

# The Best Practices of High Performing Sales Teams: 'Top-Down Vision'



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## High Performing Sales Teams Develop, Communicate and Deploy Effective Top-Down Vision from Sales Leadership

Prior to launching PMI ten years ago, I held Chief Sales Officer positions with several organizations. Sometimes my Chief Sales Officer responsibilities included marketing and sometimes my responsibilities included customer service. But in all cases, it was clearly understood that I was the guy that was responsible for making the numbers. I often reflect on these experiences in my client work today. It was probably the best preparation that anyone could have for the type of work that PMI does, and other PMI'ers with the same type of background agree: the challenges of modern sales executives are daunting and formidable, and 'walking in their shoes' is the only way to truly understand the stress and difficulty of this role.



By combining my own experiences with the Chief Sales Officers that I have had the opportunity to work with, certain things stand out as best practices required for high performance. In some cases, success can be connected with the best practice because it has been implemented. In some cases, there has been a lack of success that appears to result from the absence of a specific best practice. The **Best Practices of High Performing Sales Teams** article series will focus on sales best practices that tend to be predictors of success in sales leadership/management, sales performance/execution, sales strategy deployment and strategic account management.

### *Best Practice: Top-Down Vision*

High performing sales teams seem to do a consistently effective job of providing top-down vision from sales leadership. In these companies, salespeople and sales managers understand the direction and expectations of their organization because:

1. There is a vision of the 'desired next level' that includes stated objectives that are clear and measurable.
2. They can associate their own W.I.I.F.M? (What's in it for me?) with the success of the vision.
3. There is an ongoing effort by sales leadership to communicate and reinforce the vision.

While the development of top-down vision may be the result of a planning session (or series of sessions), the communication, execution and adoption of top-down vision is ongoing. If you have ever worked in a sales organization that effectively implemented top-down vision, then you know that it typically consists of a set of

objectives for the business that may be connected with 'core values' or guiding principles for business conduct and customer engagement.

### *Creating the Vision*



Effective sales leaders seem to have a way of brainstorming with others to harvest ideas that will help fuel the creation of their vision. In doing so, they **collaborate** up and down (and even outside) their organization about what's working and what's not, the desired end-state for their team and how to best get there. Based on feedback from thought leaders and top performers, they begin to build their success vision for the organization. Through their collaborative approach, they get more 'buy-in' because of the way that they **formulate** their vision. People feel a part of it because they have equity in it – and the vision becomes shared as a result. The likelihood of successful implementation is greater simply because of the process for creating the vision.

### *Communicating the Vision*

Once the vision is defined, effective sales leaders seek opportunities to **validate** it with key members of their team, including sales managers, salespeople and key stakeholders in other organizations (marketing, finance, services, engineering). Some leaders will even vet their vision with partners and customers. Then, when these sales leaders **articulate** their vision to the organization, they know that they are doing so from a platform that is based on teamwork and open communication. Their message is well received and more clearly understood because they have already heard and responded to many of the most likely objections and challenges. As a result, these leaders are able to more effectively sell their vision.

### *Driving the Vision*

We've all experienced vision speeches that resulted in little or no true behavioral change or improvement in sales execution. The effective sales leader will look for opportunities to immediately **demonstrate** core components of their vision by 'walking the talk' in the field themselves. We have recently observed sales executives in both the manufacturing and financial services industries that did an exceptional job of doing exactly what they were asking their teams to do – in the field with customers. Finally, the implementation of top-down vision is likely to have more adoption and traction in the field if there is an attempt to **motivate** salespeople and managers to support and drive the vision. While compensation is certainly a component of motivation, effective sales leaders also look for ways to recognize early wins resulting from field sales adoption and execution of the vision

### *Avoiding Vision Problems*

Implementing top-down vision isn't easy – but it is a best practice of many of today's high performing sales teams. If your objective is to create, communicate and drive an effective top-down vision with your team, beware the potential obstacles or vision problems that can sometimes get in the way.

These include:

**Nearsightedness:** avoid a vision that focuses primarily on the short-term while ignoring serious long-term issues or opportunities

**Farsightedness:** avoid a vision that focuses primarily on the long-term while ignoring serious short-term issues or opportunities

**Blurred Vision:** avoid a fuzzy vision that may be unclear to others in your organization though it seems perfectly clear to you

**Distorted Vision:** avoid a vision that ignores obvious obstacles or roadblocks that seem to be impediments to success

**Pink Eye:** avoid a vision that is too optimistic and seems to suggest an unrealistic 'rose colored glasses' view of the future.

Following the process above for collaborating, formulating and validating your vision will help avoid these potential vision problems and position the effective sales leader to successfully implement their top-down vision.

### *Conclusion*

High performing sales teams tend to be far above average in driving top-down vision throughout their organizations. Is it easy? Of course not – because if it was, every sales leader would do it. But for those that are successful in deploying this best practice, the strategic advantages are clear. Since most salespeople and sales managers do not have strong **night vision** (which means that they do not see as clearly when kept in the dark) perhaps an effective, top-down vision from sales leadership is the corrective measure that is needed.

### *Next Month*

Our next article will extend Top-Down Vision into action. In **Effective Field Coaching**, we will discuss how to equip and enable first and second level sales managers to effectively drive top-down vision through the implementation of effective field coaching.

Performance Methods, Inc., recognized by TrainingIndustry.com as one of the **2009 Top Sales Training Companies**, will be featured in a series of articles that will focus on the **Best Practices of High Performing Sales Teams**. PMI is proud to serve the needs of a broad group of industry-leading companies and will be sharing with the TrainingIndustry.com readership how leading global firms are deploying proven best practices to increase sales effectiveness, create customer value, grow customer relationships and gain competitive advantage. The **Best Practices of High Performing Sales Teams** article series will cover a number of critical areas of sales performance and provide readers with insight into how sales best practices are being deployed effectively by world-class sales organizations in a variety of industries. These articles will provide special emphasis on key best practices driving effective sales leadership/management, sales performance/execution, sales strategy deployment and strategic account management.

