

Making Change Happen: Know, Believe, and Do

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Are you moving your sales force from product selling to solution selling? Are you trying to increase customer face-time by driving consumption of more e-Learning? Are you gearing up to combat a significant competitive threat? Have you recently re-organized the sales force around distinct customer or product segments? Are you worried that your sales teams' skills are becoming increasingly obsolete in a changing marketplace? In the past few years, almost every major sales organization has attempted to change how its sales force sells and approaches the market. The challenge is: How can the sales training organization help support and drive sustainable organization change?

Here's what we know: Training alone will not make sustainable change happen. Most of us have tried to drive change through skills training, only to find that the costs and investment in training do not necessarily result in the pay-off for which we hoped. To make a change sustainable, more is required than skills or new compensation programs or new sales organization charts. For sustainable change, your sales teams must know the direction and the strategy, believe in it, and become committed to doing things differently as a result. This simple model: Know, Believe, and Do forms the basis of planning and communicating any change in your sales organization.

What do the salespeople need to know?

Let's suppose that you are attempting to move your sales force from a product-selling strategy to a solutions-selling strategy. Begin by asking yourself these questions. To make that transition, what do the salespeople need to know? What do they need to know to believe that the company must make this transition? What is the knowledge they need to be able to sell solutions? Knowledge falls into these key categories:

Why: The sales force has to understand the business case for change. What are the competitive challenges that make this change necessary? How do we stack up in the marketplace?

Fundamentally, you have to communicate the answer to the question: Why should we change?

What: Often, we fail to communicate clearly and crisply our new sales strategy. What is it? What are our goals? How will it affect individual sales roles?

How: If we are going to sell solutions, what will those solutions look like? What are our capabilities? What are the changes we will make to the sales and service organizations to support solution-selling? What are the resources that the sales team will have available? What knowledge of our capabilities does each salesperson need to sell successfully?

Any change effort must begin with a clear and crisp communication strategy that repeats the answers to these questions as many times as possible in as many vehicles as possible. A common mistake is to launch the change effort with a “big bang,” and then communication fades. This knowledge effort must be continuous to support sustainable change.

What do our salespeople need to believe?

Belief, more than anything else, drives behavior. We can equip our sales teams with as much knowledge and skills as possible, but if they don’t believe that changing their approach will make a difference, they won’t do what we need them to do. The tricky part is: How do you influence the beliefs in your sales organization?

In organizations people listen to what leaders say, but they draw their beliefs from what leaders do and their trust in the leadership of the organization. To influence the beliefs of our salespeople, we have to convince them of the following:

- ✓ Leadership Competence: Salespeople have to believe that the leadership team really knows what they’re doing. That is why it is critically important to communicate repeatedly the business case for change, the strategy, and the difference this change will make in the company’s performance.
- ✓ Say What You Mean: Watch out for “management speak.” Be direct and crisp about the change. Create the “burning platform” for change (John Kotter) by making sure that people know the impact of not changing.

- ✓ **Mean What You Say:** In one case, we observed a sales organization use the “big bang” approach to launching a new value-added sales strategy. The sales organization left a national sales meeting charged up and ready to sell. Unfortunately, the service organization was unprepared to provide the level of solutions required. Salespeople quickly lost faith in the company’s commitment to change.
- ✓ **Consistency Matters:** Related to meaning what you say, consistency in what you say and do matters. If you are committed to solution-selling, make sure your new product marketing materials position products as part of a solution. Don’t promote a salesperson known as a product-seller to a sales management position. A common mistake is to talk solution-selling, but during the last week of the quarter you push for product sales to make a number. Employees in general, and salespeople in particular, are actively watching for inconsistencies in your messages.

Consistency also means remaining steadfast in your direction and strategy. Sustainable change does not happen in an instant. Staying true to course with consistency and the same messages is more effective than constant change for change’s sake.

What do salespeople need to do?

Finally, you are ready to help salespeople change and adapt their behaviors to align with your sales strategy. Assuming you are experts in sales training development, your organization must then reinforce and reward the new behaviors. Sales managers have to become more than coaches; they must become teachers and role models for the new sales approach. Reward systems, including promotions, have to recognize salespeople who practice solution-selling. Consequences must be created for those who don’t. Institutionalize the change through performance management programs that clearly communicate and reinforce both the performance results and the behaviors you expect.

Know, Believe, and Do

With many of our clients, we create “marketing blueprints” that clearly identify the Know, Believe, and Do for the change the client is initiating. We then identify all the change communication vehicles for getting these messages out. Whether you are launching e-Learning or completely re-designing your sales organization, a clear and strategic communication strategy can make the difference in both the success of the change and its sustainability.

