

Is Your Salesperson Really Selling?

BY TODD M. ZIELINSKI AND LISA BENSON

If you aren't seeing a steady stream of new opportunities in your sales pipeline, it might be time to determine whether your sales team and the processes they use are properly configured for success. Your salesperson may be wearing too many hats—or the wrong hat—which can have a negative impact on sales productivity.

Since the Industrial Revolution, the concept of division of labor—breaking down a process into separate tasks that are performed by those who are or will

become specialized in that task—has been widely used in production processes as a means to increase efficiency and spur growth. In addition to creating a specialized workforce, the production processes that encourage efficiency and growth tend to be measurable, repeatable, and scalable, and provide a method for ongoing process improvement.

Although the concept of the division of labor has been successfully implemented in production operations since Adam

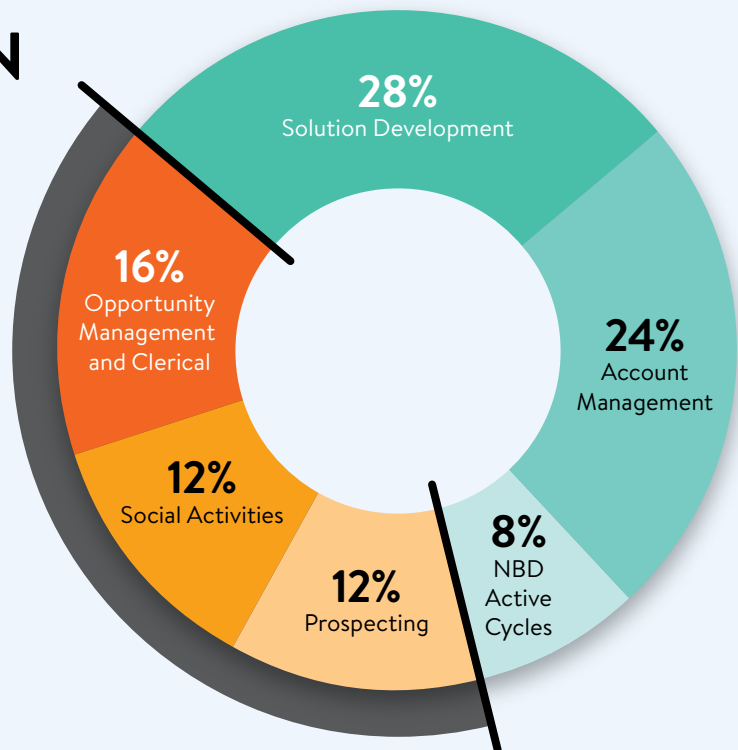
Smith coined the term in *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776, more than 240 years later many company leaders have failed to consider applying this concept and these production processes to their sales teams.

The Traditional Model of a Salesperson

After interviewing business-to-business company executives who have a direct hand in sales growth, including vice presidents of sales, sales executives, CEOs, and business owners, we found that typically

THE FRAGMENTED SALESPERSON

40%
of time spent in activities leading up to the active sales cycle



40 percent of a salesperson's time is spent in activities leading up to the first active step of the sales cycle.

The growth of a company depends on closing sales, yet a salesperson's time is highly fragmented. Salespeople are also required to retain customers, find new opportunities, network, and perform many other activities not directly related to closing a sale.

In fact, we have found the time a typical salesperson spends on various tasks breaks down as follows:

- 12 percent social activities (networking, trade shows, golf outings, etc.);
- 12 percent prospecting (looking for and qualifying new opportunities);
- 16 percent opportunity management and clerical (list building and cleaning, follow-up, etc.);
- 24 percent account management (maintaining and increasing shares of current accounts);
- 28 percent solution development (active accounts—fielding RFPs, RFQs, estimating, working with sales engineers or SMEs internally to develop a quote or proposal); and
- 8 percent new business development (active sales cycle).

The focus of the salesperson is to be in active selling mode, but they have all these other activities going on that can impact and limit the amount of time that they can spend working on new business development opportunities.

On top of it, there is no defined process around the activities. The salesperson is just an autonomous agent out there selling. Their priorities are likely defined by what is most pressing at the time. Potential new opportunities aren't likely to be screaming for attention, so seeking them out will take a back seat to current customers and other tasks.

uffering From a Mismatched Skill Set

Targeting new opportunities (often called the hunting) takes a different skill set, and personality, than maintaining and growing existing customers (the farming). Hunters tend to be driven, persuasive, flexible, independent, and solution-oriented. Farmers are team-oriented and detail-oriented, are good listeners, and tend to be more risk-averse.

Hunters and farmers are both needed. You may get lucky and find one person who can fill the roles of both hunter (new business development) and farmer (account management), and do it well. But it's not likely. If your salesperson is better at account management, they might not have the necessary skill sets, capacity, or structure to crack the right type of new account.

If you have only one good hunter, your rate of growth is going to be dependent on their capacity, which, as we have already discussed, is greatly diminished by them having so many other responsibilities. If this person leaves the company, your rate of growth can come to a halt.

Taking a Different Approach

To be successful, you must create an organizational process that can transcend one person—a process for which the pipeline will continuously be filled with opportunities that meet your specific criteria for qualified leads. This can be achieved by using the division-of-labor concept within your sales team.

Through the division-of-labor concept, you can create a separate process-focused front-end sales and marketing team whose goal is to find the right opportunities, educate them, and qualify them based on your specific criteria so that the lead is ready to actively engage in the first step of the active sales cycle when handed off to the salesperson. This team will

continually generate a measurable flow of qualified opportunities.

The salesperson's responsibilities now are to consume those opportunities, retain them long term, and grow them. The goal is to make the salesperson as productive as possible and allow the systematic approach to feed them over time, while allowing others to take on the responsibilities that take them away from actively selling.

Benefits to the Bottom Line

To expand sales capacity, instead of hiring more salespeople, who tend to have a much higher salary, implementing division of labor within your sales team may be a less costly approach. Using a front-end sales and marketing team with structured processes gives you the ability to have a greater touch than a salesperson would have on their own. If done correctly, the process can easily be scaled up or down as needed. As a bonus, the cost per sale may also go down, leaving more money for the bottom line.



Todd M. Zielinski is managing director and CEO at Athena SWC LLC. He can be reached at 716-250-5547 or tzielinski@athenaswc.com.



Lisa Benson is senior marketing content consultant at Athena SWC LLC. She can be reached at lbenson@athenaswc.com.