

## Sharpening our teams on the business frontline.

As we prepare our budgets for next year, we will take a good look at the opportunities that we can seize to make our business grow: Opportunities such as new products, or a great time slot to launch a daring action. It will seem natural of course to seize these opportunities and sketch out the plan to do so. But while planning actions in product development, marketing, and customer satisfaction is important, it is not decisive.

There is another type of opportunities that lies more on a tactical level. These opportunities come across our businesses every day. Seizing just one of those opportunities changes very little at the bottom line, but at the same time missing them all would mean going out of business. These opportunities are each and every one of our customers. And each one of these opportunities can be transformed into revenue immediately through a sale, or revenue for the future through treating the customer right.

To seize the strategic opportunities, it will be important to seize the tactical ones. **That will happen on the business “frontline”.**

Salespeople, but also many others, face customers every day on the frontline. What happens on that line is decisive. It is on the frontline that customers will be greeted on the phone or physically, it is on the frontline that customers will be convinced to purchase products or services, it is on that line that customers will pay, and it is on that line that customers will come to be cared for.

Salespeople are the most famous and most trained of the frontline warriors. But they are not fighting alone. A telephone operator is on the frontline, a technician can be on the frontline, a trainee or brigadnik can be on the frontline. In fact anyone in contact with a customer is on the frontline. Some are on the frontline all day, some only a few minutes.

Frontline warriors are involved in offensive as well as defensive actions. Traditionally, salespeople are seen as engaging in offensives, while the rest of the staff is engaged in defensive actions such as securing the company's image as well the satisfaction of its customers. But this view has flaws.

Salespeople might be the ones filling order forms, but others might bring up to them interesting opportunities. There are plenty of examples: A routine car check by a technician is the opportunity to talk highly about the new model that just came out, or a telephone operator does not simply answer “no” when a customer calls on the availability of a specific product, or a simple trainee is capable of keeping a customer interested while waiting for one salesperson to be available. Everyone should be on the offensive.

As for defensive maneuvers, they should also involve salespeople. The line between after-sales and sales is thin! A customer with a problem should not be ignored by a salesperson and sent away to the service counter. And it is not because salespeople are not responsible for answering the phone that the phone should be poorly answered when the operator has to take a break.



On the frontline, customers see all warriors as equally committed to providing them service and advice. And although frontline warriors all have their specialties and specific missions, this is something that all companies must consider: organizing their frontline and training their frontline warriors.

When we think about the above, we see costs, and so we decide to think again. The reaction to put off such changes is understandable, and moreover when the competitors faced are not extremely high performers. But it is time to get started, because the investments are in fact under control and the results very rewarding.

There are solutions for all types of businesses: information tools that can argue about new products to all frontline warriors in just minutes, online trainings available to all new employees the next day of their arrival, quality sales skills and customer communication exercises led by a professional trainer.

But above all, the key success factor revolves around management and implicating our warriors. So many of them see the frontline as a place to suffer when in fact, it is a place where you can achieve yourself given that you feel it is worth it. Getting them to understand that is already taking a giant leap into making the most of customer opportunities.

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