



Executive Summary



Welcome to the executive overview to *Sharpening Your Competitive Edge: How to Strengthen Your Distribution Sales Team for Top Results*. This summary is meant to help you better understand the focus and goal of this book. The following members of your distribution sales organization may find it useful:

- For **distribution sales executives** who want to lead their sales team to increased selling effectiveness and success: This overview will provide you with an understanding of this book's overall direction and a quick reference guide to help you find the specific chapter you want to review.
- For **senior executives or owners** who want to understand what their sales executive is working to accomplish in driving this selling process improvement initiative within your company: This overview is meant to give you a quick understanding of this book's direction and goals so you can better support your sales team as team members work to understand and apply these ideas.
- For **sales managers and reps** who want to understand the direction and goals of this selling process improvement initiative: This overview can help you understand how and why the issues being discussed within your sales team evolved; you might find special interest in the final chapters in this book, which talk specifically to the sales manager, the experienced sales professional, and the new salesperson.

The two goals of this book are (1) to provide you with the best questions and tests to help you understand and evaluate your current distribution sales organization and (2) to show you a low-risk path to bring change and improvement to your sales team.

Part 1. Preparing to Use the Seven Questions to Increase Your Team's Selling Success

In Part 1, you will identify the biases that affect your organization's leadership, review quality improvement philosophies, and learn how to use the seven questions to lead your sales team to success.

Chapter 1. Introduction: Identifying the Biases in Your Distributor Sales Organization

You and your sales leadership team need to be balanced in your approach to running your distributorship. Sales leaders may have any of four major biases (business bias, sales management bias, selling skills bias, and value and uniqueness bias). They need to identify these biases and work to lessen the impact of any strong biases on your team's selling success.

To be successful, your sales professionals need to master three levels of distribution selling skills: operational (foundation selling skills), tactical (selling structures and processes), and strategic (philosophy, positioning, and branding). Although your sales professionals need all three skill sets to have long-term selling success, only their tactical and strategic selling skills can actually increase your competitive selling advantage.

Chapter 2. Quality Improvement Programs and Your Sales Team

Quality programs such as ISO 9000 and Six Sigma have had a significant impact on the production and administrative sides of businesses. When their philosophies are applied to your sales team, these quality programs can significantly improve your sales team's selling and sales leadership skills, multistep selling processes, and competitive positioning and awareness.

A distribution sales manager can provide two types of sales coaching and leadership to his or her sales team: transactional and selling process coaching. The goal of applying quality processes to your sales team and sales leadership is to ensure that your sales managers focus more on selling process sales coaching to help your salespeople better understand how to approach, position, and communicate your company's value and uniqueness and control their multistep selling processes.

Chapter 3. Eleven Suggestions to Help You Maximize the Impact of the Seven Questions

Eleven suggestions are offered to help you get the best answers to the seven questions and maximize your implementation of the selling ideas covered in this book.

Part 2: Using the Seven Questions to Sharpen Your Competitive Edge by Strengthening Your Sales Team

In Part 2, you will explore the answers to the seven questions, and in the process you will identify the gaps in your sales team's strategic selling skills and processes and learn how to provide effective leadership for your entire sales organization.

Chapter 4. Question 1: Does Everyone Know Who Your Best Customers Are?

Having all members of your distribution organization understand and agree on a single set of attributes of your best or proactive customers will have several significant benefits for your company's uniqueness and profitability. Market segmentation evolved from generalists to specialists and then to microspecialists, and currently the most value is in being an individual specialist.

Chapter 5. Question 2: How Many Messages Are You Taking to Your Markets?

Each member of your sales team may be communicating a different and less than fully effective message of uniqueness and value to your customers. You can ensure that your sales reps take a more strategic

approach to selling by working with your team to develop and apply a single selling message to communicate your overall philosophy of value and uniqueness. Strengthening your current selling messaging will improve your team members' ability to communicate a stronger message of value and uniqueness so they can increase your customer's perceptions of your value and ability to help them.

Chapter 6. Question 3: How Many “Hellarewe Birds” Are on Your Sales Team?

How proactive and future focused are the members of your sales team in their sales planning and selling efforts? Asking how many “hellarewe birds” you have on your sales staff will help you find out. Ever heard of the hellarewe bird? A hellarewe bird is a three-foot bird who lives in four-foot grass and spends its entire life asking, “Where the hell are we?” Hellarewe birds in selling lack the vision and the planning to increase their competitive advantage by thinking more moves ahead than their customers or competitors. The majority of sales professionals and sales managers are still thinking, planning, and selling only one move ahead at a time. You can help your sales force be more future focused by showing them how to think and plan multiple moves ahead in their selling efforts.

Chapter 7. Question 4: Are You Functioning as a Family or a Bunch of Distribution Orphans?

How much coaching help and guidance are your salespeople receiving from your sales managers? Most sales managers are so overworked that they tend to get involved only in transactional coaching and do little or no ongoing or long-term selling process coaching with their team. Because of this lack of sales coaching, sales teams are not functioning as a single coached family but instead are selling orphans left to lead themselves without any coaching help or guidance. Increasing the amount and strategic focus of the coaching your sales reps receive will help them better communicate your company's value and uniqueness.

Chapter 8. Question 5: Are You Leading a Distribution SWAT Team or a Crew of Mountain Men and Women?

How much active sales leadership is your sales team currently receiving? Most distribution organizations treat their salespeople as independent mountain men and women, hired to keep your fort in the wilderness (your company) fed. But if they are doing their own thing their own way, you have no idea what any of them are doing, how they could get better at what they are doing, or when the next one will emerge from the woods dragging more food for the fort. Your goal instead is to lead your team so its members function as a single SWAT team, learning from each other's mistakes and successes to improve the results of the entire team.

Chapter 9. Question 6: Are Your Distribution Sales Reps Suffering from Car Dealer Syndrome?

Is your sales team selling a consistent message and philosophy for your distributorship as well as for the manufacturers' brands you represent? Your sales reps need to be communicating to your customers your value and uniqueness as a distributor along with the value and uniqueness of the manufacturers' products you distribute. Many sales reps in retail car dealerships do a great job of selling the brand of car they represent, but they do little to sell a customer on why he or she would want to buy that car brand from them and their dealership. Your sales team can avoid car dealer syndrome by effectively communicating both your manufacturers' and your distributorship's brands when talking with clients.

Chapter 10. Question 7: So, What Do You Plan to Do Next?

It is up to you, as the sales executive leading your sales team's change process, to implement these ideas within your sales organization. Sales teams rarely improve on their own without any sales management involvement or leadership. And any changes achieved will quickly disappear unless a sales leader is working actively to keep these ideas and

skills within your sales team's daily selling efforts. Only through ongoing coaching will your team be able to maintain these new selling philosophies and skills once they are in place.

Part 3. Increasing the Strategic Selling Skills of Your Entire Distribution Sales Organization

In Part 3, you will learn how to apply the ideas covered in Parts 1 and 2 to improve your strategic message of competitive uniqueness and the contribution of every team member to the success of your sales organization.

Chapter 11. How to Lead Your Distribution Sales Team in Strengthening Your Strategic Message of Competitive Uniqueness

Defining and strengthening your strategic message of competitive uniqueness and value will help your sales team better understand and use this more persuasive selling philosophy and language. The toughest single question a customer can ask a distribution sales rep is, "Why, based on all the competitive alternatives available to me, do I want to buy from you and your distribution company?" Using a multistep process, you can identify, refine, package, and deliver a stronger message of strategic competitive uniqueness and value to your customers and prospects.

Chapter 12. For the Owner and Senior Management: How to Build a Stronger Strategic Selling Organization

As the owner, senior executive, or "sales champion" leading the implementation of these ideas and changes, you can use a four-step strategy for making comprehensive changes to your sales organization. Suggestions are also provided for making less comprehensive changes that can still help increase your distributorship's competitive selling advantage and effectiveness.

Chapter 13. For Distribution Sales Managers: How to Successfully Coach and Lead a Team of Strategic Selling Professionals

As the distribution sales manager responsible for motivating and leading a team of sales professionals, you can successfully lead your distribution sales team through the evaluation and implementation of the ideas, questions, and tests outlined in this book. These leadership skill suggestions can help you achieve your responsibilities as a coach and leader of your distribution sales team.

Chapter 14. For New Salespeople: How to Build Your Strategic Selling Skills and Effectiveness

As a new salesperson, you can increase your fundamental selling skills by being more structured and consistent, being more proactive, and thinking and planning multiple moves ahead. You need to master a comprehensive technical knowledge of your own and your competitors' products, your use of the steps of a sales call, and your customer flexibility skills in building stronger relationships.

Chapter 15. For Experienced Distribution Sales Pros: How to Increase Your Strategic Selling Skills and Success

As an experienced sales pro, even you can increase your competitive advantage and selling success through additional sales training and coaching. The three most critical advanced selling structures or philosophies necessary for success in distribution selling are communicating a stronger strategic message and positioning; managing and leading your territory through improved tactical selling tools; and building your inside customer champions to sell for you when you are not there. Each of these three skills, when strengthened, helps you increase your selling structures and consistency, become more proactive, and think and plan multiple moves ahead.