

Create a Stronger Sales Team: How to Diagnose Problems, Identify Strengths & Take Positive Action



This white paper is cowritten by the editors of [Selling Power](#), a media company that has published content for an audience of B2B sales leaders since 1981. [Selling Power](#) is a regular media sponsor of the [Sales 2.0 Conference](#).

The foundation for success starts with an objective diagnosis to ascertain your current level of effectiveness.

Overview

Clear communication and honest self-assessment are fundamental attributes for firms that want to achieve above-market growth. To maximize successful areas of operation – and, conversely, shore up dysfunctional or underperforming areas – sales leaders need an impartial way to examine current operations.

While many assessment tools exist to qualify candidates for hiring and overall business operations, very few assessments are designed with a specific focus on sales and marketing. This white paper outlines what sales leaders can gain from using a sales-specific assessment tool and provides examples of how assessment feedback can help them reduce turnover and increase revenue.

Identifying Strengths and Diagnosing Constraints

Even the strongest managers are not mind readers. Without an impartial way to assess operational strengths and weaknesses as well as current strategies and processes, it is difficult to know how to align your leadership and make critical decisions that will most strategically benefit the business.

Top executives often lack accurate information on the day-to-day challenges that hold back their field sales and marketing teams. Often, new sales VPs are brought in to fix sagging revenue but wind up feeling like thoroughbreds trying to pull a loaded wagon. Why? Systemic and dysfunction issues compromise their ability to take the organization forward as fast as everyone desires.

Leadership Reasons to Assess Your Sales Organization

Good leaders constantly seek feedback and new information that can help them grow better teams and get winning results. The Sales Baseline assessment can help those leaders who

- want to know how to increase sales (even when sales are strong),
- want to get support for adopting new technology necessary to stay competitive,
- are facing many priorities but don't know where to start,
- are field leaders who want to accentuate critical issues in order to get senior-management awareness and buy-in on key field initiatives,
- are senior leaders who want to better understand where their field teams need resources applied.

Organizations with stable leadership often have the opposite problem. Their challenges persist because they have stagnated or become complacent about their position in the market. And the silo mentality is in full effect in many sales and marketing organizations. These companies need a catalyst to improve communication between the two teams.

Everyone likes strong leadership, but management must be careful not to unwittingly create the 'bobblehead syndrome. In a meeting, an executive might get a lot of fervent agreement: 'Yes, we should do that. Couldn't agree more.' Once the executive leaves the conference room, it's back to business as usual.

The foundation for success starts with an objective diagnosis to ascertain your current level of effectiveness – i.e. a baseline. Without an impartial tool, however, assessing current efforts can be a biased, complicated, and ineffective endeavor. Top executives want to align the goals and objectives of their sales and marketing teams, but without a fair arbitrator and a structured process for defining the underlying issues, it's quite possible to miss critical ways in which the organization is misaligned.

Sometimes it's a lack of trust. Other times, it's the lack of a comprehensive, objective process that gives everyone an equal – and in some cases anonymous – method for providing feedback. Executives need factual data about what people are seeing and thinking, without bias and all the drama. Leaders are entrusted to provide a proper environment and method to capture which strengths need to be expanded and which constraints need to be addressed.

Achieving Organizational Alignment

Sales and marketing teams in particular tend to have specific points of view about their challenges, goals, and performance. These points of view do not necessarily align. While sales and marketing are both concerned with revenue, for example, sales might put a priority on receiving qualified leads, while marketing might be highly focused on protecting and maximizing branding.

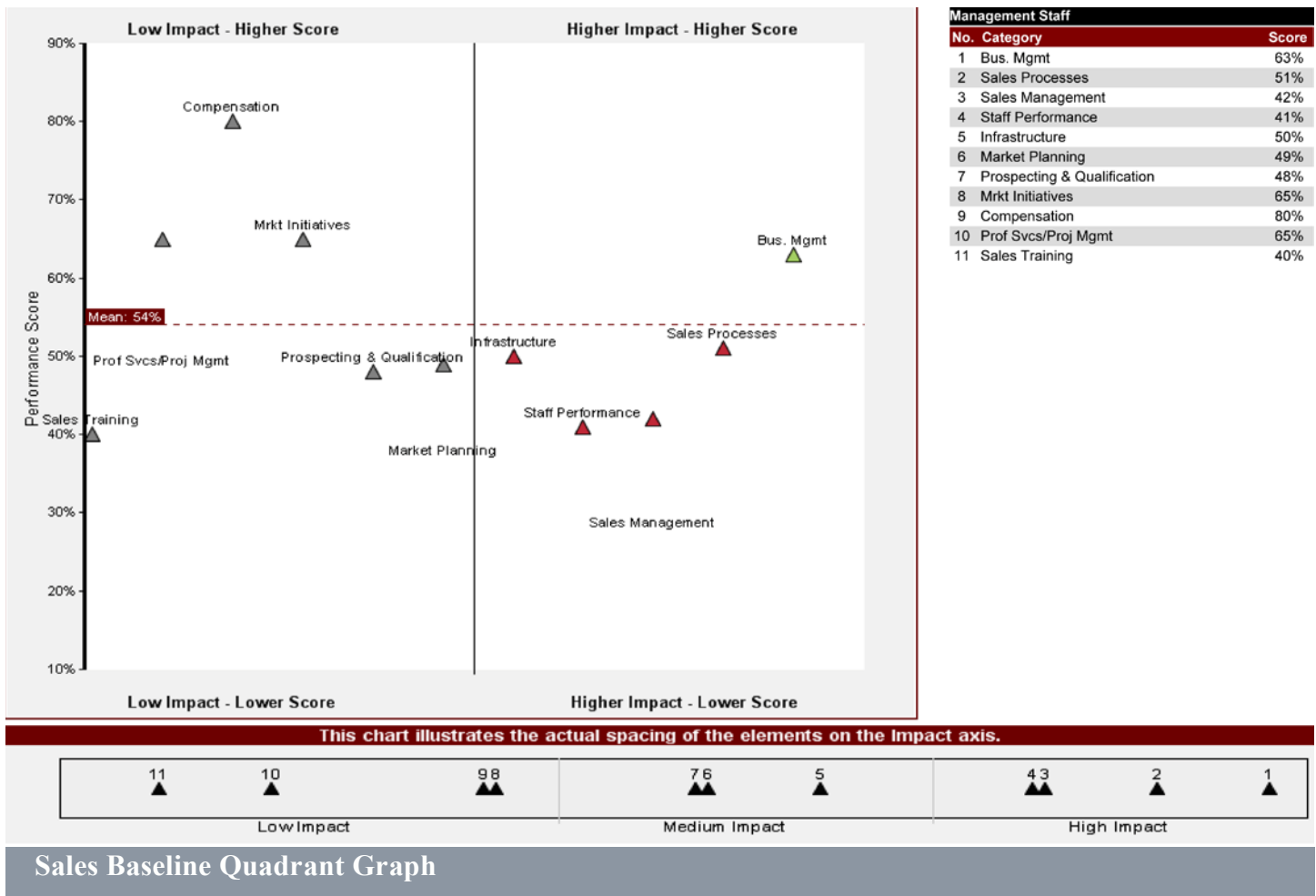
“Minor problems with misalignment can add up. If you let them go for long periods of time, they can snowball into major challenges.”

Sales organizations that want to identify these potential sources of misalignment must examine their performance across several categories. According to sales experts these include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Marketing Initiatives
- Prospecting & Qualification
- Sales Processes
- Compensation
- Sales & Marketing Infrastructure (System & Tools)
- Training & Development
- Business Management

Our affiliate partners have developed a robust combination of consultative services and a written diagnostic tool (the Sales Baseline assessment) to help organizations uncover misalignment in areas related specifically to sales productivity and results. As an in-depth diagnostic tool, the answers to Sales Baseline questions give leaders an objective look at overall performance and alignment issues. Based on feedback from this assessment, sales leaders can easily identify the most immediate areas they can affect in order to drive revenue growth.

The Sales Baseline rolls up answers into graphs that give leaders an amazing visual representation of what’s happening in their sales and marketing organizations. If we see a mix of ‘strongly agree’ and ‘strongly disagree’ answers to the same questions, then people obviously are seeing very different things. That means there is work to do to understand what the other person sees, and vice versa.



Sales Baseline Quadrant Graph

The Sales Baseline assessment has the unique ability to pinpoint where misalignment is occurring and why. Because of the way the assessment is structured, results can be categorized by division, branch, or role (field sales, marketing, customer service, senior management, etc). That means leaders can pinpoint exactly where underperformance, misunderstandings, or misperceptions are hurting the organization. These results allow leaders to resolve minor problems quickly and identify high-payoff initiatives for action.

When you have different answers to very straightforward questions, you can sometimes identify quick fixes. For example, we ask about whether or not the organization has an effective methodology for sales forecasts. If sales management answers yes, but the production, professional services, or finance staff answer no, we know that there is an opportunity to improve the process.

The majority of issues we uncover don't take a Six Sigma project to fix. Often, better communication solves so-called intractable problems. But minor problems with misalignment will add up. If you let them go for long periods of time, they'll snowball into major challenges, the worst of which are turnover of staff and loss of customers.

Sample Assessment Questions

The Sales Baseline assessment requires only a 30-minute investment of time to gain clear insight into the main challenges in your sales organization. Survey questions were developed carefully using a scientific process and are based on best practices of Fortune 500 organizations. Participants are asked to choose responses based on preset answers that range from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Sample questions in the baseline include the following:

1. Our sales staff consistently achieve their individual sales quotas.
2. We do not offer excessive discounts to win deals.
3. Our sales pipeline has the right amount of qualified prospects to achieve our sales goals.
4. We have access to the right amount of presales support to win business.
5. We follow a well documented sales process.
6. We faithfully execute a defined process for managing underperforming sales staff.
7. We use an initial approach that focuses on the prospect's business challenges (not on us).

When implemented organization-wide, the results of the Sales Baseline assessment can uncover key information from a broad cross-section of employees. Sales leaders don't have the time to poll hundreds of people in the organization. Yet misalignment often can be found in seemingly innocuous daily conversations and routine miscommunication.

The Sales Baseline is a tool for senior leadership to receive comprehensive feedback in no more time than it takes to finish a cup of coffee. It gives executives an early look at what's going on at the ground level. There are many cases when executives say, 'If only I had known... I'd have addressed the problem'. This is a chance to gain that understanding much earlier in the game and be proactive.

Conclusion

Although the sales function is often recognized as the primary driver of revenue in a company, few organizations deeply understand how the sales team accomplishes its goals. A self-assessment tool designed specifically to diagnose the effectiveness of the sales and marketing teams can help leaders delineate measurable elements of success and give other departments a better understanding of what's really happening. Using insight gleaned from answers that specifically target key categories that affect sales and marketing teams, the company's senior leaders can test their assumptions about what's working and what isn't, and decide where best to focus their efforts for both short-term and long-term sales force development.

About Bill Kliss Consulting

Bill Kliss Consulting, along with its affiliated partners, provides diagnostic methodologies, assessments, and applications to help sales, business, and non-profit executives get an objective view of their organization's strengths and areas for improvement. We help companies build more successful, scalable organizations.

To learn more, visit www.BillKliss.com.