# Media Sales Management

## (A Companion Text to *Media Selling, 4th Edition*)

### By Charles Warner

## *Table of Contents*



## Preface

In 2002, Iowa State Publishing asked several leading academics who teach media sales courses to review the outline for the proposed third edition of *Broadcast and Cable Selling*, newly re-titled *Media Selling*. Several of the reviewers requested that a section on sales management be included in the new edition because some courses in journalism and mass communications curricula included a sales management component. After discussing the possibility of adding a sales management section to *Media Selling*, Iowa State Press and I decided that the book was long enough (over 570 pages) and that publishing a separate textbook on media sales management would not be profitable, even though one was probably needed.

When I proposed a graduate media sales course to the Assistant Dean of the Department of Communication, Carol Wilder, at the New School University in New York, where I teach four courses each year, she said that she would love to have a media sales course in the graduate Media Management Program. However, Carol indicated that a media sales course must have a sales management component to be acceptable for the Media Management Program in the Media Studies graduate program. Because I wanted to teach a media sales graduate course for the New School, I told Carol, "No problem, I'll write a media sales management companion text to *Media Selling.*"

My response was not entirely eleemosynary, as I knew that those who were interested in media sales management would have to buy a copy of *Media Selling.* Putting the book online so that it could be downloaded free would drive sales of *Media Selling*, I felt, and giving the book away was my way of giving back to the media industry, which over 50 years has given me great pride, excitement, and financial security.

Why is a media sales management book necessary when there are many sales management books available? First, it is needed in college courses in media sales and sales management that use *Media Selling* as a text. *Media Sales Management* is a companion text that incorporates the AESKOPP sales system, the performance evaluation system, the Money Engine, the Cycle of Success, the organization and time management systems, and many more elements found in *Media Selling*.

Next, *Media Sales Management* is needed because the majority of sales and sales management books are written for the largest possible potential market: real estate, insurance, and retail, for instance. But selling media requires specific and unique expertise and strategies, especially in compensation and incentives in a new media era in which more and more money is being switched online. Media selling requires selling an intangible product, selling a perishable product, and selling to experienced specialists (agency media buyers).

*Media Sales Management's* organization is based on seven of the fundamental elements management practices detailed in *What Really Works: The 4+2 Formula for Sustained Business Success,*[i] in the McKinsey 7s Model,[ii] in The Sales Executive Council's "Anatomy of a World-Class Sales Organization." I have also drawn on my own experience as a salesperson, sales manager, and general manager in television and radio, a VP of Sales Strategy and Development at AOL, and as sales management consultant and trainer for dozens of large and small media organizations during a 50-year career in the media and teaching media management and sales.

Throughout the book I use the term sales manager to include sales executive positions such as VP of Sales, Advertising Director, VP of Advertising Sales, Ad Director, Chief Revenue Officer, and so forth—anyone who manages a media sales organization.

## Introduction

First, I assume that readers of all of the chapters in *Media Sales Management* have read *Media Selling*, because most of the concepts, principles, and practices in *Media Sales Management* are based on foundations laid in *Media Selling*. The building blocks of sales management practices are based on the management theories and principles in several books, including *In Search of Excellence, Built to Last, Good to Great, What Really Works, Drive, Predictably Irrational, The Future of Management,* and *What Were They Thinking*, on research conducted by the Sales Executive Council, and on my own experience in sales management and sales and management training and consulting.

### *In Search of Excellence*

In 1982 Tom Peters and Robert Waterman wrote the best-selling management book of all time, *In Search of Excellence.*[iii] The book created a sensation in management circles and some experts credited it with starting a quality and customer-focused revolution in business. The genesis of the book was at the Stanford Graduate School where Peters and Waterman had met and at the consulting firm McKinsey & Co where both authors worked. The book was a joint project between the San Francisco office of McKinsey & Co. and the Stanford Business School. The objective of the project was to define corporate excellence. The authors, with the help of researchers at Stanford, identified and then examined excellent companies to find out what they had in common.

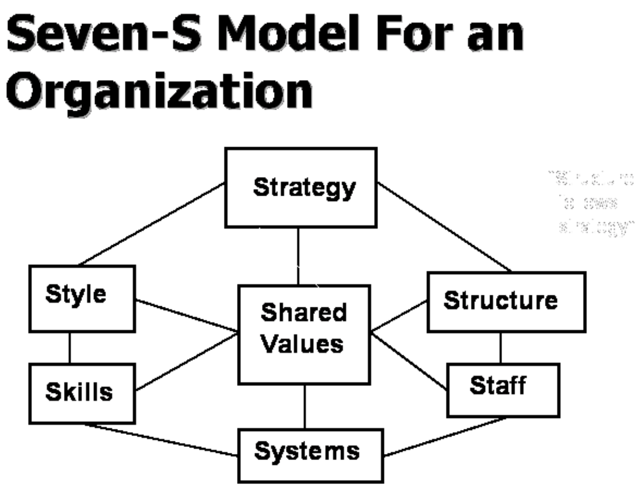
What the authors found was that excellent companies had two basic things in common: quality and service. They wrote:

> Our findings were a pleasant surprise. The project showed, more clearly than we had hoped for, that excellent companies were, above all, brilliant on the basics. Tools didn't substitute for thinking. Intellect didn't overpower wisdom. Analysis didn't overpower action. Rather these companies worked hard to keep things simple in a complex world. They persisted. They insisted on top quality. They fawned on their

customers. They listened to their employees and treated them like adults. They allowed their innovative product and service "champions" long tethers. They allowed for some chaos in return for quick action and regular experimentation.

To aid them in defining excellent companies, Peters and Waterman used the McKinsey 7-S model, shown below in a modified form (the seven elements are the same, I have just rearranged them).

**Figure 0.1**




The Seven-S Model provided the conceptual underpinning for their definition of corporate excellence. They also wrote, "We asserted that innovative companies not only were unusually good at producing commercially viable new widgets; *innovative companies are especially adroit at continually responding to change of any sort in their environments."* In the next paragraph they wrote, "That concept of innovation seemed to us to define the task of the truly excellent manager or management team. The companies that seemed to us to have achieved that kind of innovative performance were the ones we labeled excellent companies."

Peters and Waterman found that "eight attributes emerged to characterize most nearly the distinction of excellence:"

1. *A bias for action,* for getting on with it. "Do it, try it, fix it" characterized these companies. "They were experimenters supreme."
2. *Close of the customer. "*These companies learn from the people they serve."
3. *Autonomy and entrepreneurship.* "The innovative companies foster many leaders and many innovators throughout the organization."
4. *Productivity through people.* "The excellent companies treat the rank and file as the root source of quality and productivity gain."
5. *Hands-on, value driven.* IBM, Hewlett-Packard, and McDonald's success have more to do with the "philosophy of the organization" than technology or economic resources.
6. *Stick to the knitting.* "Never acquire a business you don't know how to run."
7. *Simple form, lean staff.* None of the excellent companies were run with a matrix organization. The structural forms of the excellent companies were "elegantly simple."

8. *Simultaneous lose-tight properties.* Shared values bound people together. Someone from 3 M said, "The brainwashed members of an extremist religious sect are no more conformist in their central beliefs" than the members of their innovation teams.

Peters and Waterman's research was based on a literature review of 25 years of management writing and theory and on structured interviews in 62 companies. "What we really wanted and got with our original group was a list of companies considered to be innovative and excellent by an informed group of observers in the business scene—businessmen, consultants, members of the business press, and business academics." Chapters in *In Search of Excellence* summarized the literature review and contained a brief history of management literature that attempted to define excellent management practice.

### ***Built to Last***

In 1994 James Collins and Jerry Porras wrote *Built to Last*.[iv] On the cover of *Built to Last* a sticker proclaimed, "…one of the most eye-opening business studies since *In Search of Excellence."* This book also had its genesis at the Stanford Business School, where Collins and Porras taught. The authors wrote, "We did something in researching and writing this book that, to our knowledge, has never been done before. We took a set of truly exceptional companies that have stood the test of time—the average founding dates being 1897—and studied them from their very beginnings, through all phases of their development to the present day; and studied them *in comparison* to another set of good companies that had the same shot at life, but didn't attain the same stature." The authors tried to answer the question, "What makes the truly exceptional companies *different* from the other companies?"

What the authors found surprised them, and dozens of "widely held myths fell by the dozen." Their book is about visionary companies that are premier institutions—the crown jewels—in their industries, widely admired by their peers and having a long track record of making a significant impact on the world around them. In a six-year project, the authors identified 18 companies that met their criteria for exceptional visionary companies:

- Premier institution in its industry
- Widely admired by knowledgeable businesspeople
- Made an indelible imprint on the world in which we live
- Been through multiple generations of chief executives
- Been through multiple product (or service) life cycles
- Founded before 1950

More than just meeting the above criteria for being successful and exceptional companies, the 18 they chose were the best of the best in their industries and had been that way for decades. Interestingly, 11 of the 18 companies were ones Peters and Waterman had identified as excellent companies: 3M, Boeing, General Electric, Hewlett-Packard, IBM, Johnson & Johnson, Marriott, Procter & Gamble, Wal-Mart, and Walt Disney.

During their research, Collins and Porras looked for timeless, fundamental principles and patterns that might apply across eras. In Chapter 1, Collins and Porras describe their methodology and how they "let the evidence speak for itself" as they went along. And they found nine attributes that their visionary companies had in common:

1. *Clock Building, Not Time Telling.* The concept is that the founders of the great companies wanted to build a great company for the long term that could run without

them, that could sustain great performance in the long run. Their goal was to build a great company that would produce great products; they did not start with a product idea.

2. *More Than Profits.* The best-of-the-best companies had a set of core values that drove them more than the search for profits. Merck's "We are in the business of preserving and improving human life. All of our actions must be measured by our success in achieving this goal." Or, "Putting profits after people and products was magical at Ford." In examining the mission statements of the visionary countries, the authors found less mention of profits than of core ideology. They write, "Profitability is a necessary condition for existence and a means to more important ends, but it is not the end in itself for many of the visionary companies. Profit is like oxygen, food, water, and blood for the body; they are not the *point* of life, but without them there is no life."
3. *Preserve the Core, Stimulate Progress.* This attribute is similar to Peters and Waterman's simultaneous lose-tight properties. Collins and Porras's notion is that visionary companies provide both stability and continuity *and* change and movement.
4. *Big Hairy Audacious Goals.* A BHAG is a clear, compelling goal. "A BHAG engages people—it reaches out and grabs them in the gut. It is tangible, energizing, highly focused. People 'get it' right away; it takes little or no explanation," the authors write. The authors use Jack Welsh's BHAG goal for GE: "Become #1 or #2 in every market we serve and revolutionize this company to have the speed and agility of a small enterprise." Another thing the authors point out is that, "we see that highly visionary behavior occurs when the company does not view business as ultimately about maximizing profitability."
5. *Cult-Like Cultures.* IBM, Wal-Mart, Nordstrom, H-P, and others had a culture about which people were passionate. The authors write, "We found that the visionary companies tend to be more demanding of their people than other companies, both in terms of performance and congruence with the ideology."
6. *Try a Lot of Stuff and Keep What Works.* The authors found that the visionary companies often made some of their best moves not by detailed strategic planning, but rather by experimentation, trial and error, opportunism, and by accident, sort of like Darwin's evolution by random genetic mutation.
7. *Home-Grown Management.* Visionary companies spend a great deal of time and effort in the CEO succession process. Robert Galvin of Motorola is quoted, "One responsibility we considered paramount is seeing to the continuity of capable senior leadership." Collins and Porras write, "As companies like GE, Motorola, P&G, Boeing, Nordstrom, 3M, and HP have shown time and again, a visionary company absolutely does not need to hire top management from the outside in order to get change and fresh ideas."
8. *Good Enough Never Is.* The mantra for great, visionary companies is "*How can we do better tomorrow than we did today?"* They create discontent and discomfort with the status guo—they "obliterate complacency."

### *Good to Great*

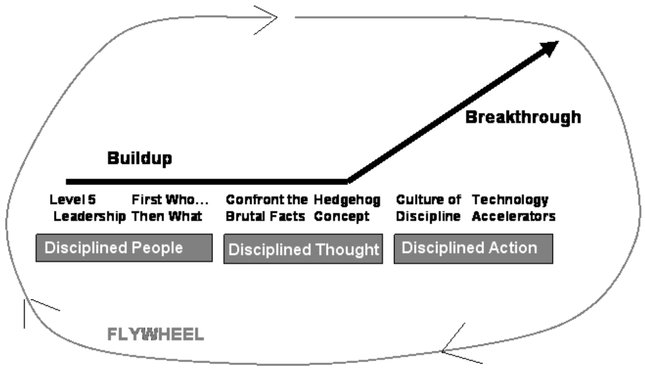
The next best-seller to come from the Stanford Business School incubator for the search for management's Holy Grail—excellence—was written by *Built to Last* co-author Jim Collins and was published in 2001 and titled *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap…and Others Don't*.[v] Collins used 20 graduate students from the University of Colorado Business School over a five-year period to conduct the research for this book that chronicled how good companies became great ones. In Chapter 1, titled "Good is the Enemy of Great," he wrote:

> Good is the enemy of great.
>
> And that is one of the key reasons why we have so little that becomes great.
>
> We don't have great schools, principally because we have good schools. We don't have great government, principally because we have good government. Few people attain great lives, in large part because it is just so easy to settle for a good life. The vast majority if companies never become great, precisely because the vast majority become quite good—and that is their main problem.
>
> This point became piercingly clear to me in 1996, when…the managing director of the San Francisco office of McKinsey & Company…confided, "You know, Jim, we love *Built to Last* around here. You and your co-author did a very fine job on the research and writing. Unfortunately, it's useless."
>
> Curious, I asked him to explain.
>
> "The companies you wrote about were, for the most part, always great." He said. "They never had to turn themselves from good companies into great companies. They had parents like David Packard and George Merck, who shaped the character of greatness from early on. But what about the vast majority of companies that wake up part way through life and realize that they're good but not great?"
>
> I now realize that (the comment "useless" was exaggerated), but his essential observation was correct—that truly great companies, for the most part, have always been great. And the vast majority of good companies remain just that—good, but not great. (The comments of the McKinsey & Company executive) planted a seed of a question that became the basis of this entire book—namely, Can a good company become a great company, and if so, how? Or is the disease of "just being good" incurable.[vi]

Collins took the challenge and he and his team identified companies that made the leap from good results to great results and sustained those results for at least 15 years. Collins wrote, "We compared these companies to a carefully selected control group of comparison companies to discover the essential and distinguishing factors at work."

So, using similar methodology of *In Search of Excellence* and *Built to Last,* Collins and his team compared companies that made the leap from good to great (as they defined great) to companies in the same industry that did not make a similar leap, but just continued on a slow-growth curve or even declined. They identified 11 companies and found that these companies went through six distinct stages in the transformation from good to great. These six stages were divided into three distinct areas as shown in Figure 0.2.

**Figure 0.2**




**Good to Great Process**

The chart shows how good companies have a buildup period before a breakthrough. There are three areas of discipline: Disciplined People, Disciplined Thought, and Disciplined Action. There are six attributes, two each in the areas of discipline:

1. *Level 5 Leadership.* Collins wrote, "We were surprised, shocked really, to discover the type of leadership required for turning a good company into a great one. Compared to high-profile leaders with big personalities who make headlines and become celebrities, the good-to-great leaders seem to have come from Mars. Self-effacing, quiet, reserved, even shy—these leaders are a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will. They are more like Lincoln and Socrates than Patton or Caesar."
2. *First Who…Then What.* Collins wrote, "We expected good-to-great leaders would begin by setting a new vision and strategy. We found instead that they *first* got the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats—and *then* they figured out where to drive it. The old adage 'People are your most important asset' turns out to be wrong. People are *not* your most important asset. The *right* people are."
3. *Confront the Brutal Facts (Yet Never Lose Faith).* Collins wrote, "Every good company embraced what we came to call the Stockdale Paradox: You must maintain unwavering faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties, AND *at the same time* have the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of you current reality, whatever they might be.
4. *The Hedgehog Concept (Simplicity within the Three Circles).* Collins writes, "To go from good to great requires transcending the curse of competence. Just because something is your core business—just because you've been doing it for years or perhaps decades—does not necessarily mean you can be the best in the world at it. And if you cannot be the best in the world at your core business, then your core business absolutely cannot form the basis of a great company. It must be replaced with a simple concept that reflects deep understanding of three intersecting circles." (*Disciplined people, disciplined thought, and disciplined action.*)
5. *A Culture of Discipline*. Collins writes**, "**All companies have a culture, some companies have discipline, but few companies have *culture of discipline.* When you have disciplined thought, you don't need bureaucracy. When you have disciplined people, you don't need hierarchy. When you have disciplined thought, you don't need bureaucracy.

When you have disciplined action, you don't need excessive controls. When you combine a culture of discipline with an ethic of entrepreneurship, you get the magic alchemy of great performance."

6. *Technology Accelerators.* Good-to-great companies *think* differently about the role of technology. They never use technology as the primary means of igniting a transformation. Yet, paradoxically, they are pioneers in the application of *carefully selected* technologies.

   Collins wrote about the flywheel concept:

   *The Flywheel and the Doom Loop.* Those who launch revolutions, dramatic change programs, and wrenching restructurings will almost certainly fail to make the change from good to great. No matter how dramatic the end result, the good-to-great transformation never happened in one fell swoop. There was no single defining action, no grand program, no one killer innovation, no solitary lucky break, no miracle movement. Rather, the process resembled relentlessly pushing a giant heavy flywheel in one direction, turn upon turn, building momentum until a point of breakthrough and beyond.

Finally, Collins wrote: "It is important to understand that we developed all of the concepts in this book by making *empirical* deductions *directly from the data.* We did not begin this project with a theory to test or prove. We sought to build a theory from the ground up, derived directly from the evidence."

The last quote from Jim Collins about not beginning his research project for *Good to Great* with a theory to test or prove is in direct opposition to the approach Peters and Waterman took in *In Search of Excellence.* Peters and Waterman began with a theory that excellent companies were innovative companies. They looked for companies that fit their definition. Collins and Porras in *Built to Last* and Collins in *Good to Great* did not go into the research project with any pre-conceived notions or hypotheses; they let the data speak. The authors of the last two books also compared the companies they studied to other companies that were not as successful. Peters and Waterman chose excellent companies and studied them without comparisons or contrasts to other not-as-excellent companies (their definition); therefore, the findings were not as penetrating, myth-breaking, rigorous, or universal as those of Collins and Porras and Collins. It seems as though Collins and Porras learned from the mistakes of *In Search of Excellence.*

### *What Really Works*

The latest book that takes an in-depth comparative look at what makes successful companies winners in their industries is *What Really Works: The 4+2 Formula for Sustained Business Success* by William Joyce, Nitin Nohria, and Bruce Robertson.[vii] In my opinion it is the best of the four books and although certainly not the final word on the formula for successful management, it ties together all of the best principles of *In Search of Excellence, Built to Last,* and *Good to Great* in a succinct, clear way.

*What Really Works* is the result of a groundbreaking five-year study of the management secrets of the world's best companies. The researchers examined 160 companies in detail over ten years from 1986-1996. They identified four types of companies: winners, climbers, tumblers, and losers and compared and contrasted a variety of management practices that led to the winners winning and the losers losing. The authors found a compelling correlation between total return to shareholders (TRS)—their criterion for success—and eight general areas of management practice: four primary and four secondary.

The four primary areas were strategy, execution, culture, and structure. The four secondary areas were talent, leadership, innovation, and mergers and partnerships. The companies with high ratings (scores) in all four primary areas and any two of the secondary areas—hence 4+2—consistently outperformed their competitors. In fact, the authors fond "the link between 4+2 practices and business success was astonishing."

Here is a list of the eight practices in more detail:

**Four Primary Practices**

1. *Strategy:* Devise and maintain a clearly stated, focused strategy.
    a. Build a strategy around a clear value proposition for the customer.
    b. Develop strategy from the outside in. Base it upon what your customers, partners, and investors have to say—and how they behave.
    c. Maintain antennae that allow you to fine-tune your strategy to changes in the marketplace.
    d. Clearly communicate your strategy within the organization and among customers and other external shareholders.
    e. Keep growing your core business, beware the unfamiliar.
2. *Execution:* Develop and maintain flawless operational execution.
    a. Deliver products and services that consistently meet customers' expectations.
    b. Empower front lines to respond to customer needs.
    c. Constantly strive to improve productivity and eliminate all forms of excess waste.
3. *Culture:* Develop and maintain a performance-oriented culture.
    a. Inspire all to do their best.
    b. Reward achievement with praise and pay-for-performance, but keep raising the performance bar.
    c. Create a work environment that is challenging, satisfying, and fun.
    d. Establish and abide by clear company values.
4. *Structure:* Build and maintain a fast, flexible, flat organization.
    a. Eliminate redundant organizational layers and bureaucratic structures and behaviors. Simplify, simplify, simplify.
    b. Promote cooperation and the exchange of information across the whole company.
    c. Put your best people closest to the action and keep your frontline stars in place.

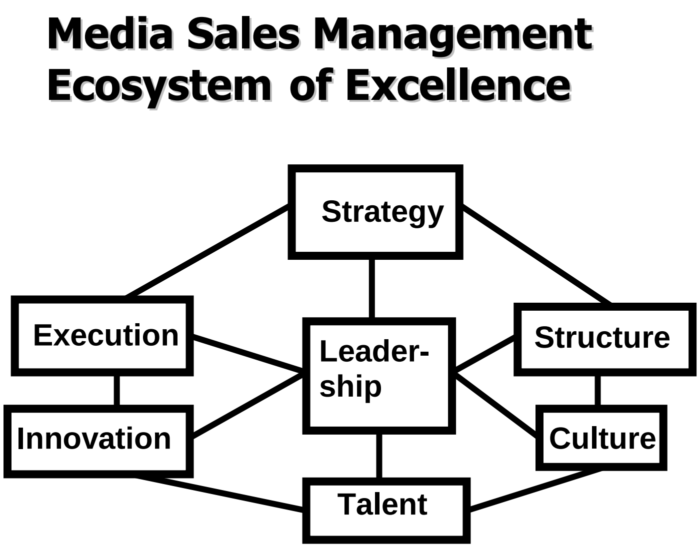
**Four Secondary Practices**

1. *Talent:* Hold on to talented employees and find more.
    a. Fill mid- and high-level jobs with internal talent whenever possible.
    b. Create and maintain top-of-the-line training and educational programs.
    c. Design jobs that will intrigue and challenge your best performers.
    d. Become personally involved in winning the war for talent.
2. *Leadership*: Keep leaders and directors committed to the business.
    a. Inspire management to strengthen its relationships with people at all levels of the company.

    b. Inspire management to hone its capacity to spot opportunities and problems early.
    c. Appoint a board of directors whose members have a substantial financial stake in the company's success.
    d. Closely link the pay of the leadership team to their performance.
3. *Innovation*: Make innovations that are industry transforming.
    a. Introduce disruptive technologies and business models.
    b. Exploit new and old technologies to design products and enhance operations.
    c. Don't hesitate to cannibalize existing products.
4. *Mergers and Partnerships*: Make growth happen with mergers and partnerships.
    a. Acquire new businesses that leverage existing customer relationships.
    b. Enter new businesses that complement your company's existing strengths.
    c. With a partner, move into new businesses that can use the partnership's talents.
    d. Develop a systematic capability to identify, screen, and close deals.

Because the above practices are the same as the successful ones I have witnessed in 45 years of selling, being a sales manager and a general manager, and being a sales and management trainer and consultant, I have used them for the basic structure of this book. For years I used a modified version of the McKinsey 7s Model (Figure 0.1) as a foundation for organizing and structuring my sales and management training and consulting. I have now modified the 7s Model based on *What Really Works* and as it applies specifically to media sales management. Figure 1.3 shows what I call the Media Sales Management Ecosystem of Excellence.

**Figure 0.3**




Note that I have included the *What Really Works* four primary principles of strategy, structure, culture, and execution plus three of the four secondary principles of talent, innovation, and leadership. I call it an ecosystem because all of the principles are inextricably intertwined and must work together at all times for the entire system to remain healthy. Leadership is the middle because it is the principle that holds all the others together and keeps them moving forward. The authors of *What Really Works* suggested an excellent analogy: Visualize a juggler (leadership) trying to keep six plates continually and simultaneously spinning on top of long, thin sticks while balancing on a unicycle. This is what media sales managers must do every day, day in and day out without letting a plate slow down or stop spinning. It is enormously difficult, which explains why there are so few world-class sales managers in the media. Among the hundreds I have known and observed in action over the course of 45 years, I have only seen two or three—I profile one of them at the end of this Introduction.

## The Anatomy of a World-Class Sales Organization

The final piece for me for the media sales management puzzle was seeing the anatomy of a world-class sales organization at a sales management retreat in 2000 organized by the Sales Executive Council where its brilliant director, Tim Pollard, presented a chart titled "The Anatomy of a World-Class Sales Organization."[viii] The chart detailed the elements that make up a world-class organization. Not all of the elements are relevant to the media industry, but I list the 20 elements below in hopes that media sales managers will read the relevant statements and grade their sales organization on a scale of one to five on how they stack up on each relevant element. The 20 elements were compiled from statements made during in-depth interviews with over 200 top sales executives in successful, large, global companies.

**The Anatomy of a World-Class Sales Organization**

**Sales Talent Management**

1. We hire stellar people. We don't compromise based on availability.
2. We adjust competency requirements as the sales environment changes and clarify performance expectations based on that model.
3. We effectively diagnose skills at the level of the individual, then address those deficiencies through targeted training, mentoring, coaching, and e-learning.
4. We actively collect and disseminate sales best practices across the organization. We never learn the same lesson twice. We never invent the same sales tactic twice.
5. We meaningfully differentiate between average and star performers. We aggressively retain star performers and more quickly manage out underperformers.
6. We effectively identify, develop, and empower future leaders at all levels of the sales organization.

**Strategic Customer and Channel Management**

7. We tier customers based on value (current and potential) and deploy sales resources effectively based on customer value.
8. We have a holistic view of the customer through an enterprise information system, and we use this system effectively to manage customer relationships.
9. We make use of multiple channels, deploying according to customer preferences and customer value.
10. We create strong bonds with key channel partners that drive mutual success and profitability.
11. We have effective methodologies for deepening or broadening relationships (and getting paid for them) with customers.
12. We effectively align the organization across divisions, functions, and geographies to present a "seamless" face to the customer.

**Sales Process Design/Productivity**

13. We provide an environment where account managers are empowered to make appropriate decisions and act on behalf of customers.
14. We have streamlined the sales process, such that it does not get in the way of the sale. Company is "easy to buy from" and "easy to sell for."
15. We aggressively digitize or offload low-value (and even some high-level) non-customer-facing sales activities to free up account manager time.
16. We provide the sales organization with easy-to-use, value-added tools (e.g. templates, technology) and accurate, relevant, and timely information.
17. We effectively leverage our senior-most executives in account planning and proactive, high-level interactions with our most important customers.

**Performance Measurement/Rewards**

18. We measure and reward our sales organization based on customer-driven performance metrics.
19. We reward desired behaviors—based on the achievement of corporate strategy (long-term profitable growth) rather than simply sales volume.
20. We reward performance in a highly motivational and visibly fair way, such that rewards are derived from, and consistent with, value created.

## Putting It All Together

It is remarkable how closely the management principles in *In Search of Excellence, Built to Last, Good to Great, What Really Works,* and "The Anatomy of a World-Class Sales Organization" parallel each other; many are the same. The similarity, therefore, validates all of them and refutes that argument that "my business is different." There is no excuse, other than bad, arrogant, and blind management for not adopting these successful management principles. I believe that *What Really Works* is the best summary of all of these principles, which is why I use it as the foundation for the structure of *Media Sales Management.*

Furthermore, in the Media Sales and Sales Management graduate courses that I teach, I require that students read *Media Selling,* this text, *What Really Works,* and *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done.*[ix] The reason I include *Execution* is to reinforce the importance of excellent execution for media sales managers, who are middle managers in difficult boundary positions between salespeople and top managers. They have exceptionally hard and complex jobs (based on keeping those six plates spinning and considering the 20 elements above) and are the ones who keep the fires stoked in the media money engines.

## Talk About Excellence…

Over the years, I have had many sales consulting assignments and have conducted numerous sales and management training seminars, so I got to meet and observe a wide variety of sales managers and sales staffs in large and small markets in radio, cable and television and small and large Internet companies. It's pretty easy to see what the common problems are and what many of them are doing wrong. It's harder to catch someone doing things right. However, I'll never forget a general sales manager of a radio station and the sales staff that was the best I've ever seen.

The station was not near the top in the ratings. In fact, twenty of their last twenty-one rating books had been down. When I asked the general sales manager, whose name was Jim, how things were going, the answer was, “Great! Every month in the last five years we’ve beaten the previous year’s monthly billing record,” Jim proclaimed as he proudly unrolled a chart on the desktop and showed me a plot of two lines, one going steadily down (ratings) and one going steadily up (revenue). The lines crossed about midway in the second year, and the ratings continued a slow but steady decline as the revenue line continued to rise steadily. Jim was silent, but smiled proudly; he knew the performance was magnificent—it was certainly the best I had ever seen.

What was Jim like? How did he motivate the salespeople? How was this superb performance accomplished? First, Jim did not have a personality that was easily distinguishable from that of dozens of other sales managers I have met, a little quieter perhaps. Jim could be described as quiet, firm, calm, pleasant, extremely sincere, and humble. There was absolutely no BS about him. He was not an outgoing, extroverted, hail-person-well-met type. When I try to describe Jim’s personality characteristics, I am reminded of John Kotter’s book *The General Managers* in which he points out that there are no common personality characteristics of high performing managers, they come in all sizes, shapes, sexes and personalities.[x] The things Kotter says high-performing managers have in common are some general behavior patterns, not personality traits. In *Good to Great* author Jim Collins found that leaders of the good-to-great companies tended to have humility—Level 5 leaders Collins called them.

Here are some of Jim’s behaviors:

1. He got to the office early (about 7:15) every morning, but there were no expectations for all of the sales staff to get in that early. Salespeople were expected to be on time for the weekly sales meeting, but otherwise they could work their own hours. In fact, Jim wanted his salespeople to be on the street selling, not coming to the office, especially in spread-out Los Angeles. Jim set the example and standard of working hard, not necessarily working long hours. I have met sales managers who think that once they get their job they can slow down and take it a little easy. Their attitude seems to be, “I worked hard to get here. I earned my job and the right to take it a little easier.” Jim earned the title, the job, and the staff’s respect every day.
2. Jim’s integrity and honesty were mentioned continually in discussions with the salespeople. Jim would not break the rules to get an order, even though the station was in a poor rating position. Rates and sales guidelines and conditions were distinguished by flexibility, but once established were firm. The salespeople could count on Jim’s integrity and consistency, and they took pride in the fact that Jim would often turn down business that wasn't right for the station or at the right rates, “crying hard while saying no,” the salespeople told me. Jim’s personal life reflected the same kind of commitment and integrity.
3. Jim was a constant communicator with the sales staff. His days were spent mostly talking one-on-one with the salespeople. He didn’t bug the salespeople, rather they were encouraged to come in for help, coaching, support or advice. There was no pressure to get orders, to close business, to make budgets or to “sell harder.” The only pressure I saw was self-imposed pressure that the salespeople put on themselves to maintain their reputation as the best sales staff in the city (a sense of pride that Jim constantly reinforced), to continually improve (which Jim insisted on), and to maximize their income. I had never seen such constant, intense, open, informal communication. After

conversations with salespeople, at the end of the day (which was often 6:30 or 7:00 pm), Jim would help the salespeople fill out their Weekly Planners, Business Pending Reports, Business Pending Tracker, and would keep track on the calls on key accounts that were made. Jim encouraged and helped the salespeople do their important paperwork, and tried to make it as painless as possible while continually emphasizing the value of the information being gathered to help him set prices and build special packages when needed.

4. Jim was the head cheerleader, coach, and trainer. The local sales manager ran the information meetings, but Jim ran the training meetings. In fact, when a new retail staff of three people was added to the station, Jim took on the training and supervising responsibility for this new unit. This action gave important messages to the rest of the staff: training is important and the retail staff is important enough to have the full attention of the top sales executive. Jim understood the multiple messages that were communicated, and it was planned that way. Jim understood the importance of values and culture in a station and how to give messages about the kind of culture that was desirable. Training and constant learning were a top priority.
5. Jim was fiercely supportive of the sales staff. He was absolutely convinced that the sales staff was the best in Los Angles, not on the average, but that every salesperson was better than any other salesperson in town. Jim told the sales staff that they were the best and expected no less from them. It never occurred to him or to the sales staff that they were not going to break another record the current month and the next month. It might have been a little tough with another down rating book, but they would all put their heads together and think of a way to win (they all shared ideas continually). They were all unbelievably competitive, not with other stations, but with themselves, not individually because their team spirit and affection for each other was remarkable, but with themselves as a record-breaking team. Jim trained them to take tremendous pride in their astonishingly good performance, and the salespeople would rather sell their soul to an Arbitron representative than to let billing fall.
6. Jim didn't gripe or complain, but was the most genuinely, realistically positive and optimistic person I have known. He didn't tell me about the station's twenty down books to be negative or to complain, but to show me how great his salespeople were. Bad ratings weren't a negative; they were an opportunity to show how well the staff could sell without numbers. Jim referred to Arbitron rating books that showed another downtrend as "character builders" with a wry, offhand smile.
7. Jim was politically savvy. There were political alliances and problems in other departments, but he didn't let on that they were important. Jim was highly complimentary of all the other departments, on-air-talent, and other department heads. When the salespeople complained about a number of interdepartmental problems in a private meeting with me, I later confronted Jim with the problems and complaints. His response was, "Oh well, I know all about those gripes and political problems, but they have nothing to do with our selling the station. We control what we do and how we sell. Our clients don't know or care about these things. If we can't do a promotion right, we don't offer it. If our production is no good, we tell clients to get it elsewhere, that we're too busy to handle it. Our general manager is smart; he'll eventually work the problems out if we can give him enough money." Even though Jim was aware of the internal politics, internal strife didn't matter, performance mattered. Most important, Jim didn't

let anything serve as an excuse for not selling the station effectively—not ratings, not other departments, not politics, not engineering or signal, or not top management—not anything.

8. Jim trusted his salespeople completely. It never occurred to him that the salespeople might not be working hard or that they might not be doing their best or that they might not be getting the highest possible rates. Jim did not require daily or weekly call reports, but instead asked salespeople to fill out Weekly Planners, which he or the local sales manager went over with them at the beginning of each week to help them organize and keep sales management informed. Jim and the local sales manager were brought up-to-date verbally and continually on every account daily. Because Jim trusted the salespeople, the salespeople were open and trusted him not to pass any blame back to them. Trust works both ways. Lack of it does too. When other sales managers complain to me that their salespeople are lazy, stupid, or greedy, I understand, of course (because I've seen it at so many stations), that a sales manager hires the salespeople and that the salespeople merely reflect the personality characteristics and expectations of the sales manager.
9. Jim protected the salespeople's income like a mother bear protects her cubs. As the rating books went down, Jim fought with management to raise the commission rates. The staff knew the sales manager battled for a raise in commission rates after every down book, and he got what he fought for. They loved their leader.

Jim reminded me of great coaches of NFL football teams who instill the confidence in their players that they can win—that winning depends on what they do right, about blocking and tackling, and about the fundamentals.

The kind of spectacular sales performance outlined here is certainly rare, but not impossible. The first key to Jim's success was taking personal responsibility for getting results and training the salespeople to take personal responsibility for their own success and not to look for excuses for failure outside the sales department or in the ratings.

The second key to success was setting high performance standards and expectations for the staff.

The third key to success was Jim's ability to build trust between sales management and the sales staff. The sales staff believed that sales management would always fight for their best interests and would not demand unreasonable goals from them just to satisfy higher management.

## Be Like Jim

*Media Sales Management* will give you the tools you need to become as good as Jim was. You can do it; you, too, can be the best.

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## Endnotes

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