



Why Scaling Your Salespeople is Such a Challenge

The Starting Point: Understanding Your Sales

Sales are always at the forefront of driving a new business. I know there is more to a company and that you are only as good as your weakest link. However, as long as your sales are generating revenue, the rest usually falls into place.

The one thing all good salespeople have in common is being good at selling themselves. Something I had to learn the hard way. One of my major flaws, I came to realise, was not identifying the sales focus I needed to hire for. As a result, I wasted more money and time than I would like to admit on figuring out why new hires were not fit for purpose. This seems to be a common problem as, according to Wayne Thomas¹, 55% of salespeople are in the wrong field.

Like most professionals, salespeople have a focus. There is a big difference whether you are in B2C or B2B, selling cutting-edge or familiar, concrete products or intangible services, high or low cost units. We sell bespoke solutions, which is incredibly challenging for most salespeople because you need to identify the client's true needs before conceptualising a possible offering.

When hiring salespeople, you would be well advised to clearly identify what their focus is and to scrutinise them during the interview, because getting this wrong will weigh on your mind and impact your business. When employing them agree on a period with measurable goals.

Logical Steps for Growing Sales

Initially selling is often done by the founders/owners or a few individuals, often intuitively, adapting frequently to figure out what works best. Everything is in flux but, at some point, you figure out how best to position and deliver your value proposition. There comes a time when you want to:

- a) delight a larger number of customers.

After saturating the market around you, 2 main options present themselves:

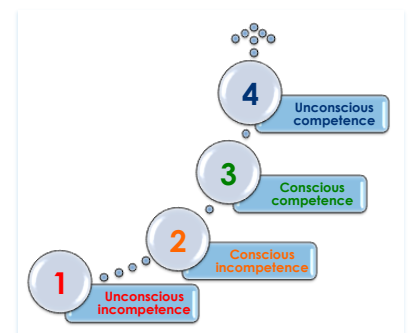
- b) taking your products/services to new markets, for example by internationalising your business;
- c) growing your product/service range, perhaps by going up or down the value chain.

In all 3 cases, you need to quantify and qualify your sales and marketing efforts. Everyone sales person I know liked riding jet-skis. However, having small teams in speedboats who need to work together and at some point, coordinating between speed boats is a different story. The initial challenge of scaling your sales is going to be one that defines you and your business.

Levels of Competence as a Prerequisite for Scalability

One of the realisations which has shocked me over the years is how unclear employees are about how they do what they do. The amount of times I have asked someone with years of experience in their field to document their steps and seen them struggle still worries me now.

Here we can learn from psychology. The **Four Stages of Competence**² by Noel Burch outlines the psychological states involved in the process of progressing a skill from incompetence to competence. The model suggests individuals are initially unaware of how little they know, or unconscious of their incompetence. As they recognise their incompetence, they consciously acquire a skill, then consciously use it. Eventually, the skill can be utilised without conscious thought: the individual is then said to have acquired unconscious competence.



¹ The Sales Manager's Success Manual

² <http://www.businessballs.com/consciouscompetencelearningmodel.htm>



Taking your people on this journey is crucial if you want to scale your business. You want your employees to capture and document their work. This will help them move to level 3, should they not be there already. Use the understood and documented sales guidelines, processes and formulas to share this with a growing number of salespeople. Just make sure you don't overdo it – stay lean, document and define only as much as needed. Most salespeople will tell you they have already reached level 4; they tend to have a healthy level of self-confidence. Check this carefully.

Salespeople at level 4 have raised their awareness, have often faced their shortcomings, improved and, consequently, grown as individuals. In addition, they have had so much selling practice that it has become "second nature" and can be performed easily. Thus, selling in front of a client can be done whilst being fully aware of other influencing factors. These salespeople are usually able to share their know-how with others.

How to Deal With the Different Characters

When scaling your company, you want to visualise and document what people are doing intuitively. Therefore, you need to understand what kind of people make up your salesforce. At the start this should be fairly straightforward due to the small size of your company. Take time and place your salespeople within the 4 quadrants.



1. Let's start with the most difficult ones. These salespeople like to be independent, **they favour jet-skis**. If that helps grow your sales without preventing the organisation being formalised, allow it.

But you need to be very clear with these individuals, give them clear, short-term objectives to meet, or let them go. They can be toxic to your organisation.

If, for any reason, you do not want to let them go, set up another sales unit which works independently from the one being scaled. This could be your first step towards growth market b or c.

2. You need to truly understand what their motivation is for not passing on their insights. It may have to do with their ego and/or fears; for example, of not being needed any more. They would be best coached and possibly challenged about their negative and limiting beliefs. You might learn a lot as a leader, throughout this process, about the unconscious level of your company and people.
3. Many salespeople haven't learnt to logically structure their work and put it to paper. Develop simple and clear guidelines for documenting know-how. Keep it clear, pragmatic and avoid bureaucracy like the plague. For example, instead of a manual, call it a recipe. An alternative is to partner these salespeople with others who are good at structuring and capturing information.
4. These are the salespeople who want to grow and progress. You will be lucky to have them in your initial team. Let them develop best practice examples and work with others in a constructive partnership. As leaders, we often overlook these gems because others take up so much of our time. However, they are not just your high-performers, they are also crucial for taking your organisation to the next level. Take time to sit down with them and find out how to reward and continually motivate them. Use them as role models and they will multiply your positive ambitions.



What About Ourselves?

Please do not expect this journey to be easy. A lot of the time, we as founders are also part of the problem. Unsure why we are so driven, never having enough time to transcribe our thoughts and ideas, challenged by our own ego and unwilling to admit we also get it wrong once we add measurables to our statements. You need to learn to *let go*.

Food For Thought – The Way Forward

Scaling your sales will be one of the most challenging and rewarding transformations. If you crack this, you have all it takes to become a successful (serial) entrepreneur. Make a clear plan of the different sales foci.

First, try to make the journey visible for everyone. Explain what you are trying to achieve, why are you doing this, how this is going to work and what you expect from your people.

Start the journey by looking at your own ways of working. In case you are involved in sales get someone to assist you in transcribing and formalising your know-how. After all, if you don't lead by example why should anyone else?

Identify your current people in sales, categorise them according to the four quadrants, and take time to bring them to category four.

Spend enough time recruiting the right salespeople and hold them accountable to meeting their goals and targets.

Scaling your business comes with tough choices and it doesn't get more personal than with people. However, believing in your organisation and the capabilities of your salesforce, not just a few individuals, might be what makes or breaks your future sales.

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If you are interested in anything else within this area,
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