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Sales Skills Every Rep Can Learn to Become a Top Performer

The sales skills every rep needs in each step of the sales cycle

Introduction

You've likely heard the outdated (yet still very prevalent) adage that great sellers are born, not made. A person either innately has what it takes for sales success – or they don't. Those who do are the ones that drive the bulk of revenue growth, while the others remain mediocre sellers at best.

But this is a myth.

Rather, sales leaders can create an entire team of all-star sellers – and more effectively predict revenue.

Sales orgs must determine the formula for a great seller – and leverage that formula to create an entire team of reps ready to meet quota. It starts with identifying the skills reps need for success at each stage of the purchase journey – and then providing the training and coaching needed for mastery.

But what exactly are these must-have skills?

The reality is, the skills necessary for success depend on a number of factors including role, organization, and industry, among others. However, there are certain skills that all reps must learn to positively impact their ability to close deals.

In this guide, we'll explore the key skills reps need at each stage of the sales cycle.

Key Stages of the Sales Cycle

1. Pre-qualification call

Reps are pressed for time and can't afford to spend time with unqualified prospects who will never convert. Instead, they must be able to find and quickly identify if a prospect is a good fit for their solutions.

According to Crunchbase, top sellers spend an average of six hours each week researching their prospects to ensure they're focusing on those that fit their ideal customer profile (ICP).

Strong prospecting skills are essential. Make sure your reps know your ICPs inside and out and know what to look for to determine if a prospect is the right fit. Reps must also be skilled at developing messages that engage those qualified prospects. These skills help ensure a rep can fill their pipeline with qualified prospects and prioritize those that are most likely to buy.

Let's take a closer look at the competencies reps must master to ace the pre-qualification step of the sales process.

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Pre-qualification competencies to master

Industry knowledge	Thorough knowledge of the ins and outs of the industry
Product knowledge	Understanding all of the relevant personas, pain points, and use cases for your products A strong understanding of available customer case studies and success stories
Social media engagement	This includes keeping social profiles up to date and proactively engaging through these channels to identify prospects
Networking	The ability to network organically and through deliberate affiliation with peer groups
Using relevant buyer and account intelligence tools	LinkedIn Navigator, ZoomInfo, Databook and others can help reps identify insights that can be used for personalized outreach
Written communication	Writing and sending personalized emails that convert into meetings
Oral communication	Being able to make and convert a cold call that builds rapport with prospects
CRM	Ability to maintain and update the CRM throughout the pre-qualification process
Meeting preparation	Scheduling meetings Understanding how to personalize the discovery call

2. Discovery call

Once a rep has identified good-fit prospects, they must work to gain a solid understanding of their unique needs, opportunities, and challenges. If they don't, the deal is doomed right out of the gate. After all, LinkedIn found that 43% of buyers feel it's an "immediate deal killer" when sellers don't understand their company and its needs.

Reps must have strong discovery skills to understand each prospect's unique needs. Only then can they offer solutions to address those key challenges. Here's a closer look at those key discovery competencies.

43%

of buyers feel it's an "immediate deal killer" when sellers don't understand their company and its needs.

Discovery competencies to master

Consultative mindset	Ability to not only ask questions but also provide consultative value and viewpoint
Knowledge of qualification questions and qualification sales methodology	This might include MEDPIC, BANT, or another
Probing	Engaging customers with 5-7 powerful, open-ended questions to get to the true root of a pain point or challenge
Active listening	Listening attentively, understanding, and responding appropriately
Product knowledge	Ability to answer frequently asked questions Ability to combat objections about product
Competitive knowledge	Knowing 1-2 differentiators for each competitor that may come up
Pivoting	Staying aligned with the buyer, wherever they take the conversion
Relationship building	Ability to establish an authentic, trust-based relationship with the champion early on to ensure the process becomes a partnership
Expanding sphere of influence	Ability to get an understanding of who is involved in the buying cycle without coming across as pushy or rude
CRM	Tracking calls, emails, and meeting notes in Salesforce, and advancing to the next stage of the sales cycle
Content availability and how to use it	Understanding what content to send to educate each customer and why to do this now

3. Evaluation

Reciting a list of product features isn't enough to engage a prospect and convince them to move forward. Rather, reps must be able to effectively convey the value their solution delivers for that specific buyer.

Yet, 44% of buyers say that sellers not understanding their own product or service is a deal killer.

Reps need to be able to provide demos and facilitate conversations that illustrate how their solutions will save buyers time, money, or effort. Here are the skills reps need to master to be successful during the evaluation process of the sales cycle.

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Evaluation competencies to master

Preparing and leading a successful demo	Winning demos are highly personalized and differentiated Collaborating with sales engineers as needed
Multithreading	Building conversations and relationships with multiple individuals on both the seller and buyer side
Product knowledge	How to educate prospects on professional services and best practices
Content use	Knowing which content to send to educate customers on why a solution is the best fit and how they can leverage it
RFP management	Knowing how to respond to and win an RFP How to create a meaningful, differentiated proposal
Competitive knowledge	Knowing 1-2 differentiators for each competitor that may come up
Business case creation	How to make a business case and determine ROI
Cross-functional resource collaboration	Understanding who in the organization to pull into conversations and when
Follow up	Knowing when and how to reach out to the prospect to encourage them to take the next action

4. Negotiation

A rep has delivered their pitch and the buyer is interested. But that doesn't mean the deal is in the bag.

Sellers must master certain negotiation skills to keep deals moving forward and overcome objections and blockers that stand in the way of a closed deal.

Top sales performers are 9.3X more likely to receive "extremely effective negotiation training" than the rest of sellers.

Negotiation competencies to master

Strategic, creative thinking	Understanding how to get creative with terms and deals to get a foot in the door
Negotiation	Understanding the process of “give to get”
Collaboration with procurement	Identifying legal or financial blockers
Quote creation	Developing customer quotes
Objection handling	Handling any pricing or negotiation objections Answering frequently asked questions
Use of customer referrals	Understanding the process for connecting prospects with customer referrals

5. Purchase

The deal is getting closer to the finish line – but it's not there quite yet.

The goal at this stage of the process is for the buyer to sign the contract and get started. Reps must have the skills to guide these final conversations – and address any last minute questions and concerns.

Companies with dedicated sales enablement programs are more likely to meet their sales quotas than those that don't.

Key purchase stage competencies to master

Order form creation	Creating and finalizing an order form
Cross functional collaboration	How to bring in the right people at the right time
Follow through	Staying engaged, even after the deal has been signed Handing off the account to Customer Success Preparing for a successful kick-off
CRM	Filling out relevant information in the CRM and marking the deal closed won Setting up an account for up-sell/cross-sell and the process to facilitate that
Written communication	Sending out a WinWire to the team

Ongoing measurement is key to skill improvement at every stage of the deal

Of course, it's not possible to simply clone your best reps. However, winning organizations do the next best thing: determining what makes top reps great – and then delivering training, coaching, and content to duplicate these skills across the entire sales team.

But it's not enough to deliver training and coaching and hope for the best. Rather, ongoing measurement is essential to ensure your efforts are actually driving change and equipping reps with the skills they need to close the deal at hand – and all that follow.

The best sales orgs create an ideal rep profile (IRP) to document the skills needed for success. Each rep is measured against this standard to identify gaps. Then, personalized training, reinforcement, and coaching can be delivered to close gaps – and create an entire team of winning reps.

Build a team of quota-crushing reps.

Mindtickle, the #1 sales readiness platform, empowers sales enablement and revenue leaders to take a data-driven approach to developing the skill sets of their sellers, helping more of them attain quota.

The Mindtickle Sales Readiness Platform offers industry-leading sales enablement, content management, conversation intelligence, and coaching tools – all in one place.

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