

START WITH VALUES:  
**SELLING BEST PRACTICES**

WHITEPAPER

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## START WITH VALUES

For a team of salespeople to be effective, its members have to share a common set of values. It doesn't matter what you're selling, and it doesn't matter whether you're at a ten-person start up or a ten-thousand-person corporation if the group shares a core set of values and is speaking the same language, you will reap great rewards. These shared values are the foundation of every-thing good in a sales organization, and yet many sales teams have not yet taken the critical steps of establishing them clearly.

When a sales team is aligned - from the frontline salespeople and support staff all the way up to the top executives - great things happen. Team members understand their priorities, thrive on the culture, and understand how and when to engage with customers. Everyone is on message; they know what to say and when to say it. I saw this firsthand during my time at salesforce.com. The company's CEO, Marc Benioff, is a master at motivating, educating, and aligning the entire company and the global sales teams with the most important strategies, and watching him was truly inspirational.

I fully realized the power of the alignment Marc provided at every internal and external event. I remember one of our clients (the president of a large communications company) saying to me, "I know that everyone at this company is on the same page, because everyone is saying the same thing, but in their own words."

The comment struck me. Salesforce.com employees understood the company's values so well that they could express them in their own way, and our clients noticed it!

As I tell nearly every sales manager I meet during my travels, if you can nurture a set of values from your sales team and get everybody on board with them, the benefits are huge: You get motivated, fulfilled employees; satisfied customers; more sales; and sustainable growth.

But so many companies and sales teams don't invest enough time into building these values, even though it's such an important concept. When I start working with a new company to help ramp up their sales productivity, I start by asking them, "Can you share your sales values with me?" Often the answer comes haltingly. The values are usually there somewhere, but they're buried. They're part of a loose subculture instead of being the very foundation of everything the teams do. They're used on an ad hoc basis instead of as a set of mantras that foster consistency and repetition.

If you want to transform your team, establishing clear sales values is the place to start. The values will become the foundation of your sales team - its culture and its processes. Push your limits in sales leadership and make it a priority. Take the initiative; no one else will. This is your chance to shine!

## BELIEVE IT; IT WORKS

I was asked to share some sales productivity insights with a leading technology company. I worked with their head of sales operations, and then I was invited to spend some time with their top executives. I listened to their challenges and learned a lot about their business. It became apparent that nurturing this company's sales values would align their sales teams and accelerate their sales performance. We needed to bring their sales values to life by tapping into the company's best practices for sales. Adopting a strategy of sales values had worked for us at salesforce.com, and I was prescribing a similar strategy here.

I thought the call went well, and the executive team gave us some runway to execute. Two weeks later, after we did the research and documentation and started planning the rollout of the sales values to their teams, I found out that the executive team had been a bit skeptical about creating a foundational set of sales values. I talked with the president and he shared that he'd thought all this talk of values and culture was a bit fluffy, but seeing their values come to life had turned him from a nonbeliever into a believer.

The sales values became the ultimate unifier for this company; they emerged in the company's sales system and sales management reporting. The sales values formed the foundation for new hire onboarding and training, showing up on day one of new hire boot camp and being reinforced many times during training. The entire sales organization was trained on the sales values, too, including "train the trainer" sessions for the sales managers. The values started emerging in deal conversations and reviews, spreading throughout the entire company. It also became apparent that the sales values were not present in deals that were going sideways, but once the sales values were reinforced in these deals, they almost always began

to move forward. The CEO of the company also embraced the new sales values and presented them in an all-hands company call where he stressed the importance of these sales values to the future of the company. Forecasting accuracy was improved. In a very short period of time, the sales values had become part of the company's culture, and it made a huge difference in how its sales teams operated. At the end of 2013, the company reported the best year ever in its growth and sales productivity metrics.

## VALUES IN ACTION: TWO EXAMPLES

In a recent article in the New York Times column "Corner Office," Adam Bryant interviewed the CEO of Hilton Worldwide, Christopher Nassetta. This article discusses leadership and aligning values, culture, and strategy. I was struck by the relevance of this interview to the topic of teams and alignment. In the context of a cultural transformation and corporate alignment, Nassetta explains that he asked his teams at Hilton to boil down their value statements and then held a two-day offsite meeting where all these value statements were consolidated. Nassetta said to them, "Let's use some of our own skills and brand it, not because I want to be cute about it, but because people will remember it." The result was an acronym "HILTON" that collected the company's values:

**H** for hospitality

**I** for integrity

**L** for leadership

**T** for teamwork

**O** for ownership

**N** for now

"To reinforce them," Nassetta says, "we are constantly referring to the letters - in newsletters, in town halls - almost to the point where we are driving people crazy. But it works."

This is a very powerful example of mapping core values to a winning formula that transcends leadership and becomes culture. Every company has a unique word that represents its sales values. Even though the Hilton story is companywide, the principles apply to a sales organization and even a sales team. While the Hilton executive team spent time together in a two-day offsite, the same sales values can be nurtured in an iterative way with sales best practices, customer interviews, and old-fashioned team brainstorming. Another example of a great company that developed and branded their sales and service values is Apple. They train their retail sales employees to solve customer problems first and then to sell solutions to their needs. "Apple lays its 'steps of service' out in the acronym APPLE," writes Yukari Iwatani Kane and Ian Sherr in the Wall Street Journal. The acronym is a guide for how to engage with customers:

**A**pproach customers with a personalized warm welcome,"

**P**robe politely to understand all the customer's needs,"

**P**resent a solution for the customer to take home today,"

**L**isten for and resolve any issues or concerns," and

**E**nd with a fond farewell and an invitation to return."

These values come to life every time one walks into any Apple store in any city. The staff is amazing and the experience is personalized and consistent.

Both HILTON and APPLE represent a set of values that come to life in the form of an acronym that is mapped to their culture and is easy for salespeople and employees to remember and embrace in their day-to-day activities.

Creating your own HILTON or APPLE sales formula needs to become a top priority: one of the first steps on your mission to inspire your sales teams to succeed.

## SALESFORCE.COM'S SAAS MODEL: SUCCESS

In 2007, Frank van Veenendaal, Jim Steele, Linda Crawford, and I met to discuss the future of sales productivity at Salesforce.com. The challenge they proposed was: How to create a repeatable winning sales playbook that would be quickly adopted by the entire sales organization? We concluded that a set of sales values nurtured from the “heart and soul” of the sales organization would serve us well. But, it had to come from sales teams themselves in order to be fully adopted. We identified top-performing sales leaders who helped us create the Salesforce.com sales values. As of 2014, these sales values are still being used by sales teams and in sales training.

In his book *Behind the Cloud*, Marc Benioff shares the sales values that Dave Rudnitsky instituted within his own sales team. Here is an excerpt of the highlights:

- Think Big, Have Attitude.
- No Deal Is Won or Lost Alone.
- Connect the Dots Focus on “Why Not?”
- Always Take the Deal off the Table.
- Get Your Face in the Place.
- Fun Facts Build Instant Credibility.
- Be Proactive on All Paperwork.
- Always Get Quid Pro Quo in Negotiations.
- Share Best Practices.
- Go After Game Changers.

Like Apple and Hilton, we came up with a memorable acronym, too. We called it **SUCCESS**. Each letter came to reflect a core value. We worked closely with the corporate and brand marketing teams to come up with the SUCCESS brand. It aligned the sales teams with the best of the best and also gave our executive team a scalable way to influence sales activity and behaviors. These sales values can be used by any organization looking to sell like the way we did at Salesforce.com. The acronym is a great blueprint for embracing key tenets of the new subscription-selling model.

The SUCCESS formula evolved from interviews and a lot of hard, creative work. I encourage you to visit the salesforce.com Dreamforce® YouTube channel to look for presentations titled “How Salesforce Runs Its Business.” Listen to sales leaders share what SUCCESS means and how they depend on it every day to keep teams aligned. You can also hear from salespeople themselves, who share how they sell and why this sales formula is critical in helping them exceed their quotas, year after year.

Each letter has meaning and is explained in the following discussion:

- Seed and Grow:** Start small. Build credibility. Build trust. Grow the business.
- Users Sell for You:** Have customers share their success stories with other customers. Share customer stories early and often in sales cycles.
- Compelling Demos:** Conduct discovery and uncover buyers’ -
- Connect the Dots:** Leverage relationships with key decision customers, and partners.
- Experience Events:** Use events to generate pipeline and improve win rates. Drive more business by using large and small events to drive momentum.
- Sell High and Through:** It is really important to walk the halls. Look across the entire corporate suite and make sure you understand the top priorities.
- Show Them the Money:** Focus on the return on investment a customer.

These sales values represent a best practice in subscription selling. The power and impact came to fruition when they were integrated with the culture and cadence of the sales organization. The

effectiveness of creating and adopting your own sales values can be that extra push that shifts results from making your numbers to exceeding targets month after month.

## **DEVELOPING YOUR TEAM'S SALES VALUES**

Sales values should come from the heart and soul of an organization. As you set out to build them, you'll need to answer two main questions:

- What are my sales teams doing now that I want to see continue and repeated?
- What needs to change to make our sales teams better?

In other words, the process of building sales values starts by examining what's working and what's not. That way, you can construct a set of values that reinforces the good, sidelines the ineffective or unimportant, and gives everyone a clear set of priorities to follow. The key to driving sales values across an entire sales organization and making long-lasting impact is to have it start with executives as a top priority. Make it known why your sales executives care about this. Put these people front and center of the messaging and the rollout. Your sales values will acquire more meaning and respect from sales teams. The success of a sales transformation initiative is dependent on the top leaders and sales management enabling the change. Having the right executive support ensures the right level of intensity and helps to make the project a success. The task of creating a set of values for the sales team is not a single-person job. You, as the sales manager, or top sales leader, can't hand down a list of values to your people and expect them to hop on the train. If you want the team to really engage with the values, you need to give them a role in the process.

Start by assembling a team to do some data collection. These should be people who have the trust of the sales organization. This team will do the interviews and synthesize the data along with the deal stories. If they do not have credibility with the sales organization, the interviewees will not be as open to sharing the truth. Set up a committee and project team to do the interviews and to conduct the surveying or do it yourself if you can invest the time. Partner with marketing and sales operations to help scale this important due-diligence process. Top salespeople and sales managers across all segments and roles should be interviewed and listened to very closely. Newly hired and struggling salespeople should also be interviewed to counterbalance the views. Don't forget to talk to customers about their buying experience.

After you collate a wealth of feedback, shift into brainstorming mode to prioritize and brand the sales values that fit your culture. Look for words that are at the core of who you are and what you do. Then turn the words into a sales aid that can be easily distributed. You know you have a winner when your sales value brand or image is pinned up in the desks and cubes of the salespeople because they appreciate it and depend on it.

At company after company, sales values have had a profound impact on sales performance, culture, and revenues. Having an entire sales and customer facing organization rallied around key selling principles and values results in win-rate improvements, and deal sizes get larger. Deal-review calls and regular sales team meetings become more fun. New hires in sales are onboarded faster and better.

## **MAKE YOUR SALES VALUES STICK**

Once you establish your sales values, the next step is to make them stick. Do not assume that "if you build it, they will come". You will need to fully embrace the sales values and make them a core part of your sales culture. This will take time and executive sponsorship. You will need to have a strategy to integrate them with your sales events, executive communications, sales manager coaching guides, onboarding programs, technology, and even compensation.

Consider making your sales values a key part of an annual sales kickoff event. At Salesforce.com, when we rolled out SUCCESS we had Frank and Jim (our co-presidents at the time) share their advice and perspectives at our sales kickoff event. Use them as central themes and have your speakers refer to them over and over. Repetition and more repetition is critical to making the values part of your sales DNA. Create a mantra that reaches every person in the sales organization. Have your CEO, sales leaders, top sales executives, and salespeople speak at all the sales events. Use personal anecdotes and deal wins

to exemplify why they are so important. Hand them out so your teams can see them. Create posters around the office. Indoctrinate your new hires with this knowledge. Explain each point and use real life examples to highlight each sales value. You want your entire sales organization to walk away repeating the mantra over and over. Create a mantra that everyone easily remembers, and watch it go viral.

Remember that you - the sales manager - are the most important leverage point for making these kinds of sales productivity programs successful. Without your support and adoption of these values, you won't get the needed reinforcement in the field. It is key that you understand how important this is to the future of your company.

The sales values should also be reinforced using technology and added to your sales process. Create your own specific fields in your sales IT systems. Build workflow rules and email alert triggers that remind salespeople what to do when. For example, a great tool to send salespeople is a listing of questions or common customer objections at relevant stages of the deal, thereby reinforcing the values and adding benefits to the salesperson.

Getting your sales values documented and shared with your sales teams are some of the most important steps in propelling a winning sales culture. Values are what salespeople learn when they are first onboarded and ramped. They support scale and growth in regions around the world. They keep salespeople focused on doing the right things. They inform the sales process. A winning sales team is always aligned by the same end goal of focusing on customer value and customer success. The sales management load is made easy, because managers can rely on the sales values to push alignment, peer coaching, and mentoring. The key to this powerful alignment is to have clear messages that are repeated over and over.

## SALES VALUES ARE IMPORTANT FOR BIG AND SMALL BUSINESSES

Building a sales culture and supporting sales values are important for large and small businesses. A friend and colleague, Andrew O'Driscoll, runs a services operation with forty-five plus employees. We talked about his business and concluded that a sales values exercise would deliver the focus he desired in order to exceed his company goals and sales targets. His company is very successful, but he wanted to take the sales side of the business to the next level. Most of the opportunity for growth was around execution in the sales process. Deals were sometimes going sideways at the last minute because the scope was increasing and the decision-making process was not being validated with the customer early enough in the sales campaign. Andrew wanted to have his team focus on uncovering the decision-making process very early in the customer engagement lifecycle. He wanted to have his team solve big problems for customers and take the time to be even more consultative. (This problem is by no means specific to this company or companies of any size - it is pretty much universal.) Andrew wanted his team to focus on a core set of questions about decision making processes, compelling events, timelines, and any red flags that could derail projects.

We dove into the project together, starting by compiling a list of people in the organization to gather perspectives from. We lined up a couple of salespeople, a couple of sales engagement managers, and the head of services. We also talked to a customer. We believed we had a good sense of what the solution needed to be, but it was invaluable to talk with these folks - especially a customer. Besides finding some great best practices and tools we could include in the project to become part of the company's sales values, we also used the interview exercise as a way to align the team. They all became part of the solution.

We followed a conversational interview style, starting with their view of how things were working today. They shared what they thought was working and what they thought could be improved. We learned so much from their stories and experiences. For example, one of the salespeople shared how she had just had a new decision maker show up last minute and push out the signing of the agreement; the issue was real and fresh. We had the salesperson share that real-life example during the launch of the new sales values. With the interview information and a validated hypothesis, the core team met to brainstorm the creation of the sales values. We used a conference room and a big whiteboard, and we started by talking about what we heard and learned from the team. We put words on the whiteboard, and as we did, themes started emerging for us: words that would become anchors for the sales values. We listed out words and phrases like business issues, discovery, decision-making process, mutual action plan, storytelling, credibility,

customer communications, solving problems, and wowing the customer. We looked at the words and found one that seemed to pull all the values together in an inspiring and directive way: engage. We began working the values around that word. (Note: Once you find a core word and have clarified the basics of the values you want your team to live by, a thesaurus becomes very useful in coming up with those memorable acronyms.) Here is where we ended up:

- E**xplore their issues.
- N**avigate their company.
- G**rab their attention.
- A**sk for the money.
- G**row their business.
- E**arn their trust.

Each of these sentences has a distinct meaning that encourages activity, expectations, and metrics. Explore their issues reminds the team to do a detailed discovery and to understand the clients critical business issues. Navigate their company helps the team to focus on all the influencers and stakeholders, making sure they all have a voice. Grab their attention brings focus to the professionalism of communications, including action item lists, summary emails, presentations that wow, and proposals that are professional. Ask for the money reminds the team to stay focused on the decision making process and evaluation criteria. Grow their business is about quantifying the value of the services to drive a return on investment. Finally, earn their trust is about sharing customer stories, references, and examples to drive up confidence.

Next, we mapped the values to the sales process and ultimately brought it to life with sales tools, technology, manager reports, and training. We quickly applied the “engage” values to every deal conversation and customer interaction. I sat through their weekly deal reviews as an observer to help make sure “engage” came to life. I heard the salespeople themselves asking for more training and tools because they believed in this new way to sell. The “engage” values formed the foundation for all conversations, training, and weekly deal review meetings.

Taking the reins of your role as an entrepreneurial sales manager starts with a strong set of sales values, and I hope you’re excited to start the process with your own team. I hope you are realizing the importance of creating your own sales values regardless of the size of your team. Once you have those values settled upon, you’re ready to start winning as a team.

