



Helping Farmers Hunt

by
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It was ten minutes to ten on Wednesday morning - almost time for the weekly business development call. Sally had come to dread these calls. She knew she would have to report another week of little progress on deepening her funnel. While Sally knew that she had to generate new opportunities, it was easy to get buried in the activity of serving her existing clients. Every week, Friday would come and she had spent virtually the entire week dealing with issues and urgent requests. Her customers were a demanding bunch, and they were investing heavily with Sally's company. She was actually ahead of her annual sales goals. It's just that she knew that her selling activity was out of balance. If her current level of business with this client dried up, she was in big trouble.

Sound familiar?

Most of us in our selling lives have had to deal with this paradox. Our sales people deal with it every day. As sales leaders, we have to help our teams balance the short and the long term demands of their jobs.

In current sales writings, people often use the hunter-farmer metaphor to describe the difference in selling styles between those sales reps who are predominantly caring for the needs of established customers ("farmers") and those who are predominantly establishing new business relationships ("hunters"). Conventional wisdom holds that sales reps fall naturally into one style or the other. These preferences are often driven by whether the sales person is extroverted or introverted, their orientation toward working in teams versus



individually, their level of energy and persistence, and other traits and skills. One well respected consulting group administers a 50 question web-based personality test, sends respondents a report which grades them on their hunting and farming orientation, and suggests the sales roles that are most appropriate for them. Some sales managers go farther to suggest that a sales rep with a predisposition toward one of the styles will not be successful in the opposite role.

While the argument for role specialization is a sound one, the reality for many sales managers is that they cannot afford the luxury of specialized roles. The sales manager must coach their team to play both roles successfully. Sustainable business results depend on the continuous development of new customers while taking excellent care of existing customers. That leaves the sales manager with the challenge of ensuring their team's success in mixed assignments.

Here are ten tips for helping sales reps balance their hunting and farming activities to optimize their long term success.

Be clear about the sales results that are required for the rep to be successful

1. **Set specific, measurable, and balanced goals:** Acceptable performance can't be reduced to just meeting short term quota goals. Sales reps need clear performance expectations around developing new business and in successfully executing all the selling activities laid out in their territory and account plans. It has to be clear that the sales leaders expect their team to meet ALL of their objectives.

Plan the selling activity

2. **Analyze the territory, accounts, and opportunities:** The territory and account planning must identify the key sources of business and how that business will be achieved. That analysis must be used to build the business results and selling activities which will form the basis for a balanced plan of selling activities.
3. **Establish the results and success metrics that should be achieved for each component of the territory plan:** Installed accounts may have straightforward goals for revenue retention and growth. New accounts or new target markets may require more modest goals which are appropriate for new business development. A modest revenue or account penetration goal in a new account may not move the revenue meter significantly but yet may represent much greater long term value to the company.



4. **Identify specific selling activities that will achieve those results within the next review period:** Once the desired results are clear, focus on what selling activities are required to achieve them. Make the activities clear and measurable so it will be easy to assess whether they were met.

Inspect what you expect

5. **Conduct regular reviews:** Sales people are masters at delaying real change in their selling behavior to let the boss move on to a new fad or approach. Regular reviews with a consistent focus are critical to signaling to the sales force that new behaviors are expected and will be measured. Many reps will not believe you're serious until you have repeated the review cycle several times.
6. **Balance the reviews across the specific goals:** Again, the review has to assess more than short term quota achievement. Review each goal and interim result in its own right.
7. **Candidly assess shortcomings against the plan:** What went right? What fell short? Why?
8. **Be specific about what you learned:** How can your team apply what they learned to assessing their territory more effectively, to writing more appropriate goals, to executing their plans more effectively?

Adjust the plan for the next period

9. **Validate the goals and objectives:** Have things changed? Are the goals still the right ones? Have new opportunities arisen that might change priorities?
10. **Apply the learnings to planning the selling activities for the next period:** Repeat the planning in steps 2-4 above. Set your team to succeed or to learn what held them back and to ready to address those issues in the future.

Successful sales managers help their sales teams see their selling plan as a series of campaigns with distinct beginnings, middles and ends. By balancing the selling activity, and tracking achievable results across the entire sales process (not just the closing stages), they help their teams achieve short term success while laying the foundation for next quarter's and next year's business growth and sales quota achievement.