

The 10 Commandments of Selling Professional Services

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Research shows that only 13 percent of professional services managers are fully satisfied that their professional services salespeople are selling the right offerings to the right clients in the right way.¹ Field reality supports this finding, as the “low-hanging fruit” most often uncovered from professional services organization (PSO) performance audits are opportunities in sales effectiveness. It is here that smart investments can yield both rapid and often dramatic improvements in performance.

Ten directives, or “commandments,” provide the framework from which to first understand sales performance problems and opportunities and then implement positive changes. The process is simple, the problems understood, and most of the remedies are straightforward. There is one caveat, however; just like the 10 Commandments used in the biblical sense, there are no exceptions—to excel in professional services selling, you must do all 10 well.

Take the quick diagnostic in *Figure 1* to gain a macro-understanding of your current state of professional services sales effectiveness. First, determine your PSO’s ability today to live up to each of the 10 Commandments, then compute your total score and overall average.

Figure 1

Services Sales Effectiveness Audit

Commandment	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
1. Clarify complex customer issues.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Communicate the invisible.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Customize each solution.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Commit high-level executives to action.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Coordinate the selling team.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Compress the cycle time of selling.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Concentrate on the stars.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Control the cost of sale.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Commercialize the sales promise.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Continually learn and grow.	1	2	3	4	5

Total Score = _____ Average Score = _____

Congratulations on all scores of 4 or 5, as these are areas of strength—keep doing what you are doing. For now, don’t worry about items you scored 3 on, as your resources need to be targeted on any commandments tagged 1 or 2. This is where immediate opportunity lies.

(Note that when respondents to this audit are brutally honest, it is rare for an organization to receive a total score over 35. In addition, it is very common for PSOs to have three or more commandments rated at a sub-par level, so don't be disappointed in your scoring—that's one reason why improving sales effectiveness is an area of low-hanging fruit.)

Here is an explanation of each commandment, including best practices, many of which can be implemented immediately. Remember to target your attention to those commandments where you scored less than a 3.

The First Commandment: Clarify Complex Customer Issues

Ponder Point: *If the issues were easy, the customer wouldn't need you.*

The issues of professional services are usually ambiguous, often interrelated, and sometimes baffling. That's why your PSO is involved—to provide not only subject-matter expertise, but also critical thinking coupled with a neutral perspective gained from multiple engagements dealing with very similar and also very different situations. This is where the sales professional and his selling team have the greatest opportunity not only to add value through communicating capabilities and enabling relationships but also to actually create value through intellect and experience combined with just the right level of creativity. This initial phase of account involvement is where the professional services sales professional earns his keep.

Clearly identifying and defining the problem is over half the battle. If you don't get this part of the selling process right, your chances of getting the business are slim. Worse, though, is defining the issues incorrectly but still getting the engagement. In this scenario, all you can hope for is discovering your error before it is too late, apologizing profusely, and pouring resources into the fray in an attempt at service recovery. Worst case, and one that appears to be happening more, is that the wrong solution is implemented, the customer is highly dissatisfied with the outcome, your firm loses money trying to correct the uncorrectable, and you end up with a great loss of time, money, and industry reputation.²

The logical path to clarifying complex customer issues is simple:

- Analyze existing data; review current systems, models, and procedures; and question account personnel to clearly understand the critical business issues.
- Listen intently throughout the process to determine which of those issues your PSO (with or without alliance partners) can effectively address.
- Formulate a framework that succinctly defines critical business issues, the implications for not addressing them, and the positive impact of correct action.

Here are some actions you can take to make sure you get it right the first time:

Best Practices:

- Standardize and routinely utilize a “mini-needs assessment” early on to gather account information thoroughly and systematically. Include a broad base of account stakeholders made up of executives, functional heads, technical experts, and users.
- Create and formalize an account-probing strategy. Make the best use of your time and account personnel by asking planned “high-yield” questions, with appropriate follow-ups to crystallize and deepen understanding.
- Enlist the account in the process. Involving key account personnel in gathering the information not only improves data quality but also builds commitment to your later recommendations.
- Implement team selling (see the Fifth Commandment). It is rare that one person has all the knowledge and experience required, so combine those with technical know-how, business acumen, and industry experience in the data-collecting process.
- Capture and convey internal learning and experiences through a user-friendly knowledge management system. Make it easy for everyone who touches the customer to learn from experiences.
- Train everyone involved in selling (and that should be nearly everyone) on listening, questioning, and problem analysis. Provide personal coaching as needed.

The Second Commandment: Communicate the Invisible

Ponder Point: *Services are something that can be bought and sold but can't be dropped on your foot (Evert Gummesson).*

For over 20 years, it has been understood that the degree of product intangibility impacts both how offerings should be marketed and how they should be supported.³ Furthermore, experience also has proven that the more “invisible” the offering, the more challenging the task of communicating both the problem and the solution side of the equation. Here is where the premise that “a good salesperson can sell anything” meets its demise—for the majority of product salespeople are ineffective at selling services of any type. In fact, our experience shows that even with a thorough realignment of sales objectives and compensation coupled with intensive training and supportive coaching, only about one out of three product salespeople (including the very best) successfully make the transition to selling services. This is a sad but true reality.

Much of the cause for this lack of sales performance stems from the fundamental differences among different types of offerings. *Figure 2* categorizes offerings into three groupings and attempts to demonstrate those major distinctions.⁴

Figure 2

Offerings Classification

Products	Product-Support Services	Professional Services
Products are produced.	Services are performed.	Knowledge is created.
The customer owns an object.	The customer owns an experience.	The customer owns a concept.
The goal of producing products is uniformity.	The goal of performing services is uniqueness.	The goal of creating knowledge is innovation.
Internal quality control compares outputs to specifications.	The customer conducts quality control by comparing expectations to experience.	The PSO controls quality by setting and managing expectations.
The morale and skill of production workers are important.	The morale and skill of service workers are critical.	The morale and skill of professional services workers are vital.

The implications of these distinctions are that different sales skills, knowledge, and mindsets are required to sell each type of offering. Furthermore, an attribute that might be a strength in one of these selling environments could well be a weakness in another. Different strokes for different folks, as they say.

Here are some proven actions to address this critical challenge:

Best Practices:

- Classify your offerings as either products, product-support services, or professional services. Create dedicated sales forces to be responsible for each type of offering.
- Tangibilize intangibles by turning feelings into facts and concepts into cash. Use analogies and stories to help accounts grasp your meanings. Use testimonials and financial worksheets to make your concepts, capabilities, and results real.
- Create feature-benefit-results profiles for all services offerings. All solutions need to be tailored to the situation (see the Fourth Commandment); however, 80 percent of what is appropriate in that situation will be relevant in others.
- Develop a proposal-writing template complete with examples of well-written prose. Designate (and reward) proposal writers with strong communications skills.
- Forget about off-the-shelf, generic training packages or the \$99 ballroom extravaganzas. Use high-quality, services-specific sales training systems tailored to your industry and your organization.

When integrating product sales personnel into the services selling equation:

- Adjust the sales management support system to reflect new expectations and shift compensation.
- Heavily incent the desired services sales behavior for at least the first six months.
- When selling “solutions” (both products and services) always utilize team selling. Select an account manager and clearly define team member roles and responsibilities.
- Train and coach, train and coach, train and coach.
- Realize from the outset that many product salespeople will not successfully make the transition to services selling. Provide everyone the opportunity to succeed, but address this issue head-on, and help find those unsuited for services selling positions elsewhere inside or outside your organization.

The Third Commandment: Customize Each Solution

Ponder Point: *Each touch point with a new customer presents an opportunity to intensify his uniqueness.*

On the one hand, the account is looking for a PSO that is *the* expert in their industry, knowledgeable in their specific problems, and well-versed in all the nuances that it entails. On the other hand, the account *knows* their situation is different and abhors the thought of having a cookie-cutter solution pulled down from the shelf and used to cut into their dough (pun intended).

Furthermore, the more seasoned the professional services salesperson, the more he realizes that the majority of issues and opportunities, problems, and options are similar across businesses, geographies, and industries. When these old pros hear the words, “But our situation is different,” their first inclination may be to don a knowing smile and wittily educate the account that they’ve seen it all before. Don’t let them do it! All of us, to some degree, relish our uniqueness, and a professional services salesperson initially perceived as an outside expert there to help quickly will be seen as a cocky “know-it-all,” there to show off, when he attempts to deny another person’s view of reality. The psychologists call this “invalidation,” and the normal reaction is quite strong, quite negative, and often quite lasting.

Finally, the problem is compounded by every organization’s desire to drive efficiency through “productizing” offerings. As soon as the truly unique project is completed successfully, the search starts to find other accounts in which the solution can be applied. While the idea is a good one, as it embraces the concepts of continuous learning and leveraging capabilities, it must be balanced with the realization that the better job the organization does of kerchunking the solution, the more quickly it is viewed as being generic. Customers don’t pay premium prices for generic offerings. So even if your offering is “me-too” in most respects, it is up to the salesperson to tailor its application in a way that the account perceives the uniqueness just for them.

Best Practices:

- In *all* proposals and letters of engagement, first demonstrate a clear understanding of the account's situation before outlining recommendations or solutions.
- Use account terms, phrases, and examples in all account communications.
- Utilize industry data and trends to show linkage to the client's business.
- Leverage tried-and-true methodologies and processes that have flexibility and can expand or reduce depending on the scope of the engagement, time allocated, and budget parameters.
- Be aware of balance. Demonstrate related experience, yet respect and point out areas of uniqueness.

The Fourth Commandment: Commit High-Level Executives to Action

Ponder Point: *Buyer motivation is based on just two things: confidence and urgency.*

By definition (ours at least), professional services is all about addressing the few, critical business issues of accounts that, if handled correctly, make a significant organizational impact. This, of course, is the domain of top management—those busy, focused, no-nonsense folks responsible for the health of the organization.

For salespeople used to talking technology innovation to department heads or combating purchasing agents over discounts, this is often a rude awakening. The executive faced with this type of dialogue quickly will point the salesperson back to the elevator and suggest that he go talk to Terri in the IT department or Fred in purchasing. It's not that executives don't necessarily care, it is that they don't have time for the nitty-gritty. Their job is to plot the course and navigate the ship, not buy the supplies or maintain the vessel.

Furthermore, techniques found successful in dealing at lower levels of the organization just don't cut it when on the helm. For example, starting an initial meeting with a department head with the statement, "Tell me about your critical issues," may yield good results and start positioning you as a sales professional. However, the busy exec has no time or desire to educate the uneducated and will grimace when confronted with this probe. He expects the sales professional to assume the role of consultant from the first minute of the first meeting, bringing fresh and useful information relevant to his situation. Only then will he consider taking his valuable time to share with you the issues.

Best Practices:

- Think, speak, write, and talk in business-ese. Translate and net-out all technical issues into what executives care about—business performance.
- Link your solutions back to the critical business issues of the particular executive you are dealing with. Whether talking about systems integration, market research, or talent acquisition, connect your solution

directly to revenue growth, market share, cost reduction, new market entry—whatever your research uncovered as the drivers for a particular executive.

- Use your face cards when required. Sometimes CEOs prefer to talk to other CEOs. Use your managing partners and other executives when you think it will impact the sales process.
- Never meet with an executive without doing your homework and having something of interest to present.
- Master the art of the white board. Always be prepared to draw a model or create a flow chart of your view of the world and ask the executive to comment about his organization.
- Utilize techniques such as “lunch and learns” that provide the executive and his team a chance to learn some best practices and check you out for the price of an hour’s time and a cold ham sandwich. At the same time, you have the opportunity to learn about their issues and start building relationships.

The Fifth Commandment: Coordinate the Selling Team

Ponder Point: *The synergy of many driving with common fate and shared destiny is a powerful force for positive change.*

Everyone admires the star quarterback. He is the sales leader that lands the biggest accounts and earns the highest commissions. These unique individuals are highly competent and fluently and effortlessly present both the product and services side of the business to prospects. However, these people are quite rare, and what is not noticed frequently is that successful service selling often requires a “selling team” approach. When one of the authors was with Andersen Consulting (now Accenture), his managing partner had a habit of saying, “Anyone can throw the long bomb and sometimes win the game, but what makes it happen is the basic blocking and tackling that goes on every day.” In professional services selling, the blocking and tackling comes about through the effective coordination of the selling team. Defining what roles you require on the team and aligning the sales environment are keys to your success.

One model utilized by some of the “Big Five” management consulting firms includes three primary roles on the selling team: the rainmaker, the business developer, and the market researcher. Furthermore, our experience has shown that many PSO sales teams are well served by having a fourth role defined, that of the specialist. This person brings deep knowledge of a field or technology relevant to the issues of the account. *Figure 3* shows the roles best suited to coordinate the effort and have the desired impact.

Figure 3

The Roles of the Selling Team

Team Role	Expected Impact
Rainmaker	Closes deals, fully understands total solutions selling. Has mastered services selling techniques.
Business Developer	Solid working understanding of the product and services side of business and can communicate strategically at all levels of a relationship. Faces the marketplace without fear and believes strongly in the company and its solutions capability. He is the one who creates a beachhead and opens doors for the closer or technical experts to participate.
Market Researcher	A data master who assists the team in understanding the prospect's needs, place in the marketplace, and greatest industry challenges. He provides input to the team related to trends, best practices, and information on competitors.
Specialist	Provides technical insights and credibility to the team.

The second ingredient of successful team selling requires aligning the sales environment. In this regard, some simple and straightforward planning is required. Make sure the performance specifications are clear, realistic, and aligned with each other. All of these should support the business strategy as well. Adequate resources, support staff, and appropriate tools help keep the path forward more focused. And ensuring that logical consequences support desired performance that are particularly meaningful to the performer helps motivation and goal achievement. But most important, use quality feedback that is relevant, accurate, timely, specific, and easy to understand if you want the team to work in unison and with a basis for action.

Best Practices:

- Institute a semiannual account planning system that clearly identifies roles, responsibilities, expectations, and timelines.
- Make each team member personally responsible for building and managing a relationship with his client counterpart.
- Change the reward system to award team performance as well as individual performance.
- Conduct cross-account sharing with other teams at least every quarter.

The Sixth Commandment: Compress the Cycle Time of Selling

Ponder Point: *A fast "no" is better than a slow "yes."*

Professional selling is about building relationships, creating trust, and painting intangible concepts so that the prospect feels comfortable enough to move forward. All these components require time, and time is a precious commodity in selling services. So when one reads the directives of traditional

selling prose such as: “Strike while the iron is hot!” “Go for the close!” “Embrace resistance statements and turn lemons into lemonade!” an appropriate queasiness in the stomach follows.

Simple admonishments to “go get ‘em” aren’t nearly enough to close business in complex selling situations. Left alone without a structured business development process, sales opportunities can string out the selling cycle to months or even years.

Furthermore, we are always amazed at the time, effort, and organizational frenzy that often accompany sales efforts that should never have been attempted in the first place. How often has your organization’s scarce resources been misspent trying to get projects that, upon analysis, were never within the realm of possibility? Or worse yet, how often have you gotten the business on projects that could never profitably meet client expectations?

Tools and processes are required to systematically compress sales cycle time by (1) qualifying good business and (2) using key events to demonstrate account interest.

Qualifying Good Business

At our own firm, we have assisted numerous professional services clients to, first, define ideal business, then work through and create a qualifying checklist made up of the specific factors most important to sizing up good business potential. This is a powerful approach to compressing selling cycle time, as you can quickly and objectively compare business opportunities using a common standard of quality. Use the checklist in *Figure 4* to visualize a key account or prospective client you have targeted and assess how qualified they are.⁵ We think the results will surprise you.

Figure 4

The Qualifying Checklist

	SUCCESS FACTORS	RATINGS				
		Low				High
1.	Importance to the Account	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Business Fit	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Personal Fit	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Our Reputation with the Account	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Account Partnership Attitude	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Competitive Position	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Access to Key Sponsors	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Funding	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Importance to Us	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Timing	1	2	3	4	5
Total Score = _____						

Keep in mind that the higher your overall score, the better position you will be in to get the business and the shorter the cycle time of the sale. If your overall score is quite low—move on! Focus your limited resources where they will yield the greatest return. Ride a winner and cut a loser short.

Improving the Committing Process through Key Events Understanding

Additionally, it is quite important to fully understand what the key events are in moving a prospective client through the committing process. What we mean by this is that you must understand ahead of time the important actions that you need the prospect to take to accelerate the buying decision. Remember that buyer motivation usually is based on two things: confidence and urgency. Building this confidence and creating a sense of urgency can be a challenge, but if you follow this four-step process, then the task will gain its own sense of momentum.

1. Envision the Ideal. Create in your mind's eye what an ideal process looks like from the time you first meet the account through the time you close the deal. How will you position yourself and your company? How will you match the prospect's personality? How will you establish rapport? What will your opening statement be? How will you demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of his service challenges? How will you illustrate your capability and involve the client in the proposed solution?⁶

2. Map Your Existing Process. Take time before a sales call to map out what each step is in how you approach the sales process. In most circumstances, no more than four steps will be in the process. Get feedback from others on your sales team on whether these steps make sense and use that feedback to explore ways to streamline and refine the process.

3. Create the New Process. Think of the sales process from a new perspective. Ask yourself, if we had a clean sheet of paper and this was Day One of the company, how would we do it differently? What existing steps would we eliminate? What barriers would be removed? What support would be enhanced? What best practices would be included? How could it be done so that the cycle time and overall impact create the greatest effect and at the same time reduce the risk of rejection by the prospect?

4. Implement. Execution is always important, so make sure you have the appropriate alignment of your sales organization in place with the appropriate supports and resources to make it happen.

Best Practices:

- Conduct a focus group to discover true sales cycle time. Pick the participants' brains to uncover the key events that most consistently either advance the sale or get in the way.

- Have a “Go/No-Go” checklist already established. Take the findings from your information gathering to decide whether this business should be pursued.
- Allocate resources to prospective accounts according to their probability of success.

The Seventh Commandment: Concentrate on the Stars

Ponder Point: *The performance improvement potential of most sales forces is 700 percent. No kidding.*

Sales management has a basic choice when it comes to the development of its sales force. Focus efforts on the low, average, or top performers. If you examine the majority of sales organizations you’ll find that:

- The training budget is geared toward the new and average performers with a focus on “blocking and tackling” skills.
- Sales management’s one-on-one coaching efforts are almost entirely dedicated to the low-performing, problem children—those a long way from quota.
- The stars are left alone. (Hey, they’re doing great, so why bother?)

So to sum it up, most effort is spent on the low performers, and most resources (training) are targeted toward average performance, with little, if anything, targeted for the old pros.

The logic seems reasonable, yet this is a formula for mediocrity. Under this scenario, resources are devoted to reinforce “average” performance. No organization can make dramatic strides ahead focusing on the status quo. The results prove this—how many PSOs routinely increase revenues more than 10 percent per year?

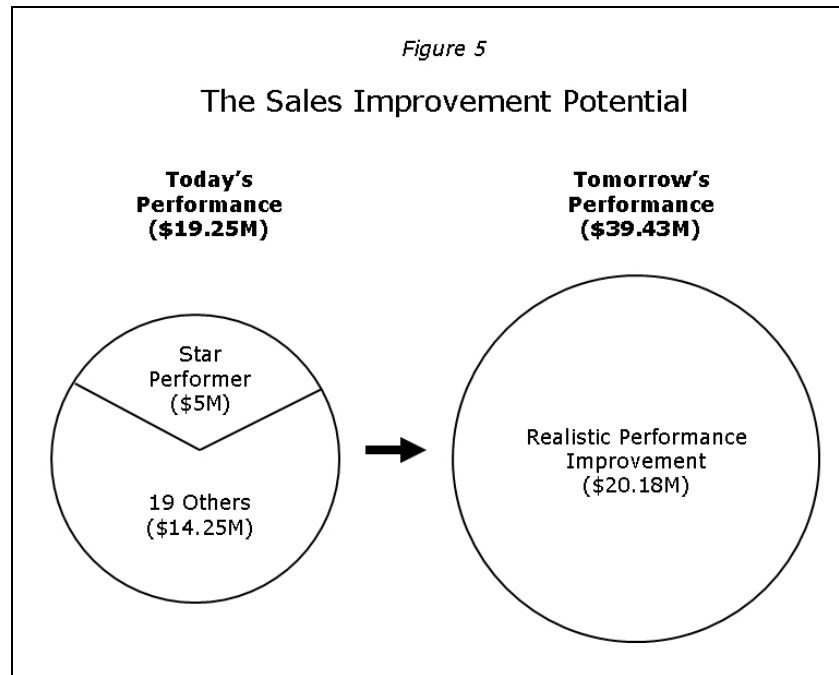
Let us suggest an alternative that we strongly feel can have an immediate and profound effect. In fact, for organizations under the above regime that commit to the steps we outline, the sales productivity of your PSO should improve 25 percent or more within one year.

Over 30 years ago, one of the founders of the field of performance technology, Thomas Gilbert, came up with the simple yet powerful formula for computing a function’s performance improvement potential (PIP).⁷ He stated that his usual finding in working with organizations of all types was that the sales function was the area that showed the greatest performance opportunity. The usual sales PIP was about a “7,” meaning the opportunity was present to increase revenue seven times more than what it was currently.

Here is an example of calculating PIP for a professional services sales force that sells \$19,250,000 per year.

1. Identify “star” performance. In this sales force of 20, the top salesperson sold at a rate of \$5 million of professional services per year.

2. Identify “average” performance. The remaining 19 salespeople sold on average \$750 thousand of professional services per year. The left-hand side of *Figure 5* shows visually this current state of sales.



3. Determine the Maximum Performance Improvement Potential (PIP). So this sales force had a PIP of 6.6 ($\$5,000,000 / \$750,000$), meaning that the star salesperson was 6.6 times more effective in selling than the average.

If it were possible to get everyone to perform at the level of the star performer, annual revenues would go from \$19,250,000 to \$100,000,000—a potential increase in revenue dollars of \$80,750,000.

4. Establish a “Realistic” PIP. Differences in the sales environment (number and type of accounts, market conditions, etc.) do have a bearing and cannot be ignored. Furthermore, of those 19 “non-star” performers, one or two may be new to the sales force and thus have less experience that should be considered. Therefore, to be conservative, calculate a “realistic PIP” by determining one-fourth of the total PIP.

The right-hand side of *Figure 5* shows the realistic performance improvement potential of the sales force in the example is \$20,187,500, double the existing revenue.

Who would not be delighted with doubling existing revenue? The good news is that this is doable. Gilbert's research reported that the very best performers do just a few things different from the rest of the pack.⁸ In most cases, skilled observers can define those behaviors in a matter of days. Usually, what is learned can readily be taught to the rest of the sales organization with awesome results. This is truly an area of low-hanging fruit.

So our recommendations are to dramatically change your focus on sales force development. Put your time and money in the place that will yield the greatest ROI, your top performers, and use their results and behaviors as the targets and models for everyone else. The laggards will "de-select" themselves, and the average performers will step up to the challenge.

Best Practices:

- Conduct a yearly "star analysis," and use it as the framework for establishing PIPs, determining critical sales behaviors and creating hiring profiles for future recruits. Train everyone who touches the customer on what is learned.
- Reformulate your sales development plan to spend:
 - 40 percent of the time working with your very best. Observe and question to find out their secrets.
 - 50 percent of your time observing your average performers. Teach them what you've learned from the best.
 - Only 10 percent of your time working with the laggards. Yes, they deserve a chance to improve, but this is almost always a system issue and not a coaching problem.
- Make sure your sales management system is performance-based, not activity-based.
- Make managers personally accountable for the recruitment, development, and retention of top performers.
- Dole out substantial incentives for employees that induce top outsiders to join the sales team.
- Tolerate unusual behavior from the stars. Often their success lies in going around the existing system and snubbing the accepted norms of behavior.
- Form a partnership with a professional-services-savvy search firm.
- Create alumni networks to maintain relationships with key personnel.
- Encourage your stars to write and speak.
- Encourage and reward stars for mentoring new salespeople.
- After two or three years, conduct a star-performer analysis of a top-flight sales organization outside your industry.

The Eighth Commandment: Control the Cost of the Sale

Ponder Point: *There is nothing more wasteful and expensive than doing something extremely well that should never have been done in the first place.*

Controlling the cost of the sale requires the formulation of four basic budgets: the sales budget, the selling expense budget, the advertising and

marketing budget, and the sales administration budget. All four of these components must work in an integrated process in order to adequately forecast revenue, margin, utilization, and expense. Proper potential-customer segmentation as well as targeting high-potential clients and legacy customers with a weighting system is one approach. The strategy, as well as the budget, is quite different when your target is to leverage an existing account where you already have a relationship vs. going after a segment of the services marketplace in which you are not the dominant leader.

Sometimes you have to invest in order to save, and this is very true in looking at the economics of sales force management. For example, a friend of ours dedicated to improving the capabilities of his sales organization was getting some resistance from people in the organization about taking the salespeople out of the field for three days of training. We very much believe in his response: "If you think the cost and time for training is expensive, try ignorance!" A rather interesting perspective on reducing the overall cost of the sales process, don't you think?

Although important, trying to maintain an ongoing focus on reducing the cost of sales is not always easy, as the excitement and perceived urgency of getting in front of any and all prospects in person is often in direct conflict with cost control. Sometimes the most effective way to think about controlling the cost of sales is based upon what not to do:

- Don't call on low-qualified accounts, ever!
- Don't make a face-to-face visit if a phone call will do.
- Don't make a phone call if an e-mail is sufficient.
- Don't send an e-mail if the prospect, customer, or client can get necessary information or take the desired action via the Web.
- Don't ask your support people to do tasks that can be automated or can be made into customer self-service via the Web.
- Don't take your Web page for granted and assume that what you have on it is of interest to anyone other than yourself.

Best Practices:

- The cost of sale is tracked.
- The planning for sales calls in different regions is supported by telemarketing and electronic sales materials.
- Individual face-to-face meetings with prospects are linked to conferences and briefing sessions on critical strategic business issues.
- Ample marketing budgets are deployed to support the development of case studies, white papers, and thought-leadership publications.
- Collateral materials are in modules, enabling a high degree of flexibility for adjustments in the sales call process.
- The proposal process is highly systematized through the utilization of support technology such as Lotus Notes, group collaboration tools, and PSA/CRM software. In this instance, a proposal, which normally would cost \$25,000 to produce, can be developed in half the time and cost.

- All prospects are qualified using a standard qualifying checklist (see the Sixth Commandment).
- Everyone that touches the customer is trained on appropriate selling tools and techniques.
- Sales personnel are allowed to sell and not be bogged down in administrative duties that a \$30-an-hour support person can carry out.
- Selling support systems (knowledge management, promotional materials, etc.) are in place and are utilized throughout the organization.
- The sales team is rewarded on profitability.

The Ninth Commandment: Commercialize the Sales Promise

Ponder Point: *No matter how superior your solution, you are 10 times more likely to get the business if the prospect calls you rather than if you call him.*

Let's assume for a moment that you believe you have the best bundle of integrated services that can stand alone or support your products across multiple parts of the services economy, but you don't have a clue how best to commercialize your sales promise. PSOs who have been successful in commercializing their service offerings indicate that factors such as positive reputation, brand credibility, and the ability to hire top talent are all linked and cumulatively will not only result in opening doors to senior executives but receiving higher margins as well.

So what can you do to make the intangible more tangible in the minds of the buyer and the marketplace? Ask yourself the following questions to gain an insight on how well you are calibrated in your thinking and strategy specific to commercializing your sales promise:

- What is our branding strategy for our services and the market messages we stand for?
- How have we created brand congruence throughout the organization?
- When was the last time we wrote a thought-leadership white paper on our services and their impact on our clients' industry?
- How frequently do we make presentations at services conferences, briefing sessions, and lunch-and-learn sponsored events?
- Is our Web page effective in differentiating us from the masses?
- Do we effectively utilize public relations processes, such as getting quoted, sending out press releases, and crafting impact advertising?
- Are we linked to other circles of influence: industry Web pages, professional associations, and marketing conference events?
- Have we explored appointment-setting outsourced agencies to get us in the door?
- Can everyone in the organization state a 30-second value statement about the company's services?
- Have we made the transition from product-centric marketing to services marketing? What should we retain that works in the product-marketing process, and how do we face the new service marketplace with clarity, difference, and purpose?

Figure 6 can help you to monitor your branding and market-facing efforts. Work through the assessment to gauge how well your branding efforts are doing today and to help determine what needs to change in the future.

Figure 6

Marketing and Branding Assessment

		Strongly Disagree		Strongly Agree	
Today					
1. Most prospective clients in your defined market have heard of you.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Most prospective clients in your defined market have a clear perception about you (what you do and how well you do it).	1	2	3	4	5
3. Most prospective clients have a favorable perception toward your PSO.	1	2	3	4	5
4. You have the reputation as the leader in your field.	1	2	3	4	5
Tomorrow					
5. Your executives recognize that the brand is a vital asset.	1	2	3	4	5
6. All "packaging" (people, communications, pricing, materials, offices, etc.) conveys the same message.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Your PSO makes a conscious effort to delight customers on select projects.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Branding campaigns are aggressively funded.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Brand awareness is tracked.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Brand quality is tracked.	1	2	3	4	5
Total Score = _____					

Regardless of how you scored, keep in mind that in services marketing the brand is everything. Many a great company with terrific services offerings died on the vine because of a lack of focused marketing and branding efforts.

Best Practices:

- Building the brand is an organizational strategic objective.
- Branding campaigns are aggressively funded.
- All "packaging" (people, communications, pricing, physical environment) convey the same message.
- Metrics are in place to monitor market credibility.
- Brand congruence is an internal and external priority.
- There is a dedicated professional services marketing department.
- Training in services marketing is part of the continuing education program.
- Annual services marketing and branding assessments are part of our strategic services plan.
- Services marketing best practices are collected and utilized.
- Our marketing efforts, (white papers, conference presentations, collaterals) support our brand.

The Tenth Commandment: Continually Learn and Grow

Ponder Point: "...the rate at which individuals and organizations learn may be the only sustainable competitive advantage." —Ray Stata, CEO, Analog Devices

Earlier in our careers, we were intrigued by the concept of a learning organization. We remember that, during that time, it was a wonderful thought that learning and professional growth were not only lifetime experiences but that corporate America was building systems and designing organizations to embrace these values. The need for the learning organization has proven to be valid, as industry after industry has undergone dramatic change, requiring not only a rethinking of the business model but a retooling of knowledge and skills.

Those of us involved in professional services over the last 10 years have witnessed the enormous growth of the number of once-staunch product companies making the transition to services-led s-businesses.* Today, s-businesses are proving their organizational value and starting to take equal place alongside their product-focused brethren.⁹ Some of these companies are building service strategies to pull existing product lines, others are building step-out services, and many still have radically reduced their product lines, while companies like PeopleSoft and IBM are services-led and leveraged.

Yet, we have observed the strain this transition creates for both organizational and personal capabilities. These changes require radical departures from the traditional skill sets upon which these businesses were built; hence, the ability to continually learn and grow is more important than ever. And, as has been pointed out throughout this article, in no area are the challenge and the importance greater than in selling.

Best Practices:

- Expect that all personnel involved in selling spend a minimum of two weeks per year in some type of intensive education.
- Make learning opportunities easy by utilizing a variety of approaches, such as on-site workshops, simulations, online training, and public seminars.
- Formalize coaching as a sales management requirement.
- Ask all top performers to mentor new salespeople.
- Commission a culture study to learn of your organization's acceptance of change.
- Invite external speakers outside your industry to discuss best practices on topics such as services marketing or sales effectiveness.
- Create a knowledge-management database of best practices, case studies, and articles.

- Allocate five percent of your gross revenue to continuing education. In the services business, your most valuable asset is your talent and mind share. Invest in it!

To be successful in the new s-business world, the opportunity to continue to grow and learn is essential. Building services competency and capability will require taking a strong stance on allocating resources to train and deploy a services workforce that not only understands the full life cycle of a services sale but can articulate industry trends and market intelligence issues. In addition, sponsoring company exchange programs, lunch-and-learn sessions, best practices meetings, and benchmarking service leaders will provide you with opportunities to not only create parity but also to learn how to be a dominant player.

Victor Hugo once said, "An invasion of armies can be resisted, but not an idea whose time has come." S-business is an idea whose time has come. Focus on continuous learning and growth, and your compass will always point true north.

**S-business is the term referring to the exploding services industry and first coined by John Schoenewald, CEO of AFSMI.*

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