



What the Customer Wants You to Know

How Everybody Needs to Think Differently About Sales

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

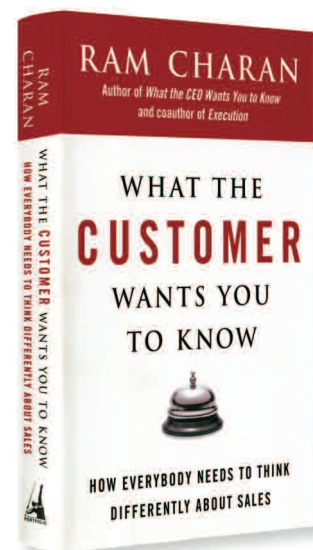
More than ever these days, the sales process tends to be a war about price — a frustrating, unpleasant war that takes all the fun out of selling. But there's a better way to think about sales, says best-selling author Ram Charan, who is famous for clarifying and simplifying difficult business problems. What the customer wants you to know is how his or her business works so you can help make it work better. It sounds simple, but there's a catch: you won't be able to do that with your traditional sales approach.

Instead of starting with your product or service, start with your customer's problems. Focus on becoming your customer's trusted partner, someone he or she can turn to for creative, cost-effective solutions that are based on your deep knowledge of his or her values, goals, problems and customers.

Charan defines this new approach to selling as *value creation selling* (VCS), which he says is radical but nonetheless practical. VCS differentiates you from the competition, paving the way to better pricing, better margins and higher revenue growth built on win-win relationships that deepen over time.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to intensely focus on the prosperity of your customers.
- Why value creation selling entails profound changes in the sales force itself.
- How to establish multiple contacts between your company and your customer so that functional people know one another and can come together quickly and easily to solve problems or clear roadblocks.
- If the customer accepts your value proposition, you have to be sure that it is delivered on time and as described, and that it fulfills the promises you made.



by Ram Charan

CONTENTS

The Problem with Sales
Page 2

Fixing the Broken Sales Process
Page 3

The Value Account Plan
Page 4

Developing the Value Creation Sales Force
Page 5

The Building Blocks of Training
Page 6

Making the Sale
Page 7

Sustaining the Process
Page 8

THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: WHAT THE CUSTOMER WANTS YOU TO KNOW

by Ram Charan

The author: Ram Charan is a highly acclaimed business adviser, speaker, teacher and the author or co-author of many best-selling business books, including *What the CEO Wants You to Know* and *Execution*. For more than 35 years, he has worked behind the scenes at Fortune 100 companies like GE, Bank of America, DuPont, Thomson Financial, Honeywell and Verizon to help senior executives develop and implement strategic plans.

What the Customer Wants You to Know by Ram Charan. Copyright © 2007 by Ram Charan. Summarized by arrangement with Portfolio, a member of Penguin Group (USA). 178 pages. \$21.95. ISBN: 978-1-59184-165-4.

Summary copyright © 2009 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries, www.summary.com, 1-800-SUMMARY, 1-610-558-9495.

For additional information on the author, go to <http://www.summary.com>.

The Problem with Sales

The telephone rang. Charlie Baldwin knew he was about to get the news he had been waiting for since Monday. He had spent three months working on the sale, and if he got it he would make quota, get his bonus, and finally be able to take his wife Michelle on that trip to Europe he had promised her for years.

Charlie had no reason to doubt his good fortune. He was an experienced salesman for Sturgis Corporation, and had known Greg Lanterman, the customer's purchasing agent, for most of a decade. When they had met last Thursday for drinks, Greg did everything but promise Charlie the order — it was in the bag.

"Charlie, I did everything I could," explained Greg sheepishly, "and until about four days ago I was sure that my recommendation to give you the order was a shoo-in. But the CFO and the executive vice president of marketing intervened and decided that the sale should go to Progis Corporation. Your price was better, but the sales rep at Progis, Mark Logan, showed us how his approach would increase our cash flow and revenue growth. Mark also had some good ideas that our executive vice president of marketing said would help us to differentiate our brand. I'm really disappointed."

For the past 12 months Charlie has been on the receiving end of four similarly disappointing telephone calls. And these calls came from people he relied on the most — people like Greg, whom he had known and trusted the longest. He doubted himself in a way that he hadn't for a very long time. He knew he had just lost his quota, his bonus, and he would be forced to break his promise to Michelle about that long-overdue vacation.

What he didn't know was whether or not he would still have his job this time next year.

Turn Selling Around

The heart of the new approach to selling is an intense focus on the prosperity of your customers. This is a radical departure from what most salespeople and selling organizations do. The entire psychological orientation is shifted 180 degrees. No longer do you measure your own success first. Instead, you measure success by how well your customers are doing with your help.

You're not focused on selling a specific product or service; you're focused on how your company can help the customer succeed in all the ways that are important to that customer. By tapping the many resources you have at your disposal to help customers meet their business goals and priorities, you are adding value.

This new approach, value creation selling (VCS), is sweepingly different from how most companies sell today in these ways:

- First, you and your organization devote large amounts of time and energy — much more than you do today — to learning about your customers' businesses in great detail.
- Second, you use capabilities and tools that you've never used before to understand how your customers do business and how you can help them improve that business.
- Third, you're going to make it your business to know not only your customers but also your customers' customers. To devise unique offerings for your customer, your company must use its capabilities to work backward from the needs of the end



1-800-SUMMARY
service@summary.com

Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries (ISSN 0747-2196), P.O. Box 1053, Concordville, PA 19331 USA, a division of Concentrated Knowledge Corp. Published monthly. Subscriptions: \$209 per year in the United States, Canada and Mexico, and \$295 to all other countries. Periodicals postage paid at Concordville, Pa., and additional offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Soundview, P.O. Box 1053, Concordville, PA 19331. Copyright © 2009 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries.

Available formats: Summaries are available in print, audio and electronic formats. To subscribe, call us at 1-800-SUMMARY (610-558-9495 outside the United States and Canada), or order on the Internet at www.summary.com. Multiple-subscription discounts and corporate site licenses are also available.

Rebecca S. Clement, Publisher; Sarah T. Dayton, Editor in Chief; Andrew Clancy, Senior Editor; Edward O'Neill, Graphic Designer; Paula Ezop, Contributing Editor

Summary: WHAT THE CUSTOMER WANTS YOU TO KNOW

consumer to the needs of your customer. This is the *customer value chain*.

- Fourth, you have to recognize that the execution of this new approach will require much longer cycle times to produce an order and generate revenue.
- Finally, top management in your company will have to reengineer its recognition and reward system to make sure that the organization as a whole is fostering the behaviors that will make the new sales approach effective.

What the Sales Force Will Need to Know

Value creation selling entails profound changes in the sales force itself. Salespeople are no longer solo operators. Rather, they are team leaders, responsible for organizing and directing groups of experts from such diverse areas as finance, legal and manufacturing in their own organization. Your company's support functions will need to work in earnest with the sales leaders, synchronizing their priorities with the needs the sales leaders lay out.

This is a role salespeople are unaccustomed to and, at first, many will be uncertain about their leadership abilities. But most salespeople have good interpersonal skills. Many will excel in coordinating their colleagues' efforts and will enjoy doing it. ●

Fixing the Broken Sales Process

Remember how depressed Charlie became when he got the bad news about losing the sale to Mark Logan's company? Unfortunately for him, that was not his last telephone call of the day. He had to call Susan Kipp, the executive vice president of sales, to report that the business they had been counting on had fallen through. And Susan had to make that same phone call to Jack Garrett, the company's CEO.

The next morning's executive meeting was one of sober reflection. The leadership team agreed that Charlie's call was not an exception: the sales force as a whole seemed to be performing worse than the competition. The company was not getting the number of orders and the pricing it deserved for its cutting-edge technology and top-shelf customer service. Yet no one could explain why that was.

It occurred to Charlie that while they had streamlined and modernized other areas of the business in recent years, the selling process itself had remained untouched. Maybe it was time for some fresh thinking.

Is Your Sales Process Out of Date?

You know your sales process is out of date when these things are true:

What You're Leaving on the Table

Fixing the broken sales process requires knowing precisely what the customer values: why the customer will prefer you over rivals and why that customer will continue to rely on you and sustain a trusting organizational relationship with you.

Lou Eccleston, the former president of global sales, marketing and services at Thomson Financial and now CEO of Pivot Inc., argues that "making a sale is not the objective, it's just a symptom of a successful communication. It's a symptom that indicates you understand the customer and are measuring your success by your customer's success. Your success is governed by how well you understand what you can do to create value for the customer. If you can't impact the customer's performance in a positive way, then you're going to be a commodity product and you're going to get commodity prices."

- Your sales force interacts mostly with your customer's purchasing department.
- The entire discussion about a possible sale revolves around price.
- Sales training consists mostly of highly focused, exercise-based training that shows salespeople how to not take no for an answer, how to not knuckle under to pressure, and how to bring home the bacon without compromising on price.
- Top management is constantly fiddling with the incentive schemes for the sales force to toughen them to get better pricing and better margins.
- The sales force that seems spread too thin is reorganized to bring a more intense focus on customers.
- Salespeople are not included in the design of the company's offering.
- Little thought and even less interaction is given to your customers' customers.
- Your salespeople are internally focused.
- Sales management is convinced it's doing a good job. ●

How to Become Your Customer's Trusted Partner

The night following the depressing executive meeting, CEO Jack Garrett was having drinks with Philip Hayward, Sturgis Corporation's newest director. Not yet familiar with either the company or the industry, Phil

Summary: WHAT THE CUSTOMER WANTS YOU TO KNOW

had a lot to learn about the business and was prepared to pepper Jack with a whole host of questions as he tried to understand how Sturgis operates. One of his first questions was about revenue growth. Phil wanted to know why the company's top line wasn't improving.

"What's the competition doing differently to win share away from Sturgis?" Phil asked. "And what are we doing to counter that, besides trying to keep prices down?" Those two simple questions galvanized Jack to suddenly reframe his thinking.

"We have lots of talented people and great technology, but maybe we're not delivering what our customers really need," said Jack. "If that's the case, then we're going to have to learn a lot more about them — their goals and priorities, their competitive challenges. We can do that, but we'll have to create a dialogue with them and earn their trust."

As he drove home, Jack's mind was bubbling with all the things that would have to change — roles, responsibilities, rewards, relationships. The plan he was conceiving would have salespeople take the lead in gathering information about what was really important to a customer's business. They would enlist the help of their colleagues at Sturgis to brainstorm ideas to create value for the customer.

Information: The Heart of VCS

Information — lots of detailed information, both facts and impressions — is at the heart of value creation selling. The concept is simple: The more you know about your customer, the better you and your company will be at identifying his or her concerns and devising products and services that will help address them. In the broadest sense you want to learn about your customer's opportunities and the competitive dynamics confronting his company. The key here is to analyze the customer's market growth and positioning.

How to Communicate with the Customer

While you're searching for answers to your growing lists of questions about the customer, you also need to begin establishing a way for your company and your customer to communicate. You need to establish multiple contacts between your company and your customer so that functional people know one another and can come together quickly and easily to solve problems or clear roadblocks.

Finally, you must always remember your responsibility to protect the knowledge a customer-partner is sharing with you. Information flow is the key to trust. Don't abuse it. ●

The Value Account Plan

Several months into the change effort, Charlie, who had lost that all-important sale to Progis Corporation, had another chance with another large client, TriNet Inc. Charlie was the team leader on the project. He was in the midst of preparing the guts of the presentation, which was slated for a week from Wednesday. But as he got deeper into it, he realized that he was missing some vital pieces of information.

For example, while he had a good deal of data on the company's industry, its competitive dynamics and its sales growth pattern, he realized that he did not really know which manager in TriNet would make the final buying decision.

In addition, while Charlie felt that he had a pretty good idea about what the final offering would look like, he realized that he had no idea what to charge for it.

He now saw that he had a long way to go before he and the team would be ready to present anything, and he had scheduled a run-through for Friday. He also realized he wasn't in it alone. He had lots of people in the company he could call on to plug the holes, many of whom had been talking regularly with people at the customer's shop. His nerves calmed as he picked up the phone to assemble the team for some last minute analysis and clarification.

The last thing a salesperson needs is more paperwork. But here's a document no company should be without: a *value account plan* (VAP). A VAP is the document that defines the value proposition and the business benefits the customer can expect to get from it.

Every VAP should include three elements: a concise description or snapshot of the customer, a value proposition and the benefits the value proposition gives to the customer expressed in physical terms, such as "*improving cycle time by X minutes*" or "*cutting inventories by X dollars*" — and in business terms, such as cost, revenue, profit margin, cash, ROI, market share and brand equity.

Customer Snapshot: VAP Element #1

The first of three major components of a VAP is a concise description of the customer. You should begin by recording the basics: the company's name, line or lines of business, information about the location of headquarters and subsidiaries, and names of senior executives.

The salesperson takes the lead by enlisting the help of colleagues to sift out the important facts to create a clear, concise picture of the customer's total business.

You can capture this snapshot as a set of bullet

Summary: WHAT THE CUSTOMER WANTS YOU TO KNOW

points or paragraphs — whatever form works best for you — keeping in mind that businesses are in constant flux. You will have to keep this updated by watching for changes in people, relationships and organizational structure at the purchasing level and throughout the organization.

The Value Proposition: VAP Element #2

The second part of the VAP is the value proposition. Here you define the customer need you will meet, the mix of offerings customized to that customer, its pricing, and its implications for your own company's revenues, cost, cash, capital investment and profitability. Creating a value proposition may seem like familiar ground. What's different here is that the VAP forces you to think about your customer's total business and to tap the best thinking of people from many parts of your company to come up with a value proposition that provides benefits to the customer beyond the usual cost savings.

One of the greatest hurdles for salespeople new to value creation selling is reaching people other than their traditional contacts in purchasing and getting their attention right away. It is often a matter of brainstorming who at your company might have a social or professional connection with someone in the customer's business and being aggressive in connecting with that person. You increase the odds when you network with multiple functions and hierarchical levels at your company.

As salespeople and their colleagues find ways to engage in frequent dialogue with the customer, they can use those contacts to create a value proposition that addresses needs and priorities beyond the purchasing department.

Formulating a successful solution for a customer requires involvement of more than one silo. People have to share and debate, particularly horizontally, what is available or possible, and then commit to it. If you are just bundling together existing products you probably won't produce a real value-creating solution.

For the value proposition to be unique, the sales leader has to demand that his or her team figure out how to integrate the package in a customized way that creates value and differentiates the solution from what the competition can offer.

The Business Benefits: VAP Element #3

The third part of the VAP defines the benefits of the value proposition. This part is built to determine the total value of ownership (TVO). TVO is an estimate of the benefits the customer stands to gain as well as what might be lost if he or she chooses to go another way.

You must first state the physical benefits of your value proposition, then you define and quantify all the business benefits of the solution. Some will be quantitative. Other benefits, like brand enhancement, will be qualitative but have real value to customers. You have to think through the benefits of your value proposition and be comfortable making judgments about them.

MeadWestvaco used its research to demonstrate that it understood their customer's business problem — lost revenue from damaged packages — and then solved it. It created a package using a specific kind of paperboard called Coated Natural Kraft,[®] which could take on high-impact graphics and still had the structural integrity to prevent package damage.

They had to get the customer to look beyond the unit price of its product by presenting the panoply of business benefits, which included increased revenues, improved cash flow by reducing inventories for the retailer, reduced unsaleables and returns, protected market position and sales level, protected brand equity and sustained consumer loyalty. MeadWestvaco won the sale and, ultimately more important, the customer's trust and respect. ●

Developing the Value Creation Sales Force

Three months after an off-site meeting, Rob Morris, the western district regional manager for Sturgis, ran into Jack Garrett, the CEO, in the company cafeteria. Jack invited Rob to join him for lunch. "So how are things going?" Jack asked enthusiastically.

Rob knew how important the initiative was to Jack and to the company. He avoided eye contact when he replied that the transformation wasn't going all that well. "My reps are having a hard time pulling together all of the information we talked about at the off-site. One of their biggest complaints is that they can't reach the people they need to reach in the customer's shop. Their primary contacts are fighting them tooth and nail, trying to keep control of the buying process.

"To be honest, Jack," Rob said, "some of our reps don't like working as part of a team. They're not accustomed to reaching out to other departments, and they don't like sharing everything with people in other parts of the company.

"But most of them are coming around," Rob continued, "in part because they're realizing they can't complete a VAP without help. Getting past the physical product and translating the benefits into something

Summary: WHAT THE CUSTOMER WANTS YOU TO KNOW

beyond cost reduction is a challenge.”

Make no mistake about it, a concerted effort to create a value creation sales force simply cannot succeed without two critical elements: buy-in and extensive training. An individual salesperson who “gets it” can make headway by personally reshaping relationships with customers and throughout his or her own organization. But senior leaders who want to adopt value creation selling companywide should approach it at a deliberate pace and realize that it is not an overnight process.

The Right Stuff

Value creation selling does indeed require a new breed of salesperson, and you should take the time to clarify what traits and skills the new breed should have. While no one person will embody all of them, anyone in the role of sales team leader should exhibit at least some of the fundamentals.

The following list of skills and traits may help you develop your own methods for determining people’s suitability, strengths and weaknesses:

1. **Affability.** The salesperson must be a great communicator who listens and distills what he or she hears and can jointly explore the issues.
2. **Ability to Conceptualize Problems and Solutions.** This is the ability to sift through large amounts of seemingly unrelated data to generate alternative ideas about offerings that work for both the customer and the seller.
3. **Leadership.** Not to be confused with personal charisma or heroic efforts, the kind of leadership the salesperson needs to demonstrate is the ability to manage a team of people over whom he or she has little or no hierarchical authority.
4. **Tenacity.** The type and depth of customer information necessary for VCS is not easy to obtain. Salespeople must have the patience and tenacity to keep driving the team and the process.
5. **Business Acumen.** The most difficult aspect of VCS is understanding the customer’s business and its processes, all expressed in the language of business.

The Building Blocks of Training

Ideally, training the sales force will start at the top, beginning with the executive vice president of sales or whoever has the equivalent title. He or she must demonstrate the ability to extract information, complete a VAP and formulate a solution. After that, training proceeds down to the level of regional sales managers, who have to gain expertise as well.

Training for VCS must make salespeople aware of the new skills they need and help them practice those skills. PowerPoint presentations, the basis of most training today, is not sufficient. VCS is such a major change for experienced salespeople, who have been conditioned to think and act in certain ways, that it takes tremendous rigor to rearrange the synapses in the brain.

Case studies and intense practice are more effective. Discussing real cases, sharing insights from them and role playing go further in helping people change their thinking. Class study should be 80 percent real practice and 20 percent content delivery.

What to Teach

The content for teaching value creation selling will evolve over time as instructors learn which techniques, examples and exercises are most effective and as the abilities of the participants develop. Over time, as VAPs are formulated and presented to customers, there will be a pipeline of real-life examples that have not yet been accepted by the customer. They should form an important part of classroom exercises. In any case, everyone should come away from the training course with the following knowledge and skills:

1. What information they need from the customer, and how to get it, to create a VAP.
2. How to prepare a VAP from seemingly unconnected information from the customer and others.
3. How to collaborate with and foster collaboration among various people in your own company.
4. The language of business.
5. The ability to foster an atmosphere of trust between the customer and the seller’s own company.
6. The concept of TVO.

Learning VCS requires repetitive practice with hands-on exercises in which the data is incomplete, messy and sometimes confusing — just like the real world. As part of a cross-functional team, participants can instruct one another in their various specialties, creating bonds that will be useful later when a sales team has to work together. Through practice they also get more comfortable dealing with ambiguity and doing multiple iterations of the customer information and value proposition.

If you’ve trained the right salespeople and chosen the right customers to start with, you will likely have some early successes. It’s important to let people know about them. Success begets success by raising morale and persuading skeptics that the new approach really will work. And, of course, it’s always beneficial to see success rewarded by promotions, pay and other forms of recognition.

Summary: WHAT THE CUSTOMER WANTS YOU TO KNOW

Measuring Progress

You have to realize that implementing value creation selling is a lengthy, arduous, and expensive undertaking with obstacles along the way. Reorienting the sales force is likely to be the first and biggest obstacle. A conscientious effort to foresee problems and correct them before they spin out of control will ease the path considerably.

What follows are some suggested mechanisms for tracking the progress and success of a VCS strategy:

- **Share of the customer's wallet.** Increased revenue is a key statistic but so is improved margin, which will show whether you are able to get premium pricing.
- **Customer benefits.** This is a clear delineation in specific terms, for each account, of how the customer realizes the benefits promised.
- **Customer trust.** This survey, done in the customer's shop, measures on a scale of 1 to 10 the degree of trust the customer's executives have for the sales leader and the team serving the account.
- **Customer-initiated contact.** This measures how frequently the customer initiates a request to the sales leader and team for advice about existing or future opportunities.
- **Internal collaboration.** This survey of sales leaders seeks their evaluation on a scale of 1 to 10 of how various functional silos are collaborating for a given customer.
- **Sales force certification.** This is a simple measure of what percentage of the sales force has received the required training and been certified.
- **Idea generation.** This survey of various functional areas seeks to measure the number of ideas fed to the functions by the sales team for future development (for example, product development, service development, changes in pricing approach, productivity improvements or technology development).
- **Customer perception.** This survey asks the customer to evaluate on a scale of 1 to 10 how well the sales team really understands the customer's business, including the decision process and priorities. ●

Making the Sale

After a sales team has used the VAP to craft what they believe to be the best response to a customer's needs and priorities, it's time to make the sales pitch. But *presenting a value creation proposition* to the customer is nothing like the typical sales call that most salespeople are used to.

In value creation selling much more work goes into preparation, in part because the sales call now involves a team of people whose presentations and responses to customer questions must be planned and coordinated. And because the sales call incorporates more background information and analysis, the value creation proposition itself is more complex than a simple "Here's my product, what price will you pay?" presentation.

While the call must concisely convey the fact that you understand the customer's business and have a specific offering that provides a broad range of benefits, you have to allow that you might have missed something. The call is, above all, an opportunity for further questioning and observation of the customer's organization.

The Pitch: The Dynamics of Dialogue

The big day finally arrives. Dress rehearsals are over. This is the real thing. The formal presentation to the customer is perhaps the most important milestone in the entire development of the value creation proposition. It tests how good a job the sales leader has done in collecting the information that went into the VAP, how effectively the team has worked together to craft the proposition, and how astute the sales leader has been in making the right trade offs among the various interests within his or her own company and the customer's.

The point is to establish that your company has the necessary expertise and deep interest in solving the customer's problems or helping him or her seize an opportunity. It is important to understand, however, that the formal presentation is not necessarily the day of reckoning. While you may leave the meeting with an agreement, it is just as likely that you will leave without one.

It's your choice how to present the value proposition, but don't assume it has to be a flashy PowerPoint presentation. Paper often works better. Given sufficient practice, the actual presentation of the value creation proposition should go smoothly. The real work begins when the formal presentation ends.

The key lesson is to listen, don't tell. A list of every objection raised during the presentation provides the framework for follow-up work that keeps your team in close contact with the customer.

Unspoken Questions

Although the customer may not articulate his or her deepest concerns, underlying the entire dialogue, three critical questions will be very much on the customer's mind:

1. Is the value proposition realistic?
2. Are the proposed benefits exaggerated or realistic?

Summary: WHAT THE CUSTOMER WANTS YOU TO KNOW

3. Can the value proposition be executed in the customer's shop?

After the Pitch

In value creation selling the sales pitch is just another beginning, whether or not it succeeds. If the customer accepts your value proposition, perhaps with some modification, you have to be sure that it is not only delivered on time and as described, but that it fulfills the promises you made.

Chances are, however, that you'll leave the pitch meeting with a new list of objections, suggestions and impressions.

The first thing to do is let the customer know you heard his or her objections and suggestions. This communication should also set a specific date and time to meet again. In following up with the customer, you can change the scope of the value proposition, narrowing or expanding it as appropriate and resetting the customer's expectations.

But not all sales pitches will end in success. If, at the second or third sales meetings, the customer is raising new objections or finding excuses for not reaching a final agreement, the sales team should begin to question the customer's sincerity. The unfortunate truth is that some customers are not worth keeping. ●

Sustaining the Process

Unless top management makes value creation selling its top priority, the process will simply become another fad of the day. Top management must integrate the value creation selling initiative into virtually all management decisions: the selection and promotion of people, the choice of businesses, the targeting of market segments and customers, resource allocation, operating reviews and budget preparation. Senior management must have the energy and tenacity to drive the change.

Build Organizational Support

Value creation selling is team selling. The sales force cannot do its job unless the rest of the organization provides the quality, skill mix and responsiveness to support their efforts. Senior leaders must create linkages between the various functions of the business.

Each silo within the organization must reconsider its role with an eye toward identifying and eliminating bottlenecks to the formulation and delivery of a value proposition.

Focus on Both Revenue and Cost

Cost reduction is familiar ground, but it ultimately impinges on growth. Value creation selling is aimed at revenues, but you must be willing to spend some money to achieve that growth. Before trying to adopt it, you should analyze your businesses and markets to determine where the investment makes most sense. That will minimize the risk and boost your revenue productivity. ●

Taking Value Creation Selling to the Next Level

Transforming a sales force from transactional selling to one that creates value for the customer is a long journey. It requires a huge change in the way a company thinks and operates. Every part of the company has to put the customer first. As you set off on your journey, you'll no doubt encounter obstacles along the way:

- Senior management will be challenged to find the right compensation system to properly reward such sales support functions as legal, finance, product development and human resources.
- Sales leaders will have to find ways to develop relationships with people other than the gatekeepers in the customer's shop.
- Your company will have to pinpoint the customers who are willing to develop a trusting relationship and find alternative ways to serve other customers.
- You will have to create and sustain an environment that encourages creativity and imagination in formulating value propositions.

The good news is that the journey is difficult and requires persistence and tenacity. That's good news because it means not everyone can or will make that journey, and those who do will be amply rewarded. Every company will have customers who are progressive and fully understand the value of collaborating with suppliers to the mutual benefit of both. Start there and don't turn back. It is the path to a prosperous future. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *What the Customer Wants You to Know*, you'll also like:

1. **Exceptional Selling** by Jeff Thull. Learn powerful diagnostic principles to reframe the typical sales conversation.
2. **The Perfect Salesforce** by Derek Gatehouse. This title discusses different types of people who excel naturally in different types of sales jobs.
3. **Execution** by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan. The authors give a five-step process for getting successful results. Leaders must get involved in the details of execution if they want to get the job done.