

2012 sales manifesto: What do the best know about driving consistent results with their partners?



By DAN MACK

A few years back, Harvard surgeon Atul Gawande authored a book called “The Checklist Manifesto.” The author’s message is

that the complexity of life has exceeded most individual’s ability to manage it consistently without error despite advances in technology, training and specialization.

His solution is the utilization of a checklist or a blueprint to ensure and drive success.

Yet, despite demonstrating that checklists produce results, there is resistance to their use because “blueprints” demand visibility, thoughtfulness and discipline.

Gawande believes in a complex environment, we are all up against two challenges – our lapses in memory, and secondly, people can lull themselves into skipping simple steps even when they remember them. If the truth be known, most of us love blueprints when it serves us, but would rather skip it when it demands our own effort.

We have found that the top performing manufacturers are laser focused against their most vital business priorities. They talk about these metrics at every opportunity, keep the priorities very concise and incorporate these topics into all team meetings. What can we learn from this insight?

Here is a list of the top sales markers that should be included in your own sales blueprint:

- **Customers:** Review how your top 10 customers are fairing versus the annual sales target, customer marketing and overall profitability. Determine if you are financially aligned and driving profitable results
- **Positioning:** Review the strategies your competitors are utilizing to create differentiation, while discussing ideas on neutralizing their strengths. In other words, take a hard look in the mirror at your own performance versus the momentum of your competition.
- **Cultural shifts:** Monitor the cultural trends or shifts that may be leading indicators of how your business may be changing. Take the time to bring in outsiders who can help you uncover these patterns and your own blind spots.
- **Innovation:** Review how your top customers are fairing versus their annual new item objectives, including initial baseline sales movement and potential vulnerable items. Determine if your initial new item expectations are being met early in the game.
- **Talent:** Consistently keep a list of potential leaders, outside of your company, that may one day be great additions to your organization. Have you constructed a virtual bench of potential talent that you could bring into your team?
- **Drivers:** There are very few corporate priorities that are truly vital. An effective sales blueprint includes a list of the most significant “Must Win” goals, a summary of resources necessary to achieve success, a project owner and a clear visible timeline. This should be a standing topic at every monthly team meeting.
- **Roadblocks:** What is getting in the way of your sales growth and industry alignment? This can be a very temperamental subject, but is essential in creating healthy and sustainable growth. Corporate stumbling blocks need to be honestly reviewed and quickly addressed on an on-going basis.
- **Resources:** How are you at quickly and consistently eliminating unprofitable customers, underperforming items and weak trade promotional events? The longer you stay with unprofitable activities the more you distance yourself from profitable growth. “Decisiveness is vital.”
- **Influencers:** Business is done with people of influence. Everyone must have a plan to advance the company’s image and relations by consistently bringing value to the top leaders of your largest customers. If you are not bringing unique value, you are not important. Here is a question for your monthly team meetings. “Are you best in the world at something, and do the influencers know it?”
- **Alignment:** Ask your internal team if they fully understand the organization’s top five business priorities, corporate roadblocks and brand positioning. In other words, what are you focusing on, and what’s getting in the way of growth? Consistently ask this question throughout the year and listen for alignment opportunities.

Are any of the following ten business metrics unique? Obviously not, and that’s why many of us struggle with keeping these questions front and center by designing a comprehensive and transparent blueprint. The power of formal checklists and corporate blueprints help facilitate deeper team discussions, driving alignment and profitable growth.

Do you dare utilize a checklist or better yet a sales blueprint within your daily operation?