

Fast Forward: Strategic Planning Reality Checklist for Sales Leaders

By Dario Priolo and Brendan Hawkins

A strategic plan starts with good intentions, but is virtually useless without implementation. Achieving solid results depends on a plan that is attainable and based in fact. The following checklist will help you avoid some common traps that come back to haunt sales leaders over the course of the year.

1. Know Your External, Market-Driven Factors

If you have aspirations of growing—by going after new market segments or launching products, for example—you must firmly establish business objectives and align the sales force with those objectives. Establish a clear baseline and identify the gaps in alignment.

- New vs. Existing Regions
 - What is the revenue potential in these existing and new regions?
 - Based on our competition, how much market share can we achieve and how quickly?
- New vs. Existing Accounts
 - What is the revenue potential in these existing and prospective accounts?
 - How much carryover business do we have already booked and are there any multiyear contribution effects?
 - What is our risk of losing a strategic account to a challenger?
- New vs. Existing Products
 - What is the market potential for existing and new products?
 - Based on our competition, how much market share can we achieve and how quickly?
 - What marketing support do we need to be successful?

2. Know Your Internal, Organization-Driven Factors

Even if the market potential exists, you need to have the people and organization in place to execute the plan. Overall, in terms of recruiting and development, you

should use metrics as benchmarks--whether that's for attrition rate, or the length of time it takes to fill a sales position or ramp up a new hire to full productivity--to base your implementation plans on solid facts.

- Current Production
 - How much does the typical rep sell in a year?
 - How does this production vary across regions, products and key accounts?
- Sales Rep Attrition
 - What is our voluntary, involuntary and total turnover rate?
 - What is the opportunity cost of an open territory?
 - Are we at risk of losing a top producer?
 - Why have we lost top producers in the past?
- Time to Recruit
 - How long does it take us to fill an empty position?
 - What investments can we make to shorten recruitment time without compromising quality?
- Time to Ramp-up
 - How long does it take to bring a new rep to full productivity?
 - What is the reps' productivity during the ramp-up period?
 - What investments can we make to shorten time to full productivity?
- Time for Excellence
 - What capabilities do our reps need to be truly successful?
 - What skills do they have today and what are the gaps?

3. Align the Organization to Execute the Plan

Once there is a clear understanding of the external and internal factors, then the next step is to build alignment to support successful execution.

- Coverage
 - Based on our growth plans and the talent-related factors, how many reps do we need to hire?
 - Based on ramp-up time and productivity, how much can we expect new hires to contribute in the new fiscal year?
- Penetration
 - Based on the risk and opportunities in our strategic accounts, what focus investments are needed to protect and grow these accounts, and when can we expect a return on these investments?
- Specialization
 - Based on new markets and new products, does the existing sales force have the capability and motivation to realize the potential, or do we need to develop specialists?
- Alignment
 - Even if the market potential exists and we can hire and deploy a sales force, can we create sufficient awareness, fulfill demand and satisfy our customers?

Some Final Thoughts...

Gauge your present situation and make sure you have the right information to set accurate and attainable objectives. Involve department leaders to ensure buy-in across the company, and to demonstrate to all employees that the company intends to follow the plan and effect change. Then, keep checking your progress against the plan, for a map to guide your company to change and growth.

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