



HOW HUMANITY CREATES SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

■ By Mark Faust & John Heeneey, Echelon Management

“Humility is the most important leadership character quality in Costa’s opinion because it is the ‘sire of all virtues.’”

As COO of a S&P 500 company, Sandy Costa led a growth initiative from \$90 million to \$1.6 billion in six years. While there were many acquisitions in those five years, more than 60 percent of that growth was organic. This was just one of many teams he led through high sales growth improvements using strategies any company can implement to accelerate growth. Here are the top strategies Costa prioritizes as keys to fostering sales growth.

Leverage Relationships. Most people have relationships with hundreds of individuals. One of the most underutilized assets in any sized company is the leveraging of the relationship potential that exists throughout the organization. Share a list of your targets throughout the company and discuss any possible connections that may accelerate meeting, engaging and building trust with your top prospects.

Create a “Must-Win” list and review regularly. Costa facilitated worldwide calls regularly that reviewed the progress on key targets, new opportunities, challenges, missteps and questions. This enhanced focus of idea sharing accelerated sales cycles in a positive upbeat form of accountability.

Incent and compensate all of your people for profitability, not simply revenue. Too often, companies build quotas and compensation only around revenue and customers. Allow the entire team to contribute ideas that improve profitability and have a clear connection between compensation and the amount of profit cultivated by sales reps and others.

Find and share best practices regularly. Costa would have the sales teams meet annually to review why they won business and what specific and scalable practices were key to winning business. Start a best practices “bible.” Add to it and review regularly.

Top leadership must be close to sales. Despite being a COO of a 20,000 person team, Costa would go on sales calls. He dedicated approximately 25 percent of his time to interactions with key clients. We’ve seen team

sales calls involving owners and other top leaders increase closing ratios, accelerate sales cycles and foster sales improvements and innovations. Make team calls on your largest customers and most competitive situations and watch success multiply.

Put people first. Most important to Costa was keeping “Humanity At Work,” which is the title of his new book. By this, he means making sure people know how important they are to the organization. This is the bedrock to fostering growth and can be accomplished by considering the following:

Treat employees like volunteers. Too often management looks at staff with an attitude of “hey, they are well paid and lucky to have such good jobs,” but when a spirit of gratitude is consistently emanating from leaders, the esprit de corps is higher and people sell and serve the extra mile.

Bring objectivity and patience to your most emotionally charged challenges. “Fear evaporates when facts come on the scene,” says Costa. “Most people don’t bring all of the facts to the conversation.” It’s leadership’s job to ask as many questions as it takes to have all of the facts and restore objectivity and fairness to challenging situations. Rarely is conflict as charged if all of the facts are shared.

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Forgiveness is another key character strategy to maximizing a team’s aggressiveness and courage. “I would tell the team that I expected to make mistakes today and that mistakes are part of business,” says Costa. “People who beat people up for mistakes just send them into a shell ... I normally did not have a problem when people made mistakes, only if they didn’t learn from it.”

The first 10 presidents or owners of companies to respond will receive a free copy of Costa’s book and a Strategy Audit from Echelon Management. Send an e-mail to John@em1990.com with the words “Humanity At Work” in the subject line. **AG**

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