prospects and good prospects come from effective lead generation activities. This "above funnel" activity is typically performed by marketing. Alignment will result in the VP Sales having "cradle to grave" responsibility and accountability for the entire sales process.

At the external level, success is achieved by the VP Sales being highly visible to customers, partners, industry leaders, competitors and the media. This could be a full-time job in itself. Additionally, the VP Sales must be the customer champion. Personal characteristics required here are personal charisma, communication and people skills. A highly effective VP Sales can funnel customer-related insights back to the executive team and the rest of the organisation.

A VP Sales must be a process guru and an

organisational architect to bring focus and consistency to the sales process. The most vital process to formalise across the organisation is lead generation. The VP Sales' responsibility is to ensure that its troops have a pipeline of qualified prospects to transform into happy customers. The second key process that needs to be validated is the sales management process which tracks all key performance metrics including individual productivity and the forecasting process. Here rigour, attention to detail and clarity of thought are the order of the day.

The VP Sales needs to be an exceptional people person; a visionary and a natural leader. Sales people are inspired and motivated by working for a visionary leader who not only understands the business but also genuinely understands their challenges; cares about their success on the job and cares about them as people. At the same time the VP Sales must also be a tough people manager - under performance cannot be tolerated. It is unfair to the rest of the team and the rest of the company and must be dealt with quickly and effectively. The VP Sales must at the same time be a compassionate coach. This is a very different profile and skill set from that of the traditional role of a sales driver who was often the "top dog" in sales. An outstanding sales coach has outstanding "people skills" such as empathy, understanding, emotional sensitivity, tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity, discipline, decisiveness and rigour.

But getting the balance right between short-term and long-term focus is a constant challenge. The VP Sales must deliver revenue and market share targets this year while building the organisation's capability to deliver the growth called for in next year's business plan.



David R Ednie is President and CEO of SalesChannel Europe, a consulting practice specialising in sales performance motivation, which is all about keeping your team at the TOP!
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EYEON

Strategic recruitment: planning for the future

A survey by PwC and the Economist Intelligence Unit indicates that 42% of senior executives in the financial sector believe that finding the right staff to deliver business growth will be the greatest management challenge of the near future.

Around Europe, organisations are also finding that high-level recruitment is not getting any easier. "Part of the solution is to plan your human resources strategically", said Steven Maisel, Managing Partner of Alexander Hughes Belux. This entails identifying, as precisely as possible, quantitative and qualitative Human Resources needs, up to two years in advance.

"In fact, HR must be aligned with the corporate strategy from the outset. If the strategy is likely to call for a venture into new business areas in 2009, HR requirements must be charted now, and recruitment processes put in place to ensure the right people are operational when required", said Maisel.

Increasingly companies have to define their HR strategies according to the changing business environment and forecasted demand for future profiles. This strategic recruitment approach will be essential for businesses to attract the best people, survive and grow.

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The golden checklist of a successful VP of Sales

- Create a customer-driven culture
- Recruit and select the right sales talent
- Train and develop for the right set of skills
- Segment markets in meaningful ways
- Implement formal sales processes
- Develop enabling information technology
- Align other business functions with sales
- Deliver and where possible exceed my numbers