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## **Eight Nine Characteristics of great sales organizations**

Having spent the better part of my career building sales teams, I have seen my share of great sales teams. Unfortunately, I have also seen my fair share of “less than great teams” as well.

Over that time, I have compiled a list of those areas that the great sales enterprises share. I call them the “**GREAT EIGHT**”

Here, in no particular order, are the **GREAT EIGHT**,

- 1) A well communicated sales process and sales nomenclature permeates the enterprise.
- 2) Each salesperson understands their personal sales metrics and is held accountable to those metrics.
- 3) The value proposition is well understood, and reps are savvy at presenting that value.
- 4) A CRM is well ingrained in the organization and embraced by all.
- 5) Salespeople understand the value of marketing and embrace their Role in coordinating marketing within their territory.
- 6) The organization has a robust Strategic sales and marketing plan and there is a strong focus on execution of that plan.
- 7) Sales managers understand and engage in Coaching as an integral part of their job.
- 8) There is a rigorous hiring and onboarding process that weeds out underperformers.

Certainly, there are other contributing factors, but these are the “holy grail”. Make sure you have these in place and the other issues seem to resolve themselves as the leader focuses on communicating, guiding and developing the team. Often, the root cause of our challenges is our selection of the sales leader and our inability to develop their leadership skills. The problem arises when we first choose that sales superstar that has been our top performing rep. We erroneously assume that because they were a great salesperson, they will automatically be a superstar manager. This assumption has proven wrong often. The great salesperson approaches the sales leadership position thinking that the same attributes which made them a successful salesperson; tenacity, perseverance, sound tactics and an ability to sell will translate to sales management.

In fact, the attributes top sales leaders most possess are coaching and development skills, strategic planning and execution, empathy, high EQ among others. The following editorial must be discounted if in fact you have the wrong person at the helm.

Here is a deeper review of the “Great Eight”

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**A well communicated sales process and sales nomenclature permeates the enterprise.**

Each sales organization has a de facto sales process which has evolved within the company. However, there must be 100% agreement on each stage of the sales process, along with a common nomenclature and win probability. Close or similar will not cut it. Until this process is adopted forecasting and rep development is imperfect, at best. Take the time to definitively define and hard code the process so you can scale and predict. Make sure you get the input of your team...

**Each salesperson understands their personal sales metrics and is held accountable to those metrics.**

Most sales reps do not have a good understanding of how their time is best spent. Make sure your reps have a quota (believe me 40% of companies DO NOT have set quotas.) Once completed help your reps understand and OWN their own metrics, so they can focus energy on the proper high gain activities. Here are the ratios each rep must OWN:

Proper funnel size  
Average sales size  
Average sales cycle  
#Contacts/#Decision maker  
#Decision makers/ #appt  
#Appts/ #presentations  
#Presentations/ close

It has been my experience that funnels are not full enough and not enough of the proper activity is being conducted. It is vital that the REP establishes these numbers, so they internalize what is needed for success. Oh, by the way, some of the above are the KPI's to which you must hold accountable.

**The value proposition is well understood, and reps are savvy at presenting that value.**

Have you ever listened to how your reps introduce your company to prospective clients? It might make you shiver. Most sales reps drone on and on about the history, depth, breadth, and size of your organization. LISTEN UP: your prospective clients do not care!

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Do your reps have an engaging value proposition that centers on PAINS they solve and get the prospect to ENGAGE.

If your reps are losing on price, it is THEIR Fault, as price is only important if they cannot display true value. It is also important for your reps to understand and be able to articulate the difference between **price** and Total Cost of Ownership **TCO**.

Make sure when a prospect tells you that your price is too high, you can adeptly switch the conversation to the actual costs involved in selecting you as a vendor, as opposed to a competitor. If not, you are destined to win and lose on price and lose a larger percentage of deals.

### **A CRM is well ingrained in the organization and embraced by all**

Unbelievably some companies still do not have a CRM. Many of those who have them find that the adoption of this vital tool is poor. CRM is first, and foremost a philosophy to provide exceptional support to the proper target market and customers. The CRM TOOL comes afterwards and must support your philosophy. I have seen the marketing portion of the sales funnel grow dramatically through the years, while the actual sales engagement has become more concentrated, and has moved further down the engagement process. If you lack a tool to nurture and develop permission-based marketing using digital mediums and social platforms you will lose out. In addition, accurate reporting is vital to predict, plan and train.

### **Salespeople understand the value of marketing and embrace their role in coordinating marketing within their territory.**

The line between sales and marketing has always been blurred. Reps want more opportunities and marketing wishes salespeople embraced the air cover they provide.

The fact is the marketing-sales function must be well defined, shared, and integrated. A cohesive sales and marketing organization will maximize opportunities and maximize their capture rate.

Salespeople must understand and embrace their role in maximizing the marketing message in their chosen markets and with their clients. Unfortunately, this rarely occurs.

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**The organization has a robust strategic sales and marketing plan and there is a strong focus on execution of that plan.**

Things are created twice, First in vision, second in reality. Few companies have a current sales and marketing plan which is shared by all and inspected frequently. If the leadership team fails to have a written plan or fails to communicate the plan into clear tactics and metrics, chaos ensues. Many sales leaders do not understand the importance of having a shared focus, and so people are not working cohesively and there is no real ownership of the plan. As an example, the plan, should include, at minimum:

- 3-year revenue objectives
- 1-year annual projections
- Quarterly Rocks and accountabilities
- SWOT analysis
- Marketing focus
  - Collateral
  - Digital focus
  - Web and social platforms
  - NPS
  - Trade show strategy
- Customer persona
- Product mix
- Channel strategy

There is much more but we will pause here...

**Sales managers understand and engage in Coaching as an integral part of their job.**

As a business and sales coach, I value coaching as the single greatest developmental tool available in the business world. Many frontline managers see coaching as an ancillary part of their job. They are too busy coaching and developing their people because they are playing firefighter as the battle the problems which surround them. If they embraced their people and invested in their development, they would find the fires would cease and they could spend their time on positive high gain activity. Less tenured managers become particularly immersed in firefighting as they approach the job as a super-salesperson, getting involved in all the wrong activity. Make sure that the single greatest responsibility they have is to lead, manage and hold

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their people accountable. What is your sales leader's job description? Are they focusing on their five highest gain activities? Do they know what those highest gain activities are? Are *YOU* coaching them?

### **There is a rigorous hiring and onboarding process that weeds out underperformers.**

Many of the aforementioned issues can be avoided simply by being rigorous in your selection and deselection process. The adage that we hire too fast and fire too slow is a universal truth. Understand that, as a sales leader, selection of top-flight talent is critical. You then owe it to that person to provide a strong onboarding process. It takes less than 3 months to determine if someone can REALLY make it. Yet I continuously see people avoiding letting people go, because they fear they could "do worse" and/or they are too busy "putting out fires."

A bad hire costs somewhere between \$30,000 and \$80,000, on average. Create a selection and onboarding process that supports success. Suffice to say, it is significantly more involved than you presently utilize. As an example, my selection process has 18 steps, and my onboarding process articulates weekly and daily training requirements for 3-6 months depending on the position.

### **Summary**

There really is a ninth quality of successful sales organizations. This one really carries more weight than the others: **a fervent commitment to improvement.**

The companies who are not satisfied with the status quo are those who sustain remarkable results. Insightful leaders who value human capital are the companies that excel. My responsibility is to reveal and release human energy at all levels of the enterprise, the team, and the people. If you fear the status quo more than change and you view human capital as your greatest asset... we might be able to help.

This is a very high-level overview of common sales problems, each of which merits a deeper dive. If you'd like to take a deeper dive, let us know.

**How effective is your company's sales organization?**

[Take our brief sales effectiveness survey, answer 7 questions and find out](#)



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## **About Don Hahn**

**CFCC, CFPBA, CPVA, CPTA  
Chief Learning Officer  
Hahn Training**

A life-long sales professional, Don is passionate about enabling organizational change through improved leadership and coaching. As a leader, trainer and coach, Don delivers blended learning experiences including sales and sales management training, leadership workshops, executive coaching, and sales forums and a sales toolkit, all of which serve as the foundation for a top performing company.

A certified Franklin Covey Coach, Sadler Certified Sales Master, certified in psychometric assessment tools, an EOS Traction implementor, sales trainer and business consultant, Don has worked with hundreds of businesses and thousands of professionals in creating change-ready organizations. As a leading talent manager, Don is a member of TTI's elite Chairman's Circle and a chosen member of TTI's International Faculty.

Prior to founding Hahn Training in 2000, Don spent over 25 years in Fortune 500 firms as a successful sales rep, coach and advisor. As a sales leader he has spearheaded business operations, channel development, marketing and sales operations for global sales enterprises from start-ups to Fortune 50 Firms

As a sales coach, Don has engaged in over one hundred coaching engagements over the past decade, leading to profound results for his coaching clients. Don lives up to his tagline; "All Things Sales"

Active in the community, Don is past president of the Buffalo Niagara Sales and Marketing Executives (BNSME), a mentor and reactor at UB's Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership, and the Center for Leadership and Organizational development,

He has authored and established The Corporate Mind, a comprehensive Mastermind Group for entrepreneurs and leaders. Additionally, he has published "Keep it in the Fairway," a book and seminar series examining the connection between sales success and golf mastery. Don's no-nonsense approach gets results. He's been there, done that. He does not teach theory; he teaches real world.

Don lives in Buffalo with his wife of 40 years, Debby. His outside interests are golfing, reading, writing and gardening.



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