

**Sales Enablement: A Strategic Solution to a Complex Problem**

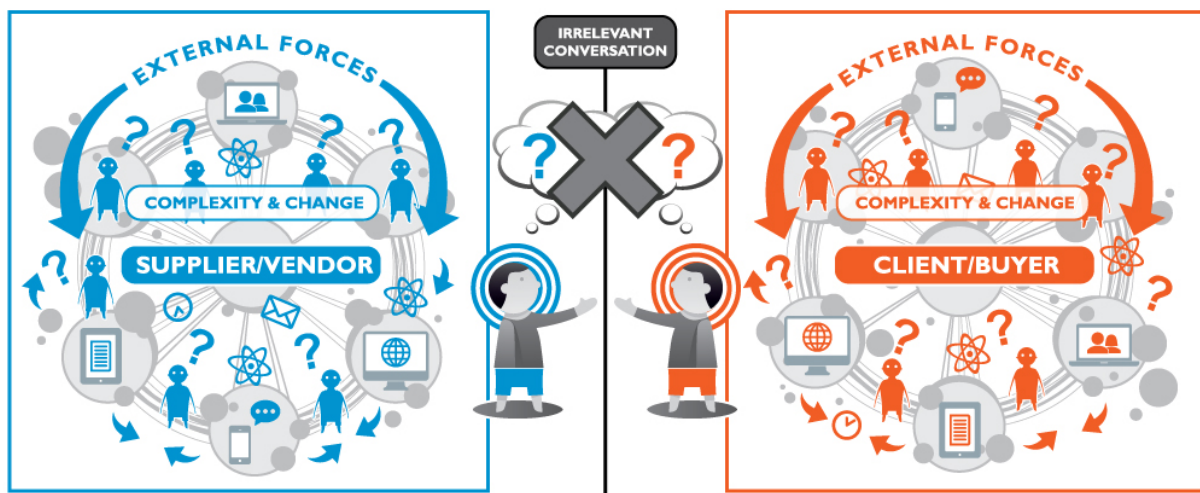
Improving sales conversations with a strategic value communication approach

Ten years ago, the adage that summed up corporate strategy was simple—grow or face extinction. Today, that challenge is even more difficult—grow while cutting costs or face extinction. While this may seem dramatic, the do-more-with-less era is a reality leaders must face.

While it seems cliché to say change is the new normal, the fact is that changes outside and inside your company can impede your progress. These forces of change and complexity might create barriers to productivity; however, that’s not the only challenge your CEO needs you to help overcome.

At the same time your people are trying to improve results, people within your customers’ organizations are also being bombarded with change. This creates a barrier to your success. Why? Because forces within your organization and the buyers’ come together in one of the most critical and overlooked areas in your company’s value communication process—the sales conversation.

FIGURE 1 - Change and Complexity Can Lead to Irrelevant Sales Conversations



**A bad system will beat a good person every time  
- W. Edwards Deming**



Changes on both sides of the sales conversation are causing executives to think more strategically about the challenges of driving profitable growth. What worked in the past will not work now or in the future. While many might want to lay lackluster performance at the feet of salespeople, the truth is that, while improving sales skills may be critically important, the system around those salespeople is equally, if not more, important.

For example, those who sell to executives need a message that resonates with those executives—one that's tailored to the buyer's role. Salespeople also need content that helps them reach out to other decision makers, not content that merely reinforces product features and helps them gain access to the procurement department. And, they need help from managers to learn and adapt their approach, not just tips and tricks for meeting monthly sales reporting requirements.

### **A strategic solution for meeting evolving needs.**

Overcoming the barriers to relevant sales conversations requires a strategic approach that supports salespeople with the right content, skills, and tools they need to appeal to the right buyers. As a learning leader, you can help:

- **Implement a forward-looking human capital strategy.** Clarify future-state requirements by using sales conversations as the design point. Start by analyzing where the organization is going and helping leaders understand the roles of people in getting there.
- **Create a set of standards for each key role.** Once roles are clarified, help leaders create the "spec" for each role. Use input from the field and reach out to buyers to determine what they need from salespeople.
- **On-board new people that meet defined criteria.** Once roles are defined, build a solid on-boarding program to help customer-facing, revenue-generating employees understand the problems your company can solve for buyers. Help them achieve desired proficiency and put them on the path to achieving your defined future state.
- **Develop current employees to achieve those standards.** Explore the gap between the current state and future state in each of your customer-facing employees. Identify the behavior shifts that need to happen in these roles, and work with your peers to align the content, skills, and tools necessary to change that behavior.
- **Create and manage a reinforcement strategy.** Work with front-line managers to anchor new behaviors and move employees toward the future state.

With a strategic and dynamic sales enablement solution in place, your customer-facing, revenue-generating employees will have the agility and tools they need—and your organization will have the sales teams it needs—to remain competitive.



## **SALE CONVERSATIONS: AN IMPORTANT MEDIUM FOR COMMUNICATING VALUE**

In recent years, sales conversations have become increasingly challenging. While economic factors share part of the blame, other factors often obstruct relevant sales conversations, including the following:

- New products or solutions require the sales team to engage executives and their teams, all of whom have different views about the problem that needs to be solved.
- Right sizing or downsizing the sales team creates gaps in sales coverage, resulting in complex teaming environments and conflicting roles.
- Buyer expectations continue to evolve alongside the alternatives available to them, creating more sophisticated definitions of what is valuable to buyers.
- The message salespeople need to deliver often changes depending on which buyer they are talking to and where they are in their decision-making process.
- The sheer volume of internal initiatives designed for sales has increased dramatically in recent years.
- Overlapping and conflicting territories, product groups, solution-sets and more create confusion and often dis-incent sales teams.

### **About the Author:**

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Brian has been a leader in the sales enablement field for more than 10 years, with a concentration on the human aspect of sales enablement disciplines and practices. He was hired by GP Strategies in January 2013 to spearhead Sales Enablement and provide thought leadership to clients. Prior to joining GP Strategies, Brian served as a Senior Analyst for Forrester Research, a world-renowned research organization where he was a sales enablement human capital thought leader to fortune 500 executives. For the preceding 4 years, Brian spearheaded the sales learning and development practice at the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), the leading international organization of learning development professionals, where he developed content, tools, and training programs for sales learning professionals and trainers. He has a PhD in organization and management.