



The Creating Competitive Distinction Series: Part Two

The Seven "Can-Be's" of Competitive Selling

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The **“deadly dilemmas”** we discussed last time persist because people avoid managing the tensions between **“what is”** and **“what should be”**. We say, **“What should be, can be!”** The state of **“Can Be,”** requires corporate and executive bravery by acting counter-culturally. Unfortunately, corporate America exhibits little bravery these days, even when it is most needed.

What is Corporate & Executive Bravery? It is taking a passionate interest in your company’s future performance so that you become a “change leader” rather than a “change resistor”. It is saying, “How can we make this happen?” not “why is this not happening” (for the umpteenth time).

The “why” it’s not happening is not so obvious. Why do executives get stuck in expecting that problems can be fixed by doing more of the same (*which didn’t work*), rather than by doing different things? Why do executives not display *bravery* and do different things? Because they:

- Fear acting on their counter-cultural beliefs
- Are wrapped-up in their self-interest, often to the detriment of driving profits!
- Have experienced retribution of some kind for “sticking their heads above the parapet”
- Don’t trust themselves, their bosses or their people
- Are suspicious of different things, particularly those elements “not invented here”
- Believe that previous success is an indicator of future glory!

Here are the sales challenges from *safe* to *brave* – guess which create competitive distinction?

1: Focusing on Sales Strategies

Using Isolated Sales Tactics  Linking Tactics to Sales Strategies

Focusing on Sales Strategies is a state of mind. We should permeate sales thinking and action with this question, “Is this strategically related?” Asking strategic questions of overworked, ill-prepared people takes “guts” and persistence. Getting them to link their sales tactics to a competitive sales strategy before calling a customer takes focus. It is counter-cultural to stop asking for an increase in call rates and pay attention to strategizing a call.

Essential Questions:

- How can leaders engage their sales force in deciding how to manage their competitive vulnerabilities?
- How can managers translate field sales experience into teaching the organization what it takes to sell competitively?
- What protocols do managers need to ensure that the right sales tactics are applied to the right sales strategies?
- How do senior executives give credit to others who demonstrate these capabilities?

2: Discovering & Delivering Value

Using Generic Knowledge



Linking Specific Value

It is easier to focus on features and functionality than customer value priorities. So many executives pay "lip service" to creating real value propositions. They never really show salespeople "how to discover" differentiable value. Where is the *bravery* in focusing on product training without customer application? Where is the *bravery* in leading an organization that cannot, in all quarters, define the very values sought by an admiring customer base? Bravery is showing the organization how to aim higher by searching out differentiable value.

Essential Questions:

- What can executives do to reinforce customer value propositions through their organization?
- How do leaders teach their organization to seek out the customer's "value priorities", believe them, and then fulfill them?
- How can senior executives demonstrate to the entire organization how to behave differently?

3: Competing:

Vulnerable & Predictable



Differentiated & Unpredictable

While it is obvious sales people want to "compete" it is not so obvious that competing requires articulating and quantifying value differentiators to win. It is brave to seek out quantified differentiators and teach the organization how to use them in competitively unpredictable ways. It is even tougher to get marketing to provide examples and proof of their existence.

Essential Questions:

- How can executives direct resources to eliminating competitive vulnerabilities in product development and production?
- How can an executive coach a sales force to identify competitive positions and exploit them in unpredictable ways?
- How can senior executives help cross-functional networks focus on building and validating existing differentiators?
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4: Integrating Products & Applications

Fragmented



Integrated

So often, existing products, new products and customer preferred applications become fragmented. It is difficult to develop coherent, value-based product packages. These "packages" establish a distinct brand image and stimulate on-going relationships and customer loyalty over-time. This integration process takes a brave leader.

Essential Questions:

- How can leaders demonstrate that integrated value-based product packages increase customer loyalty?
- How can leaders ensure that product development is actively linked to sales strengths and processes?
- How can senior executives champion integrated products with the sales force and customers?

5: Selling - Activities & Competencies

Diffused  Focused

It is counter-cultural to improve rather than replace sales people, processes and protocols. If something doesn't work (apparently) it is easier to add sales languages, tools (like CRM's) and methodologies. A brave leader soon realizes it's not the tool, method etc. It is the extent of their people's commitment to using these devices to create "sale wins." Leaders **shift focus from fiddling with process to focusing on competence**. You are *brave* when you stop adding and start using!

Essential Questions:

- How can sales leaders focus on 3 or 4 key behaviors that lift the sales force to prominence in the market?
- How can leaders stop telling the sales force what not to do and demonstrate what they want them to do?
- How do senior managers lead people to simplify sales processes, support functions, and focus sales management on what works?

6: Repeating Success

None Identified  Identified & Systemic

It is counter-cultural to build a "training" department that does more than just "TRAINING." It takes great bravery to create an effective training function that has the authority to expect different behaviors from a sales force. It is bravery to create a "coaching cascade" that is dedicated to changing behaviors – sales AND management behaviors. It is *brave* to compensate and reward those who get it. And then, of course, it is brave to STOP rewarding those who reap the easy sales that have nothing to do with competence, but rather with territory placement. **Brave leaders work to replicate success, not just accept it when it comes along.**

Essential Questions:

- How will leaders tie behaviors to success, **and** reward those who put the two together?
- How will senior managers take advantage of "leading indicators" in measuring sales progress rather than rely on culturally acceptable "lagging indicators?"
- What will senior managers do to ensure that the "language of the leaders" can define replicable behavior and actions?

7: Managing Customer Demand

Respond ←————→ Create

It is counter-cultural to say, "*STOP engaging in "every" deal and focus on selective deals – those you can win.*" It's safe to chase everything that moves rather than say "No!" Saying "NO" takes guts. It is counter-cultural to recognize that creating demand is not just about the product you sell. It is equally about how your sales organization entices the market to "want the product." Bravery is all about giving the sales force the task of exposing and exploiting demand issues. Bravery is funding the professional development of competent sales people who can learn to and implement this philosophy.

Essential Questions:

- How does a sales leader hire, create and keep qualified sales personnel that "have the knack" of creating demand in their territories?
- How will you promote working on select opportunities that expose the demand elements and "seed" them in your market place?
- How will you create a select group of customers that can advance your image?

Where does a Brave Executive go from here?

Bravery would suggest that the organization, due to cultural interferences, needs to understand that competitive growth depends on "doing different things." This is not an easy transition. In fact, it can be down-right painful! A brave sales leader must show comfort in his or her change of attitude and behavior. And, the leader must implement actions which demonstrate the "bravery." You MUST **EXPECT** different things in order to **DO** different things.

- **Measure Differently:** Include competence as a measure of success.
- **Talk Differently:** Clean up and simplify the sales language, tools and processes so that everyone can use them.
- **Act Differently:** Integrate a "coaching cascade" that makes coaching a "way of doing business" up and down the entire sales organizational ladder

Where does a brave executive begin?

Start by:

- **"Painting the Train"** - Sit with your leaders and decide what can be done that is different from what we have done. Align the expectations of all who contribute – sales – support – service – IT – field management – senior management, etc. – **AND, DO it while you are moving! Don't stop the train** to make changes! A loss of momentum will crush the initiative to get better.
- **Challenge the organization** - Ask the organization to coach one another so that success is replicated once, twice, and thrice! Be a coach yourself as an example to get others to see the value!
- **Protect what works - particularly things you just changed** - Talk to the troops about why things worked so they do it again and it becomes a staple. Use only tools and processes that produce results. And, stop duplication of sales efforts.
- **Stop relying on change for the sake of change** - It doesn't do anything but interfere with productivity. Realize that there are good things happening, but that they need to be enhanced by putting them into new visions and actions designed to stimulate changed behavior. Use the newly aligned expectations to guide you and your organization towards the "right changes."

The benefits of such actions can greatly help eliminate competitive predictability and promote competitive distinction.