



"What you do not measure, you cannot control."

Tom Peters
(Nov 7, 1942-)

WALKING THE TIGHTROPE

The idea behind Tom Peter’s quote goes all the way back to Lord Kelvin. The Enlightenment project itself was grounded in the idea that what you don’t measure, you can’t understand.

This is certainly true in business today.

As a Sales Executive you walk a tightrope. Fall to one side and you spend all your time managing the numbers and neglecting the real priority, your customers. You can be sure that while you’re in your office looking at numbers or sitting in a meeting, your competitive peers are in front of your customers building their business, and maybe taking some of yours.

But fall to the other side and you become disconnected with your team, losing your grip on the real mechanisms of the company. Your ability to accurately forecast slips and you are reduced to only hoping key opportunities are on track to being closed. The result is surprise on the downside and these types of surprises clearly point to a lack of control and process.

Key Point: *The surest sign of a mature Sales Executive is the ability to strike the right balance between making a personal impact in closing deals with customers while staying in control of the business.*

The only way to strike this balance is to maintain a coordinated set of review processes that are structured to appropriately balance the team’s focus. This allows you to provide leadership on strategy and ensure the team is on track to meet its commitments.

Objective	Examples	Frequency
Tactical Management	Staff Meetings, Revenue Reviews, Account Reviews, Design Win Reviews	Weekly/Monthly
Long-Range Development	Goal Development Meetings, Staff Off-Site Meetings, Corporate Sales Meetings	Quarterly/Annual

Figure 1. Major Account Management Framework



Figure 1 provides a hierarchy of reviews and planning meetings that drive strategy and provide regular opportunity to measure progress and “course correct” as needed.

At first glance Figure 1 seems to suggest a lot of meetings, and we all hate meetings, right? What we should hate is inefficient meetings, which result from a lack of preparation and discipline, i.e., sloppiness. However, if a meeting or review has an agenda and moderator who drives the discussion along predetermined objectives, it can be the most effective and leveraged time in your team’s busy day. To Tom Peter’s point, reviews are the opportunity for us to measure, so we can remain in control.

Key Point: *Regularly scheduled reviews that efficiently work through predefined objectives are the most efficient way to stay on track to achieving your goals.*

An effective goal development process is the core of any effective sales management program, so we will lead with that topic first.

The discussion then moves to the limited, but effective use of staff meetings and reviews to “track and drive” progress to your goals. Reviews can be a very efficient use of your time provided there is good follow up. This requires you allocate a skilled administrative resource to keep the calendar and all of the assigned action items straight.

With a framework in place to manage the current quarter business, we’ll close the newsletter discussing effective implementation of more strategic planning meetings such as Staff Off-site Meetings, and Corporate Sales Meetings.

GOALS

Effective Goal processes can only flourish in a culture that welcomes the opportunity to set stretch goals and regularly measure progress to their achievement. The positive side of a missed goal is the opportunity to learn.

To foster this kind of culture, missed goals cannot be used as clubs. When they are, goals are then seen as something to be gamed and managed, rather than as a way to focus, stretch and learn. If a missed goal is part of a pattern of poor execution, the reasons for poor execution need to be addressed, but not as part of how you develop and use goals with the team.

Scope of the Goal Process

An effective Goal process drives a Manager to align with each team member on key results that must be accomplished in the period under plan. Goals can be developed for any period of time, but I’ve found that a three-month quarter provides a good balance between the overhead of managing them and market visibility.

Goal development starts by asking the question, “What are those few things that need to be accomplished to allow me to look back at the end of the quarter and consider it a success?”



“Those few things” means as few as one and no more than five goals such that the goals with milestones can fit on a single sheet of paper. Kept to the few and important. Each team member should be able to share their goals from memory.

Key Point: *To be effective, Goals need to be written, both to improve clarity and create a record. They also need to be completed early so that at the end of the period, they can be scored effectively.*

The idea then, is a very few clearly written goals that a salesperson can carry in their head. Scale that across your team, with everyone aligned on the results they need for a successful quarter and you have a powerfully focused sales organization. As a bonus, scored goals are the best documentation of achievement and (and lack of it) you can have when it comes time to write annual employee reviews.

SMART Goals

The SMART criteria is a tried and true tool for confirming that a goal is well written. For a goal to both be clear enough for any reader to understand and to ensure it can be scored properly at the end of the period, it must be:

- **Specific.** The goal needs to be clear enough that any two who read it will come away with the same understanding.
- **Measurable.** A hard metric is ideal. For example, when a goal states an increase in sales of a particular product, call out the size and timing of the increase. When the target is something qualitative, such as a better relationship with a customer, the goal needs to state specific milestones that can be documented such as whom should meet with whom and what should be accomplished.
- **Achievable.** The Goal must be realistic within the constraints of a solid effort and available resources. To include a Goal whose completion is outside the quarter, pick discrete milestones within that goal that are achievable within the quarter.

For example, the final decision for a Design Win may be outside the quarter but an important milestone such as the commitment to complete a product evaluation could be achieved. This milestone makes an excellent goal for the current quarter.

Take into consideration a particular team member’s propensity to over or under commit. A team member is most committed when they believe their goals are very achievable with some opportunity to beat them on the upside.

- **Relevant.** The relevant list of goals are those which, when looking back at the end of the quarter, answer our question “did we have a successful quarter?”



- **Time Based.** Include a target date for completion. Target dates should be on the liberal side of reasonable since closing commitments usually takes longer than expected. This helps team members develop the habit of hitting their goals.

Prior to the start of a quarter, the goal process starts by building goals for the organization (i.e., your goals) using the model just discussed. These goals should tie to the corporate goals. Having these in place will allow you to “cascade” Corporate goals through you to all levels of your organization. Said another way, goal results rolled up from the bottom should tie to the Corporate Goals.

With your goals in place, schedule a meeting with each team member to score goals from the previous quarter and discuss potential goals for the coming quarter. As preparation for the meeting, ask them to bring a rough list of potential achievements for the coming quarter that would answer our question: “What would make this a successful quarter”?

During that meeting, work the list to no more than five goals with associated milestones for each. Each goal may have up to four milestones that lead to that goal being realized. Also, assign weights to each goal that sum to 100%. Weighting clarifies priority and facilitates scoring. The meeting finishes with a draft set of goals that your team-member takes away to complete, including crosschecking them against the SMART criteria.

Key Point: *Goals need to be approved and in place before the end of the first week of the quarter at the latest, so schedule the initial meetings accordingly, leaving enough time for final approval and signoff.*

Starting too late is the second great sin of goal setting (the first is not following the SMART criteria). If you’re chronically late approving goals, the whole process becomes an exercise in shooting first and calling whatever you hit the target.

Scheduling needs to include enough time to allow you to cascade goals through your team. The Sales Executive’s goals should be completed before meeting with direct reports to ensure that the sum of the teams results achieve the group’s (Sales Executive’s) goals. And so it goes down the levels of the sales organization.

2nd Quarter Goals

#1 Achieve Financial Targets	
	Bookings of >\$30M (25%)
	Maintain minimum Gross Margins of 50% on Billings (15%)
#2 Win Critical Design Wins	
	Customer A: Book production PO on Product X by June 15 (25%)
	Customer B: Successfully complete evaluation of Product Y by May 15 (10%)
#3 Account Development Milestones	
	Customer A: Complete and sign new commercial agreement by May 30 (15%)
	Customer B: Hold first meeting between new Engineering VP and our Business Unit VP by June 30 (10%)

Figure 2. Example Objective Set for a Salesperson

Figure 2 above shows an example of two Goals that meet the SMART criteria. Based on the weightings in Figure 2, the most important results for this Salesperson are to hit their Bookings target and to close the Design Win with Customer A.

There are a number of ways to check progress to objectives as you move through the quarter. Objectives are an excellent agenda item if you have regular “one on ones” with each of your staff. Or, team-members could be tasked to forward the Objectives to you monthly with comments on progress. Lastly, goals can be an agenda item during monthly Account Reviews. The point is that there are many low impact ways to ensure that goals become a regular part of your review process.

MANAGING THE QUARTER

As you move through the quarter, you need regular opportunities to review your progress on Revenue and Design Win targets and ensure you’re closing opportunities and reacting quickly to problems.

Key Point: *Effective review meetings are “horizontal”, moving quickly across items and only pausing for clarification or to discuss an issue. Issues that can’t be resolved quickly become “vertical”, i.e., requiring extended discussion with only a few meeting participants. These items should be captured as actions for later discussion with only the required team members.*

Staff Meetings

Or should I say, the “dreaded” staff meeting? While it’s true that we’ve all sat through our share of long, meandering and ultimately pointless staff meetings, it’s a fact that the only thing worse than staff meetings is not having them at all.



Your team will come away energized if, in one hour or less, the team gets aligned on any quarter close issues, gets an update on corporate news and perhaps works through a topic together as a team. To make this happen, pick a regular time to meet, prepare and then force yourself to keep it to no more than an hour.

I like holding staff meetings early each week, either Monday or Tuesday, as a way to provide focus to the team as they launch their week. An agenda will require you to think through the objective and flow of the meeting and is helpful in managing the clock. A good agenda will include some subset of the following topics:

1. **Actions from the previous meeting.** Reviewing actions encourages compliance and provides context for the current meeting
2. **Progress to revenue and design win targets.** Staff meeting is not the place for a detailed review, but rather the forum to highlight overall progress and any significant disconnects from plan. Of course, in a revenue crisis, the recovery plan is THE topic for staff meeting.
3. **Corporate news.** Staff Meeting is an efficient way to disseminate items of general interest ranging from results of Board meetings to changes in insurance coverage.
4. **Project discussion.** If time permits, you may want to schedule one or two topics that could be covered in depth. Also, Staff Meeting is an efficient way for a product line or corporate function to work an issue with Sales Management.
5. **Review action items.** These are published to the team following Staff Meeting.

If you keep a brisk pace and move along a clear agenda, your staff meetings will be a leveraged, efficient way to keep the team focused and build team fabric.

Key Point: *Staff Meetings, with few exceptions should be kept to an hour or less. It is your meeting and your responsibility to keep the discussion on track. In almost all cases, long staff meetings are a result of poor meeting management.*

Revenue Review Meeting

As you move through the quarter, Job #1 is to make sure you maintain a solid grip on Revenue for the quarter. An excellent Revenue management process was presented in the Newsletter titled [Driving the Quarter](#). The weekly Revenue Review meeting is the axle around which that particular wheel spins.

The goal of this meeting is to build a clear picture, agreed between Sales, Marketing and Operations, of the high confidence revenue number at that moment in time and to identify actions to close gaps. My preference is to hold this meeting either at the beginning or end of the week since either schedule allows you begin the week with a clear view of that quarter's revenue.



Holding Staff Meeting right after the Revenue Review Meeting is a perfect segue as you can then close the discussion on revenue before moving on to other topics.

Design Win and Account Reviews

While driving revenue for the quarter is the top priority, hitting the Design Win target comes right behind in terms of importance. The newsletter titled [Closing New Business](#), outlines how to hold an effective Design Win Review meeting. The Design Win Review and Revenue Review meetings have the same objectives and similar formats. Specifically, it is cross-functional, provides focus on high value opportunities and is action oriented.

The objective for an Account Review is to provide a platform for a sales person to present progress to their numbers (revenue and design wins) along with their biggest obstacles to overcome and the resources required to reach these targets.

The decision regarding whether both Account and Design Win reviews are needed is largely a question of who needs to attend. The sales team is the execution arm of marketing, so if the marketing teams want access to the sales team to review Design Win opportunities both reviews may be required. Otherwise, Design Wins can be handled as part of an Account Review.

Given the dynamic nature of current quarter revenue, the Revenue Review meeting should be held weekly or bi-weekly. You likely can keep a good grip on the status of Design Wins and individual Major Accounts with a monthly review.

To maximize the precious time your team has to spend in front of customers, they must not be required to do simple data gathering for these reviews. Rather, salespeople should only be required to organize their messaging to management into a slide or two and all other data should come directly from your systems.

For example, data for Design Reviews should come directly from your CRM tool (e.g., Salesforce.com) and numbers for Account Reviews should simply be canned reports from the financial system.

Key Point: *To keep preparation time to an absolute minimum, all data to be reviewed for Revenue and Design Wins should be reports available at the push of a button.*

Start the review by recapping results from the period under review and the status of actions taken from the last meeting. The last slide should be a free form slide that allows the salesperson to articulate what they need to hit their goals, what management needs to improve to make the company more competitive and any useful competitive information.

With this minimalist approach, a salesperson can be reviewed in thirty to forty minutes. Keeping a short leash on these meetings limits elaborate preparation and forces everyone to keep discussion to the key messages. If problems are uncovered that require deeper discussion, an action should be taken and worked later.



It's remarkable what you can learn and the energy that can be generated from a crisp set of reviews. For many organizations Friday is a good day for reviews as they tend to be quieter and with less travel for all involved.

Your follow-up on issues raised by your team is important to the credibility of any review. The sales team will support these reviews if they feel they are given an opportunity to be heard, the information is then used to drive change AND there is minimal administrative burden.

Review Meeting	Frequency	Objective
Staff Meeting	Weekly	Review Actions
		Progress to Quarter Targets
		Corporate News
		Project Discussion
Revenue Review	Weekly	Validate Revenue Position
	Bi-Weekly	Actions to Close Gaps
Design Win Review	Monthly	Validate Design Win Strategies
		Review Actions to Close Wins
Account Reviews	Monthly	Provide Market Status to Mgt
		Status Progress to Targets
		Validate Design Win Strategies
		Review Progress to Qtr Goals

Figure 3. Summary of Review Meetings with Frequency and Objectives

A review of Figure 3 highlights that with two, one-hour meetings (Staff Meeting and Revenue Review) your team can be updated and aligned for the upcoming week. In addition, you have a good grip on the revenue picture and the actions needed to close to target. This is a very leveraged use of your time.

You have the rest of the month and quarter to schedule the other reviews and can organize these in a fashion that best works for you.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT MEETINGS

The life of the Sales Executive seems like a constant drive to hit the current quarter Revenue and Design Win targets, then when the quarter is overrepeat. To evolve your program and strategy you must set aside time regularly to plan. Staff "Off-Sites" and



Corporate Sales Meetings are tools to set your strategic agenda, drive alignment across the organization and inject new energy into the team.

Staff Off-site Meetings

Important but not urgent topics such as incentive planning, preparing for the upcoming negotiation season or extending core processes like your CRM are important topics that can be pushed to the side amidst the noise of driving the quarter.

An Off-Site Staff meeting is just the place to work through these projects and allow your staff to build their leadership skills by taking the lead in preparing a topic and leading the team through it.

In addition to the opportunity to get away from the business and let the creative juices flow, these meetings are excellent team building opportunities. The best way to build a personal relationship with a customer is out of their building at a restaurant or golf course and this is also true with your team as well.

If travel is required for your staff, you can rotate locations so members of your staff can also share the opportunity of hosting the team.

Avoid holding these meetings at corporate locations. The battle to keep phones turned off and the team focused is almost not winnable unless you're off-site. This will provide needed physical and emotional separation from the business.

A successful Off-Site requires significant planning. Building the agenda and assigning time slots is the easy part. Each topic should have its own slide deck that opens with a list of objectives for that section. For that section, think carefully through how the discussion will progress and document the key points and issues that need discussion.

Finally, the deck should end with a specific list of deliverables, whether they are decisions required or assignments for follow-up later. As each section ends, the results for each deliverable, along with any action items should be documented for publication after the meeting.

In terms of frequency, more than once a quarter is too often and fewer than twice a year is probably not enough.

Corporate Sales Meetings

There is no better way to train and drive alignment between Executive management and their sales team than to hold a worldwide sales meeting. It's also a great way to pump up your team. Hold a great sales meeting and expect a spike in bookings.

Sales meetings should have some mix of these objectives: 1) align the sales team to the corporate objectives and plan; 2) product training and; 3) generating energy and momentum.

Discussions around a potential sales meeting should start directly with your CEO since a Corporate Sales Meeting is the CEO's meeting. You should outline your suggested



objectives, calendaring and meeting length, a rough idea of cost and, given these things are always very expensive, why the timing is right to hold a meeting.

After gaining CEO approval, and after getting input from your peers on the Executive team, planning can begin in earnest. If the meeting will have fewer than 25 attendees, you can handle the planning with help from one good administrator.

As the number grows, you'll need to resource accordingly. For example, if you're planning for a meeting with more than 100 attendees, you'll need to chair a team to plan the logistics and another to oversee creation of the training materials.

For a larger meeting it will take at least a quarter to get all the training built and obtain reasonable prices on venues. With the date set you start with a kickoff with each planning team and then meet at least weekly thereafter to make sure preparations stay on track.

The presentation agenda should provide a mix of corporate plan review and product training. All of your corporate Executives should be in attendance and present the plans for their businesses. Done right, these presentations will generate positive energy, so it often works well to start and end the day with an Executive presentation.

Product training as a rule should be prepared and presented by the Marketing teams. Whereas Executives can be given a lot of flexibility in their presentations, the format for product training should be quite rigid.

The quality of marketing teams tends to be uneven in most companies and a specific, almost "fill in the blanks" template will reduce the number of editing loops required after your initial review. A consistent approach will also aid in retention as the sales team will know what to expect as they move through the training.

In addition to presenting product line strategy and the features/benefits of focus products, each presentation should have a clear call to action. The best presentations will also include selling tools such as cross reference guides and summaries or "cheat sheets" which your teams can (and will) use when they return to the field.

If your team is selling technical products you may also need presentations on how your products fit into your customer's business so your team can speak more knowledgeably with customers and build a more consultative type relationship.

Outside speakers can be used to spice up the agenda and are often a good way to close a day. Industry pundits or motivational speakers can work well, but it is even better to have a few Customer Executives present.

Customers are surprisingly willing to participate as they get an opportunity to present their company story and tell a major supplier what to improve in order to serve them better. It's also a great opportunity to build a relationship with a key Customer Executive.

As a meeting stretches toward a weeklong event, time should be set aside for a team building activity that combines some fun with the local area.



A great way to cap your sales meeting is with an Awards Dinner the final evening. Great care needs to be taken in choosing the recipients and types of awards as there is an equal opportunity to end the meeting on a high or low note depending on how this is handled.

It is best to avoid “Salesperson of the Year” awards in favor of rewarding behaviors that you want reinforced in your culture. For example you can give awards for “Going the extra mile to close an order” or “Going the extra mile to solve a customer problem”.

Narratives are powerful ways of communicating values. When presenting awards, the story driving the award can be told with humor while emphasizing the values to be reinforced. You can give as many of these awards as time allows. It’s a sure way to close your meeting with a bang.

SUMMARY

Every tightrope walker makes their way across the wire in their own style, so consider the range of review processes presented in this newsletter as a menu of options from which you can choose to give you the kind and level of control you need over the business.

Many management processes helpful to my career have been presented over this series of newsletters. Of course, they’re really only useful if you, as the Sales Executive develop a way to integrate them into your routine.

It has been a real pleasure for me to share with you what I’ve learned from a number of great Sales Executives over the years in these newsletters. I hope they are as useful for you as it has been helpful for me to crystallize these processes in my own mind through the process of writing them.