

BUSINESS AGILITY

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Agile Sales, or How to be Happy

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Sales teams of the past and present tell us different stories. Customers, their values, and the customer journey have all undergone tremendous shifts. Today's consumer market is represented by individualized consumers who prefer unique methods of purchasing.

Thus, sales teams now are conceptually different. Traditional schemes of "pushing" the product via telemarketing or direct mail are irrelevant. With the invention of cutting-edge technologies and overall digitalization, successful sales are impossible without integrating CRM system on a much more personal level. In fact, customers are more and more reluctant to communicate over the phone while favoring making purchases via social media channels. That is why businesses that picked up on the trend and managed to adapt their customer relations accordingly are bound to succeed. Indeed, companies that utilize Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram and similar tools for communication, promotion and sales have already taken the lion's share of the market; whereas large, inert companies that are slow to change are experiencing a continuous decline in the sales rate.

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Another aspect that differentiates the modern business is leadership structures. Today, it is not "the boss" or "the chairperson," but the true charismatic and creative leader who inspires and guides the team. The team, in turn, now is not just a "group of people" but a cross-functional organism brought together by one goal. The goal is defined not only by quantitative factors but also by the qualitative ones. Before, the sales industry was governed by the laws of the jungle; where sales managers were armed with personal project portfolios and clientele, akin to lonely wolves. Now, to experience true success one needs a team. It is the team that creates new ideas and values, establishes communication and interacts with clients.



To refuse to adapt to these changes is to risk the collapse of your company. That is why you need Agile - a universal methodology that will assist your company to go through the adaptation process. Standing for "flexible", "quick", and "nimble," Agile can make your sales flexible, quick, and nimble as well.

In 2011, it was my team that pioneered Agile in the sales sphere in Russia. By the time I started to study the methodology, I had already enjoyed a great deal of professional sales experience. Back then, Agile was applied only in the field of IT; even my mentors could not have thought Agile might have been used in any other sphere. There were no cases in Russia or anywhere else in the world.

The first sales team I put together in accordance with the Agile methodology ended up being twice as effective and accounted for twice the volume of the product realization. What's more, all the departments that we converted into Agile-teams demonstrated triple and even quadruple growth in sales. I believe that Agile is the best thing that can happen to sales.

Here is a more in-depth example: A traditional department of sales is comprised of the head of the department and the sales managers - the lonely wolves who are in the pack; yet work for themselves, armed with their sales plans and their clients. In contrast, there are no bosses in the Agile-team, there is a leader who guides the managers; yet is responsible for their effective work. There lies the key difference: the workers of traditional sales departments want to reach their personal target goal while the Agile teams are willing to work together in order to achieve a result that is 3 - 4 times bigger than initially planned.

Agile methodology employs an excellent tool called "a retrospective meeting" that doesn't exist in the traditional sales. This is a weekly "feedback session" or "debriefing" where the team analyzes the work done in the previous week and comes up with ideas for improvement that can be implemented within the next few days - all to be better than yesterday. This way, the company undergoes changes via improvements of the interior processes and communications. Another Agile activity – the "demo" - takes place once a week and brings together the largest forces of the company. The sales squad invites relevant teams from other departments (e.g. marketing, finance, or IT) in order to demonstrate the results of the work. The most important purpose of such meetings is a collaborative discussion of the future strategies: what is to be done to double the sales and make the client happier. It's worth noting that a customer may sometimes be invited to the demo-meeting, since Agile is always about maintaining close cooperation with the clients, thus, it is the client who is now the boss.

“The effectiveness of Agile methodologies in Russian companies is demonstrated by an average 3-4 times growth in sales”

This way, the sales teams become the driving force of the whole company. Together with the marketing team, the sales team have the closest relations with prospective customers. Hence, improving communication between these departments, the needs of the customers are communicated to the whole organization. As a result, it leads to the improvement of the product, advancement of the customer support, and winning the trust and loyalty of the consumer. Agile erases the boundaries between the departments and forms an entirely different value culture that celebrates the customers and their dreams.

Imagine the clockwork mechanism where all the cogwheels are in contact. In the similar way, the sales department should interact with other divisions. If you plan on implementing the Agile culture in the sales, you must develop that culture within the whole company. I recommend choosing the team that demonstrates the worst results as the pilot team. Ensure transparency of the project so that all personnel are fully aware of what's happening. We always organize a "behind the glass walls" show: where we record all the activities that are taking place in our pilot Agile-team and broadcast the process to



Agile Sales Team | Walking the wall

all departments and branches of the company. This is of the utmost importance when the company is large (1000+ staff): as this way we can ensure the whole organization has the inspiration to undergo an Agile transformation.

Don't forget about learning and development. Quality education stimulates people to wish to move forward. Talk about successful cases. Show how innovations change the business processes for the better. Make sure all your employees have access to all the Agile tools you utilize in the company. Start awareness campaigns to popularize Agile.

The effectiveness of Agile methodologies in Russian companies is demonstrated by an average 3-4 times growth in sales. In the USA, the country that pioneered Agile in business, the effectiveness of the projects experienced a 7-15 times increase. Those are truly inspirational results!

However, when implementing the Agile approaches into your company, you need to be aware of the barriers you will have to surmount. The first barrier is the way most sales-managers think: that the principles of the sales industry have been established for decades. While it's true that active and goal-oriented individuals often choose to devote their lives to the sales, when immersed in the environment of ambiguous accountability (as it is represented by the corporate cultures of the majority of the Russian companies), these individuals accept the rules of the game. "I'm not my brother's keeper" is the belief most of our sales managers adhere to. It symbolizes laziness. It symbolizes the lack of any desire to develop. It symbolizes the will to stay within the comfort zone - the warm place where there is nothing to want when you reach your target. The fear of change and the wish to "play it safe" in terms of conditions, territory, or clients appear as the result.

Adopting an Agile approach allows you to combat such issues successfully and also bring the "lonely wolves" together. This method creates transparency of the processes and exposes all the lazy-bones who cannot truly make it. You need to know one thing: around 30% of your personnel will be replaced once you implement Agile approaches which form new ways of thinking and a new culture in the company.

Team members will decide for themselves what they are to do to reach their goals. In addition, the role of the director ceases to exist once the leader guiding the way appears. The team decides whether and how to follow that path. There lies the principal difference: in a traditional sales department there is a quarterly

or yearly plan to be delivered in respect of the number of phone calls, meetings, or clients - all measured by the Key Performance Indicator. Yet, in the Agile team, the focus is set on a larger purpose which is pursued by everyone regardless of their individual tasks. Specifically, the work is based on the flexible planning: the team sets the goals for the following month and move towards raising the planning bar even further. It is not unusual for the team to over-perform by 100-120%. Unlike traditional sales teams, Agile-teams do not resist such a frequent change in planning.



Sales Kanban Board

Let me illustrate my point. When the team adopts the principles of Agile, every team member gets the opportunity to immerse themselves in the activity he or she feels stronger in, thus, can show their best. For instance, if a person is good at keeping up the correspondence, he/she may just say, "I'd like to be responsible for the preparation of our mail and its delivery; I can make sure we provide proper responses in the timely manner." Another individual chooses to work with the clients over the phone, and just because he or she is comfortable with the task, he/she will be the most effective in it. A third person is perfect when it comes to face-to-face negotiations, so he/she is always on standby when it comes to engaging in on-site activities. All in all, everyone chooses by themselves and for themselves. The team is given the liberty to figure out how to reach the goal without direct orders and direct management. Such a freedom of decision-making increases engagement and develops a sense of responsibility.

That is the basic principle we adhered to when implementing Agile in the business that was entrusted to us. This was a huge company which sold construction materials and employed a great number

of employees in the sales department. We started by applying Agile techniques in just one team. Before long that team demonstrated effectiveness that exceeded 80% of the other teams (from 40% to 127% increase). It was obvious to the business leaders that the Agile way should be utilized by other teams in the company. These teams, in turn, demonstrated similar results - overall, sales were up 120%. Conducting such a transformation was a colossal task, and the success of the transformation was dependent upon engagement and adaptability from the top-management.

There were 3 key benefits from this transformation;

1. The innovations we introduced resulted in the overall growth of sales.
2. The commitment of the personnel increased as well as their approach to working with clients.
3. Finally, the employees demonstrated genuine interest in their work.

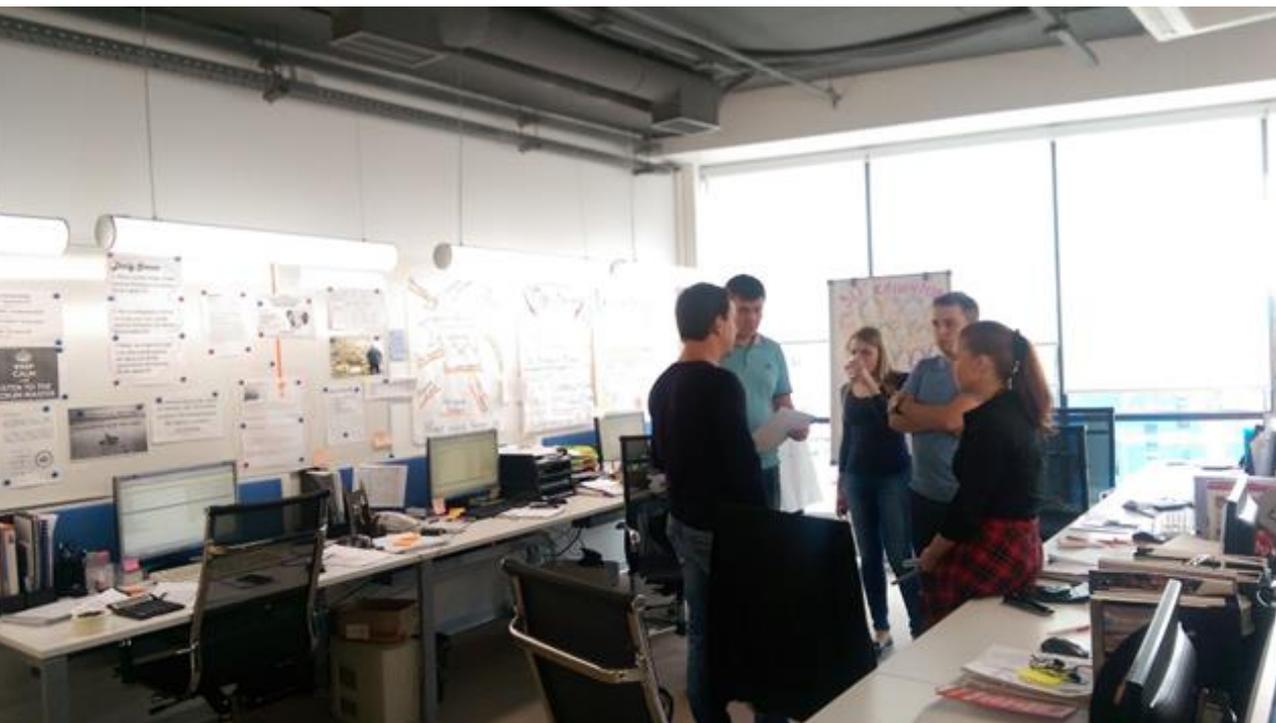
In Russia, it is not typical to talk about happiness at work. Yet, when you do what you love and your job brings you pleasure, you are happy. It has nothing to do with the completion of the plan. The happiness comes when you realize that it is you who makes the client happy, and whatever you sell - windows, doors, or toilets - is unimportant.

If you want the business to stay the course, you must reshape your sales culture now. Not only by introducing flexible principles of interaction with clients, but also by building transparent and honest communication within the company. Traditional management has run its course. Be honest to yourself and admit it.

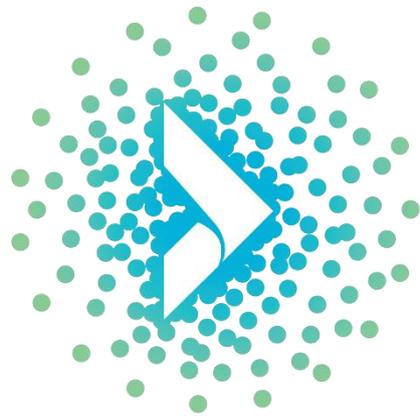
If you want to survive, live and prosper, take the following steps.

1. First, implement modern IT.
2. Second, change the structure and the processes adopted by the company.
3. Third, start working on the ideology that thrives on flexibility, adaptivity, creativity, and new thoughts.

This is the culture I like to call "the culture of start-ups", when the people are not just "working" but trying to change the world. It is such cultures - energetic and lively - who have the true power. Survival is more than just demanding a 20% sales increase, as it is often the case in large corporations. It requires you to change yourself while implementing business agility. Moving towards cross-functional teams where there can never be a war between the sales and marketing departments and there exists a joint endeavor to create new values for both the client and the company.



Daily Stand-up



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