

THE 6 P'S OF A HIGH PERFORMANCE SALES TEAM

HOW TO BUILD A SCALABLE SALES ENGINE

Over the years, I've heard many variations of "The 6 P's" – "Proper Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance" (and a host of less polite versions!!)

Planning is clearly important, but we've seen too many sales teams in healthcare, technology and professional services industries devote time and resources to the wrong things, only to leave gaping holes in much more critical areas.

To help you avoid these pitfalls, here – based on 25 years of blood, sweat and battle-scars – is our definitive list of the REAL 6 P's.

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THE 6 P'S OF A HIGH PERFORMANCE SALES TEAM

1. PEOPLE

We start here for the obvious reason that even the world's best process won't work if it's applied to the wrong people.

Professional services, technology and healthcare markets are changing faster than ever, and the best sales teams are built to adapt. Hire for drive, of course – but also curiosity, generosity to teammates and an openness to learning new tricks. This applies from the CRO/SVP of Sales down to each rep.

Curiosity is essential for genuine consultative sales with clients.

But it is also a critical internal trait for managers and potential managers – allowing them to understand what motivates each person on their team.

Generosity is crucial to building team “muscle”. The willingness of your managers to allow their team members to “Level Up” (yes, that means to eventually do their boss's job) is essential to scaling capability and revenue in a large enterprise team.

2. PROPOSITIONS

Commoditization is not just a trend, it's an actively pursued strategy by procurement teams to drive the cost of the highest performing goods and services down.

When it comes to value propositions, your team's mantra should be;

**Expand, monetize
and get personal.**

We see far too much focus on pitching, product and performance. "Show up and throw up". There is always some favored clinical trial paper, study or benchmark data that confirms that your product performs better than someone else's,

and every rep has been trained to within an inch of their lives to talk about it. It's called "falling in love with your software (or instrument)."

Sorry to burst your balloon, but in our experience, nobody cares about your product. Sales is about them, not you.

In the eye of the beholder, competitor product differentiation is often quite limited. Product discussions rarely move the needle in the sales cycle with those that matter.

What does move the needle is gaining a better understanding of the individual (business and personal!) pain-points that the person in front of you cares about, monetizing the value of these problems and then mapping your solution to fixing those problems. The more senior the stakeholder, the more important this becomes – executives want to talk about their business, not watch your reps drink their own Kool-Aid.



Ultimately, organizations don't make decisions – people do.

And people are driven by personal benefit far more than product performance. If your team is talking to their prospects about your therapy's efficacy, and your competitors are talking to these same prospects about getting their weekends back, you're going to lose.

This mindset change is difficult, but profoundly important. It involves more focus on personal gain for the decision makers. This change also requires advanced selling skills needed to quickly establish credibility, ask better and more challenging questions, have great listening skills and map proposals from technical to financial and personal care-about for the executives that matter.

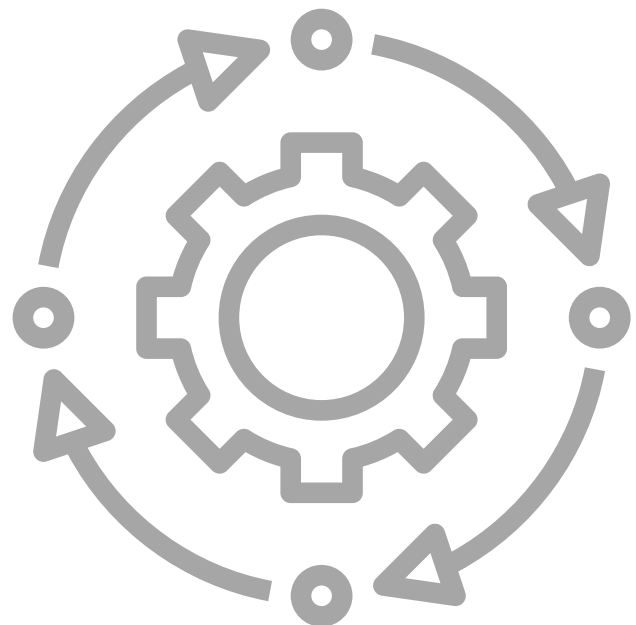
3. PROCESS

Sales processes tend to be massively over-engineered. A team is assembled from marketing, sales operations, finance and sales, they run a series of committee meetings to agree “best practice”, everyone contributes a bunch of ideas from their department and – Hey, Presto – out pops a camel.

And then when anyone has a good idea, they add to the process. And keep adding.

We’ve seen it all. An enterprise Key Account templates comprising 225 rows in an excel spreadsheet (every “improvement” adding 10 more rows for the reps and front-line managers to fill in and giving the sales team one more excuse to not be out there engaging their clients).

One of my favorites was called “The 21 Steps to Selling <Acme’s> solutions” – (company name redacted to protect the guilty). I don’t care how complex or brilliant your technology is – if it takes your sales team 21 steps to sell your stuff, you’re doing it wrong.



WE FAVOR SIMPLICITY:



Sales funnels (often called “Playbooks”) should never be more than 10 stages (5 is better). The best teams aim to take fewer but bigger steps to advance through the pipeline;



Account Planning templates should be as simple as possible (in my opinion, “Blue Sheets” are far too complex for even most enterprise teams, and focus on the wrong sorts of data). Account templates should be judged not on the comprehensiveness of the data they store, but on their ability to inform front line salespeople to make sensible, optimistic next steps in the sales cycle.



Re-direct the time and effort that your team spends completing and updating complex account strategies and replace it with robust pre-call planning.

Remember, it is never too late to cull unproductive process.

4. PRE-CALL PLANNING

Spend less time building complicated account strategies and more time planning the key meetings with the key stakeholders that can really move the needle.

Sales funnels are not linear. Even the most complex sale tends to have a small number of key meetings that make or break the opportunity, and move the deal materially forward (or stop it dead in its tracks).

Great sales teams focus their precious planning time on making sure these key meetings count.

It constantly amazes me how many large sales organizations do not have a consistent, robust process for pre-call planning.

They will have pages and pages of data in their CRM about the client contacts, they will log terabytes of post-call data, but will turn up at key meetings without a compelling, clear and optimistic plan.

If call planning exists, it's because the better sales managers build their own, using Word documents or emails.



Great sales teams focus their precious planning time on making sure these key meetings count.

Because they're not integrated with the CRM, the sales leadership have no visibility to call planning.

Post-call logging is a very poor substitute. Most reps I know can "Log a Call" after the event that makes even the most painful and unsuccessful meeting seem like it went pretty well.

I've seen forms added to a salesforce page by CRM administrators, but these tend to be counter-productive because they're usually designed by sales operations folks who, um, haven't sold anything in a while.

There's no feedback loop. And salespeople hate them because they're administrative and don't add value for them – they're usually loaded with useless fields such as:



A drop-down list of "Which products are we here to sell" (this is precisely the opposite mindset that a solution sales approach should have – uncover the client situation and business problems, don't pitch product); and



Is the meeting in-person, by phone or zoom? (As a sales leader, if the meeting achieved a great result, I don't really care if it was conducted by smoke signals or carrier pigeons!!)

A good call plan process is essential to **DRIVE ACCOUNTABILITY** and to force **PRE-CALL PLANNING** to stretch the goals, and should covers these things:



Clarity of the strategic objective (high level goal) for this account.



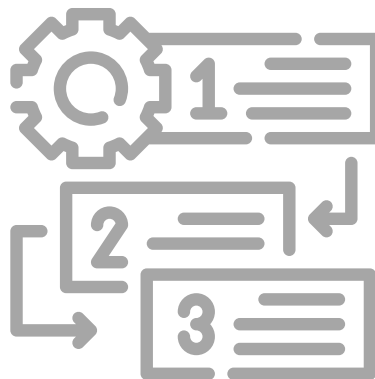
A review of likely or known “care-about” for the person we are meeting;



A clear, specific and optimistic meeting goal (Advance).



A simple game plan for the meeting (“how” do you plan to achieve the Advance).



INVEST IN A TOOL THAT INTEGRATES CALL PLANNING, COMPETENCY ASSESSMENTS AND YOUR EXISTING CRM.

5. PROMOTIONS

I'm going to take a bet.

If we audited the competencies of your sales organization, I can almost guarantee that the weakest link in your team will be in the the front-line sales management (Regional Sales Directors and equivalent roles).

Why am I so confident? Partly because, in my opinion, it is usually the hardest role in the sales organization. But also because, as people are promoted through the ranks, the promotion from individual contributor to front-line manager presents the biggest step-change in responsibilities.

“It's much easier to sell than to build the capabilities in others to sell.”

This coaching and leadership competency gap becomes the speed limit on the growth of enterprise sales teams. Just like a business leader who can't delegate, your growth is limited by the length of your manager's arms.

And here's a terrifying thought for a sales leader...

Most front-line managers spend their time coaching the deal, not the person. With a team of 6-10 reps, they can only spend around 5% of their time with each. I don't pretend to be a mathematician, but to my simple mind, this means that 95% of the client-facing activity of a typical rep (emails, phone calls and in-person meetings) happens *when their manager is not there.*

HERE'S THE NEXT TERRIFYING THOUGHT...

Most sales leaders have no objective evidence about which managers can coach and build the muscle of their teams, and which ones cannot. Revenue performance is a poor proxy for assessing manager coaching capability:



Financial performance of an individual rep is often determined as much from their territory as on the rep's innate capabilities. A rep who made President's Club this year might have got there with sweat, or skill, or the luck of landing a territory with a couple of great prospects ready to buy.



Financial performance and win rates are trailing indicator of selling skills. This becomes increasingly important as deal sizes and complexity increase. The sales cycle on a complex enterprise sale can be 6, 12 or 24 months – nothing hurts more than losing a deal after 2 years, and only then discovering that the rep leading the charge didn't really know what he or she was doing, and the manager couldn't fix the gaps (or wasn't aware of them).

What to do about this? Measure the right stuff, which leads us to...

6. PERFORMANCE METRICS

Here comes another good bet.
(Yes – if you DM me, I'll put my money where my mouth is)



Chances are, as a sales leader, you're measuring the wrong things.

Alignment of the team to the larger commercial goal is critical. Yet one of the biggest single mistakes that even experienced sales leaders make is to measure, and reward, the wrong stuff.

Mistake #1: Track Activity

“But wait!” I hear you say.
“Surely, activity is worth something. I need to know that my team are busy doing something...”

Sorry, but nope. If you track activity, you'll get activity. But the last time I looked, activity alone doesn't pay the bills. And even worse, it gives your team an excuse for missing their quotas – “Check out all this activity!!! Look how complete my blue sheet is!!”

One of my first bosses after I got out of college was a large, friendly Finnish guy called Jouko. Absolutely brilliant guy, I was totally in awe of his talents. I still remember him telling me one day “If you don't know what to do, do something”. Jouko was wise, but he never ran a sales team. It's not hard to find something to do – and the more fields in your blue sheets, the easier it is to look busy.

Mistake #2: Focus too much attention on win rates

This might sound crazy, but win rates only measure the total conversion through all stages of a sales funnel. In a simple, high velocity sale (say, a one or two meeting close), that's fine. But a complex enterprise sale involves scores of meetings and perhaps hundreds of client interactions. Win rates lag months or even years behind the sales activity. You are much better off measuring Advance Rates – the % of high-gain meetings that achieve their desired goal – that is, the % of meetings that move the sale forward.

We recommend that sales leaders focus performance metrics on these areas:

SALES REPRESENTATIVES



Call Planning (frequency and quality for high impact meetings)



Advance rate (the % of key meetings that gain the intended Advance)



Pipeline velocity (a whole other topic – one for another day)

FRONT LINE MANAGERS



Competency assessment skills – the ability to credibly assess strengths and gaps of each member of their team from their own observations



Coaching skills – the ability to build the muscle of their reps to sell effectively and autonomously (that is, with *decreasing Manager input*)



Ability to accelerate their team’s pipeline velocity over time

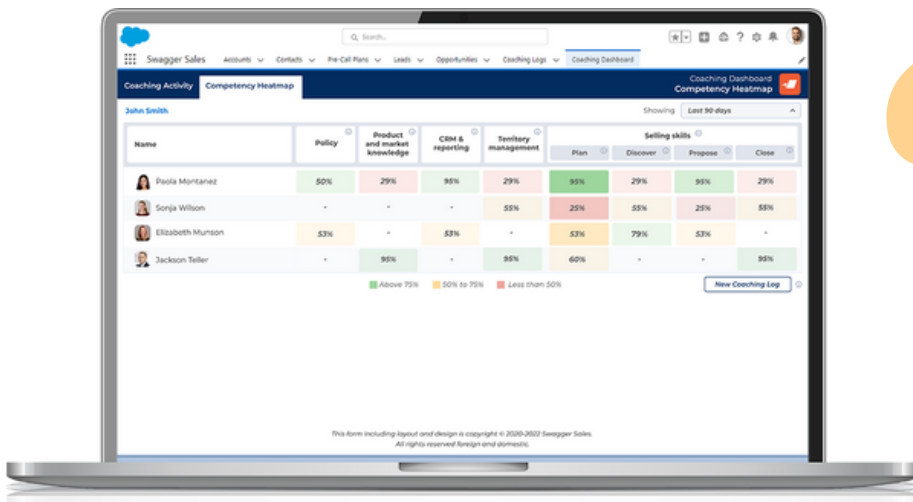
With the right tools integrated into your CRM, these metrics can be built up as part of your team’s regular selling and coaching cadence.

SUMMARY

Few sales organizations excel at all 6 P’s, but the great ones pay attention to all of them. Turning a large sales team around is a process, and starts with an honest audit of current strengths and weaknesses, and a look at the best training, tools and advice on the market to find the short-cuts to success.

25 MINUTES CAN TRANSFORM YOUR BUSINESS

SWIFT™ turns your CRM from a database into a high performance sales engine with integrated call planning, coaching and competency assessment. We'll demonstrate how this Salesforce plug-in can drive discipline, accountability and performance across your sales team. Connect with one of our consultants in the US, Asia-Pacific or Europe to book a demonstration of Swift™.



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