



The Miller Heiman New Sales Vice President Survival Guide

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The Miller Heiman New Sales Vice President Survival Guide

With the intense pressure placed on sales leaders, it's not surprising that a sales vice president's average tenure is brief. Given this statistic, chances are you are either new to a sales leadership role or will be in the next few quarters, whether through a promotion or a new position with a new company. Moving into this role can be as exciting and rewarding as it is difficult. Whether this is a challenge you are currently facing or a position you aspire to reach, I encourage you to review the areas we consider most critical for sales leaders to focus their attention on during the early stages of a sales leadership role.

Our research has demonstrated that SVPs at Winning Sales Organizations (WSOs) have a considerably longer tenure and tend to engage in a "discovery process" during the first 90 days with their new company. During that time they ask a lot of questions and do a lot of listening. They gain insights into their employer's strategic objectives, customers and deals, procedures and norms, corporate structure and strategies, leadership and teams. This Survival Guide describes the discovery process – a comprehensive guide for an incoming SVP to learn his or

her way around the new company, get traction fast, begin to drive sales, make informed decisions, and effectively lead a sales organization.

One minor word of caution: No two organizations are exactly alike, not even similarly-sized ones in the same industry. Each has its own culture, its own modes and attitudes, and its own style of doing business. Because different organizations move at different speeds and have different priorities, our guide is not a substitute for experience, skill and good judgment. While we can't make it easy, we can offer proven, effective tools for stepping into a sales leadership role – and staying in it long enough to accomplish some significant goals.

Align with Your New CEO and Executive Team

We have observed that sales executives at WSOs have a keen understanding of their company's overall business strategy. When sales executives fail to glean the organization's overall objectives, they can't effectively convey those objectives to their team. Invariably this creates a leadership vacuum that team members will fill with their own individual priorities and goals. Of course,

some may be aligned with the overall strategy. But why leave it to chance? It's up to an SVP to provide sales leadership by aligning the team's efforts with the company's goals. To do that, the SVP needs to know what those goals are. We find it remarkable how often a new SVP simply never finds out. Clarity on business strategy is key.

We recommend that new SVPs learn, early on, what the CEO is trying to accomplish. What is his or her agenda? When you've aligned your team's goals with the CEO's agenda, the result is a clear sense of direction.

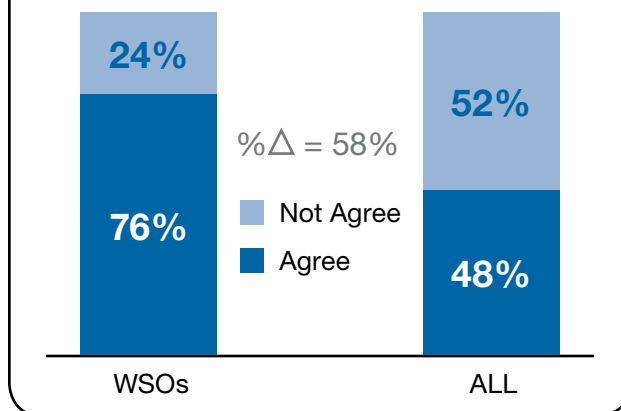
Another critical yet often-overlooked key to SVP success is getting a clear understanding of your new employer's procedures and norms. (Ideally, CEOs will periodically review the procedures their executive teams follow – and ask whether the procedures advance or deter business.) Often, a new SVP will review the company's rules (generally found in the employee handbook), but never really think about the company's norms. Norms are the ground rules – and while they may not make it into a handbook, they're important to know. For example, at some organizations executives turn off their cell phones during meetings. At other organizations, cell phones are permitted at meetings, but they must be in silent mode. It may not seem like that big a deal, but new executives who take the time to learn the norms right away often have an easier time being accepted by their peers.

Speaking of peers, a deep dive into how they operate, how they feel about newcomers, their personal styles, and their attitudes will help get your footing in the new organization. In talking with sales leaders from WSOs, we have learned that successful sales leaders practice seeing things from their peers' points of view. As the new kid on the block, you may see yourself as something of a savior. But of course, you cannot be sure the rest of the executive team will feel that way. So, how do they feel? How do they see things? What is a "win" for them? In most cases, the win for marketing, sales, and IT are three entirely different events. How are their results measured and tracked? What motivates them? What drives their success? Learn about your peers' goals and challenges, and you'll begin to see the organization from their perspective. Of course, you'll want to let your peers in on your practices, your style, your expectations, and your definition of a win. At WSOs, sales executives are more inclined to invite other key executives to sales calls, reviews, and meetings. Bottom line: get your peers and the organization's key stakeholders involved in your business – and get a good understanding of theirs.

[Chart 1.1]

As a new SVP, you'll have resources at your disposal – marketing, IT, HR, and sales operations support, for example. When we look at our research, we are surprised

1.1 - Our executive leadership is actively engaged in our sales process



by how many SVPs never actually gain an understanding of their company's non-sales functions; for example, its HR procedures. How does the hiring get done? Who handles training? Does the organization utilize performance management standards? If so, what kinds of metrics are used? How is compensation structured? How are rewards differentiated? Will sales operations provide sales with timely and relevant data? If not, why not? We urge new SVPs to talk with the CFO and head of marketing.

Be sure you understand how lead generation works. If there's a CRM system, how is it used? (Or, in the case of a lot of CRM systems, how is it under-used?)

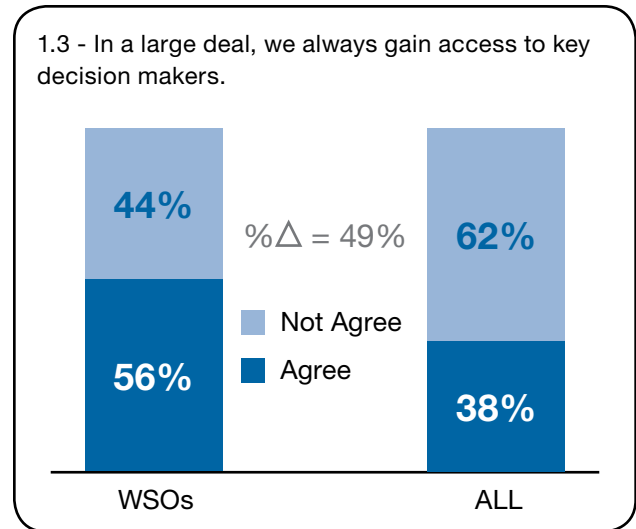
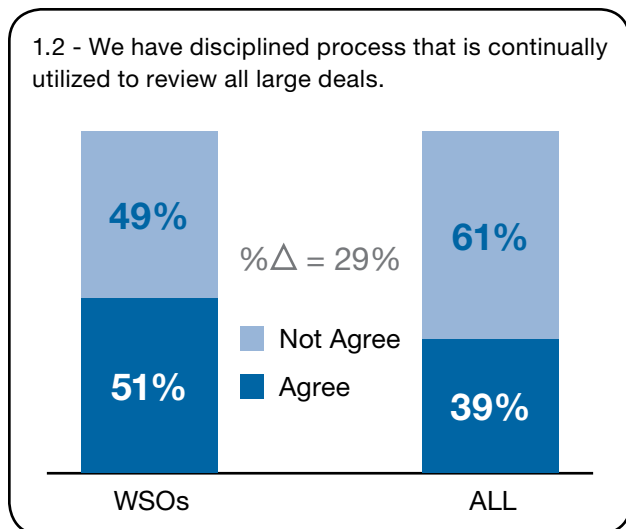
Try to get a sense of the budgets these groups are working with and what drives the budgeting process. Are you looking for a bigger budget next year? If so, will the increase come from a peer's budget? Find out which peer and what the ramifications might be. If your increase comes out of marketing's budget and will result in lower quality leads, are you sure the budget increase is still a good idea? One of the best ways to learn about your resources is to walk around (or phone around), meet people, ask them questions, listen carefully to their answers, and probe some more.

Understand the Business – Especially Your Ideal Customers

Your industry knowledge may not help you understand customer, deal and relationship dynamics at your new organization. Some of the questions to ask are: Do we want to reach out to new and different customers? What is our ideal customer profile? How long are our sales cycles? What's our average deal size? To gain a thorough understanding of the business, sales leaders at WSOs analyze revenue and market share by strategic account as well as by product and region. Their goal is to get a

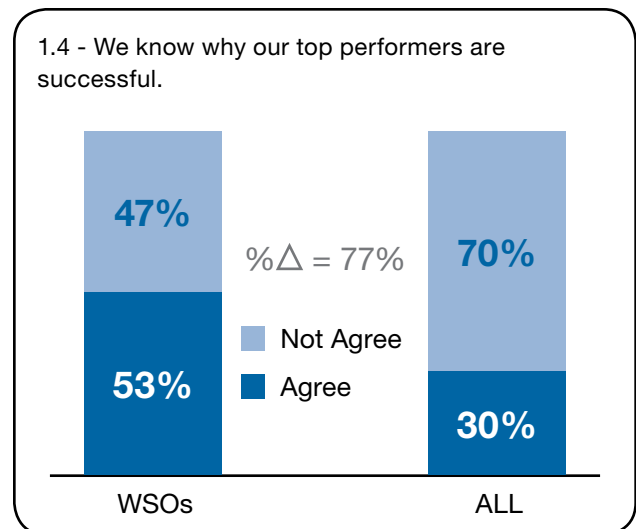
clear picture of what actually drives revenue and what keeps it flowing. They also conduct regular profitability analyses that allow apples-to-apples comparisons of customers. Just because Customer A pays you twice as much per month as Customer B doesn't mean that Customer A is more profitable. We've learned that SVPs at Winning Sales Organizations aren't wooed by deal size. They see it as an important measure, but not the only measure. How much of a team effort is required to generate each of those revenue streams? How demanding and time-consuming is each customer? What kind of discounts are you offering? You may not be able to grasp a customer's actual value until you study average deal size, seasonal fluctuations, sales cycle lengths, discounting procedures, and more. Also, studying the dynamics of deals won, lost, and in process will help you see the big picture, establish new goals and talk about future sales efforts from an informed point of view.

Most Winning Sales Organizations have a formalized process for working with their strategic accounts and for assessing the risks associated with large accounts. [Chart 1.2] Miller Heiman offers a free assessment tool to help SVPs gauge where they stand with their most important customers. The tool can be found at www.millerheiman.com/lamp. One more thing we know about winning SVPs: they invest time in learning about their customers' buying influences. In their first 90 days, they figure out who the decision makers are within their top customers and top current sales opportunities – the economic buyers, the technical buyers and the user-buyers. [Chart 1.3] Each group has its own agenda, objectives, and definitions of a "win." How a sales team presents itself to each of these buyer groups shouldn't be a function of the sales team's agenda. The fact is, it's about the buyers' points of view.



Know Your Team – Especially Your Top Performers

SVPs at winning sales organizations know who their top performers are, whether they have a direct sales force or channel partners. And they know what tangible, repeatable attributes makes their stars successful. [Chart 1.4] Not only do they analyze the business's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, but their own team's capabilities, shortcomings, and styles as well. We recommend finding out who on the sales management team has credibility and understanding how they earned it. What management practices do they have in place? What is that person's personal style? What is their perspective on the business? Building relationships with credible sales managers will better help you understand what's working and what's not, and create opportunities for them to transfer credibility to you.



In addition, it is always important to know who on the team is exceeding quota and who isn't, and dig deeper into why this is the case. Reviewing compensation plans and performance reviews are important, but so is understanding the circumstances behind the numbers. The same logic can be applied to channel partners if you go to market indirectly. The key is to understand what makes your top performers successful and then replicate that success in other parts of your business.

SUGGESTED READING

[Leveraging Sales Talent, and Driving Your B Players to the A Team](#)

Get Clear on Your Strategies and Goals

At WSOs sales executives tend to be more focused than other companies on leading key performance indicators. Without those KPIs (as well as some of the other discovery tools we have been describing) it may not be so easy to define what a “win” actually is at your new company. Again, that is why we suggest learning about the CEO's goals, and, based on those goals, setting your own short-term objectives.

SUGGESTED READING

[Study Identifies How Global Giant Compares to WSOs](#)

Once the business objectives are clear and you have translated them into goals for the sales organization, you will have gone beyond simple revenue goals and well into the realm of more detailed and specific key performance indicators. While we advise new SVPs to set goals by looking forward, not backward, we recognize that if you know how success was measured in the past, you can be more realistic when you decide how to measure it in the future.

Proactively Manage Performance

Effective leadership is the thread that ties together all of the factors we've described in this paper. We have found that managers will comply with any ratings scale they are told to use in evaluating their salespeople's performance. The best managers can determine what differentiates top performers and then leverage these to get the desired results out of the weaker team members the performance management system was designed

to influence. Any manager can develop and use these necessary skills through formal training and ongoing coaching.

Finally, we recommend performing a S.W.O.T. Analysis: analyze the organization's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Be sure to include your peers and direct reports to build momentum and get buy-in for the strategic changes that may occur as a result of the analysis.

Enjoy the Ride!

Once again, whether you were hired by a new organization or promoted through the ranks – statistically speaking, an SVP has a short time to make an impact. If you're serious about not needing to return recruiters' phone calls for a good long time, we advise you to walk the WSO walk, talk the WSO talk, and take our objective, methodological approach to your first 90 days on the job.

The New Sales Vice President Survival Guide Checklist

I. Alignment with Your New CEO and Executive Team

- A. Understand the overall business strategy
- B. Understand the Procedures and Norms
- C. Understand your Peers
 - 1. Modes
 - 2. Attitude (toward you and others)
 - 3. Win-results
 - 4. Style
 - 5. Sensitivities
- D. Understand your Resources
 - 1. Sales Operations
 - 2. Marketing
 - 3. Finance
 - 4. HR
 - 5. IT

II. Understand the Business

- A. Understanding your customers
 - 1. Top customers
 - a. Industry
 - b. Depth of relationship
 - c. Share of wallet
 - d. Tenure
 - e. Why they buy from us
 - 2. Ideal customer profile
- B. Revenue Dynamics
 - 1. Revenue by customer
 - 2. Revenue by product
 - 3. Revenue by region
 - 4. Sudden or subtle erosion
- C. Deal Dynamics
 - 1. Average deal size
 - 2. Average sales cycle length
 - 3. Seasonality
 - 4. Buying influences
 - 5. Forecast accuracy
 - 6. Average discount
 - 7. Big deals won, lost and in process
- D. Relationship Dynamics
 - 1. Average account billed
 - 2. "Strategic" accounts
 - 3. Big accounts recently won or lost
 - 4. Strategic Account Risk Assessment
- E. Competition
 - 1. Market share by region
 - 2. Market share by product
 - 3. Market share by strategic account
 - 4. Sudden or subtle erosion
- F. Business summary
 - 1. Strengths
 - 2. Weaknesses
 - 3. Opportunities
 - 4. Threats

III. Understand Your Team

- A. Structure
 - 1. Direct vs. Indirect
 - 2. Regional vs. Vertical
- B. Management Team / Field Leadership
- C. Behaviors and styles
- D. Performance history / comp plans
- E. Strengths and weaknesses

IV. Get Clear On Your Strategy and Goals

- A. Establishing Leading KPI's
- B. Set goals
 - 1. Short-term vs. Long-term
 - 2. Internal/historic vs. External/forward looking
 - 3. Data availability, integrity and location
 - 4. Alignment with business strategy
- C. Track goals
 - 1. Systems
 - 2. Procedures
 - 3. Communication Plan

V. Proactively Manage Performance

SUGGESTED READING:

Driving Your “B” Players to the “A” Team

Top performers make a company work. It's more than their impact to the bottom line; it's the way they work for an organization as a whole—whether it's by taking on a leadership role, or developing honest relationships with customers.

When you have top performers, they “generate a lot of energy, enthusiasm and excitement. They help fuel a healthy culture,” says Bill Golder, sales vice president for Miller Heiman, Inc.

Every company wants more world-class sales performers, and few have as many in their ranks as they would like. Golder contends that you must understand what a top performer's required traits and skill sets (or “DNA”) are as they pertain to your specific organization. And, “many organizations have the opportunity to manage talent better,” he says.

What Makes a Top Performer?

Jason Reed, sales vice president for Miller Heiman, believes this skill separates the top performers: They're exceptional listeners. “Top performers know listening is more than being quiet. It's about really listening to what the customer says and dovetailing smart and insightful lines of questioning from the information the client shares.” Reed points out that understanding the client's circumstance requires those types of listening skills. He says, “Top performers have these skills and marginal performers often don't.”

He and Golder agree on another trait that propels exceptional performers to the top: business acumen. A salesperson who understands, and is interested in business, will be more successful in uncovering customer challenges and making honest and credible connections. Interpersonal savvy, or EQ [Emotional Quotient], also comes into play, according to Reed: “Some people have it; others just don't.” Situational fluency is so important in the sales world, and sales reps with high EQ are able to thrive regardless of ever-changing sales environments.

Golder indicates that there “always needs to be a good cultural fit” for top performers to excel. A top performer in one organization might not be a top performer in a different organization. “Top performers blend well with culture and pace—it isn't just skills, knowledge and traits.

“A sales rep could deliver numbers consistently, but not bring value to the organization in terms of leadership. Top performers bring an intangible value to an organization beyond the numbers,” Golder states.

“Without question, there's a lot to be said for the consistent, serious and professional manner in which top performers sell to prospective clients and manage their portfolios. They aren't haphazard. They have serious standards and disciplines that can be replicated,” says Reed. They regularly apply their own business processes to how they sell.

Get to the Core of Top Performers' DNA

Golder suggests that organizations get to the core of their top performers “DNA” by using a scientific profiling approach (like Miller Heiman's Predictive Sales PerformanceSM assessment), and by performing win analyses. “Having a win/loss analysis in place for deals is healthy, but it's doubly effective when one of the outcomes of the analysis is discovering what happens when top performers win deals.”

Reed says, “Identify the habits of rainmakers; top performers know that X calls a week result in Y live meetings and ultimately yield Z closed sales—and they're disciplined, consistent and get results. Institutionalize this information to build management controls and drive compliance throughout the entire sales organization.” According to Reed, a legitimate selling process with discipline and compliance through the ranks is fundamental to scaling sales growth. If the organization has bought in to the selling process, and if it's practical and can be replicated by entire sales force, then an environment for quantum sales growth is the result.

Bring Bs to As

Many companies buy in to the concept of systematizing best practices and propagating them throughout the organization, Reed says—and those companies are thinking in the right direction. But it's easier said than done. Coaching B and C level players to become A-level producers isn't easy. Companies must create a foundation that enables a consistent approach to selling to be driven down through the rank and file. “It becomes increasingly important that there's common language, consistent process and discipline about how you go to market,” he states. It's only at this point that systematizing best practices is even possible.

“There's a fine line between your best people and the rest,” Reed goes on to say. “Sometimes the line can be pushed.” As he puts it, the trend has been to refine and manage operational efficiencies in all departments,

functions and divisions within companies—except for sales!

Sales, traditionally, has been considered to be more nebulous—more of an art form. Thus, operational approaches to selling have been neglected. But, Reed says, this is changing fast: “Companies are quickly realizing the tremendous value in systematizing their sales process.” He is quick to mention that the “art of selling” is still important, but that today’s market demands more than just a friendly personality and a low golf handicap.

Now, the trend has reached the sales world, and the result of systematizing sales processes can be just the push that’s needed to nudge the B-level players in the right direction. “You won’t get the middle pack to shoot completely to the top. You can, however, get them to move up a rung or two,” Reed says. “Moving the core middle forward even incrementally can be profoundly valuable to the entire sales organization in terms of performance.”

The key to moving Bs to As, according to Golder, is prompting sales managers to devote energy to the right group. Often, sales leaders get caught up in managing C-level salespeople, who seem to need the most resources. The other possibility is that managers are trying to be the A-level super-salespeople by handling deals themselves. Both of these activities, Golder says, represent misallocation of the sales manager’s time. Any organization that can help its sales management find more time to spend with the bulk of its sales force—the B players—will see the benefits of better revenue.

And, while the onus is on management to help the sales force reach the next level, by providing the right resources in terms of training and support, the rest, Golder says, is up to the individual salesperson. “As a salesperson, so much of what’s delivered comes from your individual efforts and contribution. That’s part of the reason people are in sales.”

Measuring Performance

Three key elements should be gauged to determine the level at which any salesperson is delivering: skills, activity and revenue. According to Golder, this is how it works:

Skills: the general sales ability and attributes required to be successful in the organization.

Activity: showing up, working hard, playing to win, being persistent.

Revenue: Meeting the Numbers

And, Golder says, if you have a development process in place, it requires companies to really think about ways in which they should measure progress rather than just top-line revenue. They can begin to think of the components for success on a more granular level: “How effectively are my people executing on the skills for this job? If companies can define that, and have a good process in place to make sure salespeople get feedback on execution of measurable skills, it will contribute greatly to the expansion of the A-player population.”

As Reed stresses, even an incremental positive difference in the core middle’s approach to selling can significantly impact an organization’s number: “Not everyone will be a rainmaker; nudging the Bs and Cs forward just a little is arguably the best move a sales leader can make. It has an even greater impact than making the best better.”

SUGGESTED READING:

How Global Giant Compares to WSOs

Unilever may well define the much-used term “global.” The consumer goods giant has salespeople on the ground in more than 150 countries doing battle to secure local restaurant shelf space.

Unilever’s Foodsolutions division offers food ingredients to restaurants and shops, and most successful salespeople cook with local proprietors and sell by demonstration. However, in some instances, this interactive sales method leads to a string of one-time sales as representatives finish a demonstration and move down the street to the next target.

Unilever trainers around the world have been working to shift sales culture and encourage methods that produce repeat business, according to Roy Martinez, a Unilever sales training leader with responsibility for building sales capacity in North America.

Miller Heiman spoke with Martinez and Miller Heiman VP of Sales, Tim Call, about Unilever’s methodology: Global sales executive leaders expressed interest in *Miller Heiman’s Sales Best Practices Study*, and Martinez asked Miller Heiman to administer that survey to key people in the division, so they could directly compare their results against Winning Sales Organizations (WSOs).

Miller Heiman surveyed a majority of Unilever’s senior sales leaders, their two COOs, and 135 managing directors and salespeople--about 185 individuals total. The depth and detail with which the division was surveyed required senior executive-level input from both companies. Bob Miller, Miller Heiman’s co-founder, delivered the keynote message at Unilever’s January 2007 sales meeting, during which the results were presented.

Martinez suspected the survey results would help articulate areas where the division’s leadership could drive more sales involvement at the country leadership level and the areas where changes to the sales process were needed. The study results delivered on his hunch and also helped rally executive fervor around training geared toward developing more strategic planning for sales calls.

Excerpts of the discussion with Martinez and Call follow.

Miller Heiman: How did the Sales Best Practices Study fit with Unilever’s plans for its sales team members?

Roy Martinez: In the last 14 months, we’ve really been looking at selling strategy. We have so many different go-to-market strategies. In many places around the globe, the selling strategy is transactional selling, and the thought among regional leadership is that the more people you have on the street, the more you can sell. That’s good, but it doesn’t bring accounts with larger volume potential to us.

It created heated debate all over--Rotterdam, Turkey, South America, Bangkok. We hoped to record what our salespeople and executives around the world know and don’t know--on a data sheet. How could we make a big difference in spreading a real sales-driven culture, whether we are looking at a very simple sale to a shop owner in Vietnam, or selling to Yum! Corporation in the U.S.?

We needed to tie the knot much tighter between executive leadership in all those different countries to get them really locked into their sales organizations and understanding their customers.

Tim Call: Response to Bob Miller’s presentation of preliminary survey results at the global sales meeting was very good. Over the next few days, meeting attendees kept referring to it.

MH: It sounds as though discovering concretely where Unilever either does or does not match up against your peer group helped solidify strategy you’ll follow to improve results.

RM: If you’re a large company touting yourself to be leading edge or ahead of the pack, you should know what the pack is doing. We wanted to know what WSOs were really doing, get a sense of our benchmark. It’s one thing to read about selling strategies in a book, it’s another to hear them in person, to be able to work on the issues the survey has identified.

TC: Typically, using survey results, an organization will make a laundry list of five to seven things they want to change incrementally, then decide what’s most important and set strategy for the following year.

RM: We’ll target two or three areas that stand out. The study gave us a clearer direction to move in.

MH: What are some of the specific areas that you think the division will target?

TC: I think at the global meeting, they learned they’re doing a pretty good job at some things. One area

they might pursue, though, is around opportunity identification, knowing when to pursue an opportunity and when not to.

RM: We need to bring some lofty goals down to earth. If a salesperson says he can close \$100,000, we need to hold him accountable for this number. Sales leaders tend to be exuberant, and salespeople are always hopeful, but you can't take hopeful to the bank!

The survey also showed our value proposition is not as strong as a WSO. We need to strengthen our ability to articulate that, instead of just listing 15-20 features and benefits in a call. We need to look to the customer, and provide solutions they would really value. The importance of qualifying the opportunity, understanding your customer and articulating a true value proposition were things the survey results expanded on for us.

This is why we're working to develop strategic sales process worldwide. And if you have senior sales leaders, VPs, trainers in HR like myself and the chairman and executives of a region actively involved, you are going to strengthen your value proposition within that structure.

INTERVIEW SUBJECT:

Name: Roy Martinez

Title: Manager for NA Learning & Development. .

Company: Unilever

Business: Creates products that help consumers meet everyday needs for nutrition, hygiene, and personal care with brands that help people feel good, look good and get more out of life including Knorr, Hellmann's, Lipton, Bertolli; Dove, Lux, Pond's, Rexona/Sure; Skip/Persil; Cif and Domestos.

Headquarters: Unilever NV: Rotterdam, Netherlands; Unilever PLC: London, England; Unilever also has corporate offices in the United States and strong local roots in more than 100 countries across the globe; it operates in 150 countries worldwide.

Founded: Lever Bros., which eventually merged with other entities to become Unilever, was started in the 1880s

Revenues: Annual sales of \$40 billion in 2005

Employees: 206,000 worldwide

Website: www.unilever.com

ABOUT MILLER HEIMAN

SIMPLICITY + POWER = PERFORMANCE

For nearly 30 years, Miller Heiman has brought precision to the art of selling. Our simple, powerful processes and tools help drive performance, especially when the sales cycle is complex and the marketplace is demanding.

Sales Leaders trust us. We understand their sense of urgency. We don't disrupt their strategy; we give them a foundation to execute and drive results quickly.

Sales Managers depend on us. We give them common language and processes to improve revenue predictability, collaboration and coaching.

Salespeople value us. We respect their natural ability and give them added capability and tools to replicate success and create wealth.

Our experience working shoulder-to-shoulder with the world's leading companies and our comprehensive research has enabled us to stay relevant over three decades of change. Bring us your toughest deal or most promising account. We'll gladly prove it.

Typical problems we solve include the following:

- Improving Sales Force Productivity
- Managing Sales Talent
- Transitioning from Product-led to Solution-led Selling
- Winning High-value, Complex Deals
- Shortening Sales Cycles
- Improving Sales Forecast Accuracy
- Evaluating and Integrating Sales Forces Pre-and-Post Merger
- Protecting and Growing Strategic Accounts



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