



# Sales Versus Service

## Why customers do not care about your org chart

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I was in a meeting last week with a company that was having what they called a “handoff problem.” Sales team members would close deals and then toss them over the wall to the service team members, who would promptly fumble the relationships because they did not understand what had been promised or why the customer bought in the first place. Does this sound familiar?

Here is what really got me: This company’s leaders spent months reorganizing its departments, creating new processes and building elaborate handoff procedures. They were treating the symptoms while completely missing the disease.

The real problem? They were thinking about sales and service as completely separate functions when, in reality, there is far more overlap than most people realize. And, more importantly, their customers do not care about the company’s internal org chart.

### The False Division

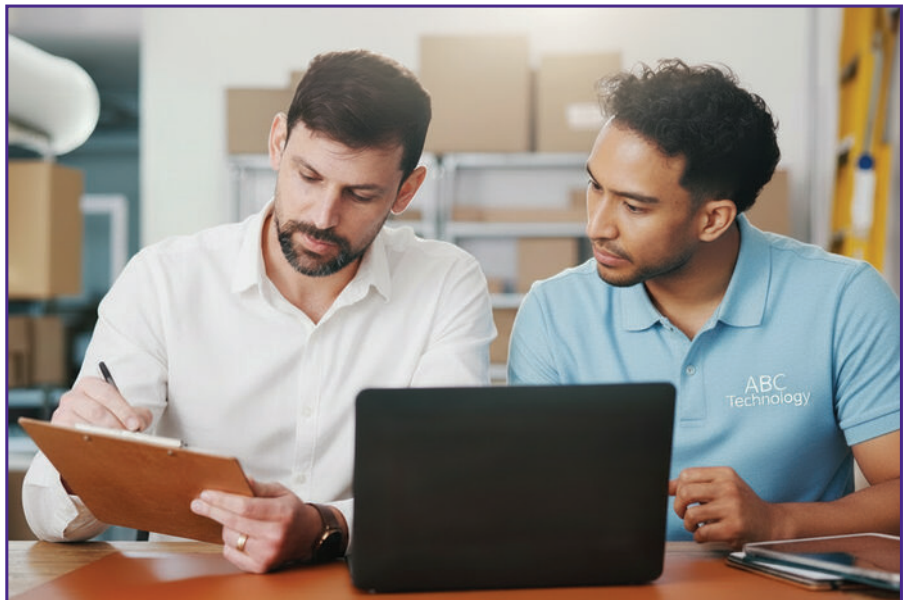
Walk into most companies and you will find sales and service employees living in different worlds. Sales sits over here, service sits over there and never the twain shall meet. Salespeople think service folks do not understand business development. Service people think sales folks make promises they cannot keep. Both sides are probably right. But here is what is crazy: We create this artificial division in our own minds, then act like it is some law of nature.

Let me break down what we typically think sales does:

- Prospecting and building relationships (usually at the decision-maker level)
- Diagnosing customer needs and issues
- Solving those needs and issues
- Proposing solutions and talking money
- Closing the sale
- Ongoing relationship building and upselling/cross-selling

Now, here is what we typically think service does:

- Product and/or service delivery
- Establishing and building relationships (usually at the operational level)
- Solving problems and addressing customer complaints



### ■ Potentially upselling and cross-selling

Look at those lists for a minute. Really look at them. See the overlap? Both functions build relationships. Both solve problems. Both potentially upsell and cross-sell. The main differences are timing and the level of contact within the customer organization.

Those are not two completely different jobs. That is one customer experience that we have artificially chopped into pieces.

### Your Customer’s Reality Check

Here is the thing that should keep every manager awake at night: While sales and service might be separate and distinct in your mind, they are usually not distinct in your customer’s mind. When a customer calls your company, he (or she) does not care if he is talking to “sales” or “service.” He cares about getting his problem solved by someone who understands his business and can help him succeed.

When your service person cannot answer a question about pricing or contract terms, the customer does not think, “Oh, that’s not his department.” They think, “This person doesn’t know what he’s doing.”

When your salesperson promises something that service cannot deliver, the customer does not blame the handoff process. He blames your company.

Your customer sees one company, one relationship and one experience. The fact that you have divided responsibilities based on your internal convenience is your problem, not his.

### The Real Cost of Artificial Division

I have seen this division cost companies in ways they do not even realize. First, there is the obvious stuff — missed upselling opportunities, frustrated customers and relationships that die during handoffs. Service people who could be identifying expansion opportunities do not because “That’s sales’ job.” Salespeople who could be preventing churn by staying involved postsale do not, because “That’s service’s job.”

But the hidden costs are even worse. You are essentially training your people to think in silos. You are rewarding them for staying in their lanes instead of thinking about the total customer experience. You are creating a culture where passing the buck is standard operating procedure.

And here is the kicker: Your competition might not be making the same mistake. While you are fumbling handoffs, they are providing seamless experiences that make you look amateur by comparison.

### What Good Managers Actually Do

The best managers I know understand that the Venn diagram of sales and service is not two separate circles, but there is way more intersection than most people think. And they manage accordingly.

They train their salespeople on service delivery. Not because salespeople need to become service technicians, but because they need to understand what they are promising and how it gets delivered.

They train their service people on business development. Not because service people need to become closers, but because they need to recognize opportunities and understand how to have business-level conversations.

They create compensation plans that reward collaboration instead of territorial behavior. Service people get credit for identifying upsell opportunities. Salespeople get credit for customer retention metrics.

Most importantly, they train both groups to think like business consultants instead of order-takers or problem-fixers.

### The Skills That Cross Over

When you really think about it, the core skills of sales and service are remarkably similar. Both require the ability to listen — really listen — to what customers are saying and what they are not saying.

Both require problem-solving skills. Salespeople diagnose

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business problems and propose solutions. Service people diagnose operational problems and fix them.

Both require relationship-building skills. The conversation might be different, but the fundamentals are the same.

Both require the ability to communicate value. Salespeople communicate the value of making a purchase. Service people communicate the value of the ongoing relationship.

The main difference is not capability — it is context and timing.

### Building Functional Teams

Here is what I have seen work: Instead of thinking about sales teams and service teams, start thinking about customer teams. Create integrated teams where sales and service people work together on the same accounts. Let them sit together, plan together and succeed or fail together. Have your service people participate in initial sales calls. Have your salespeople participate in implementation meetings. Cross-train ruthlessly.

Most importantly, measure and reward the things that matter to customers — total relationship value, customer satisfaction, retention and growth — instead of the things that matter to your org chart.

### The Bottom Line

Your customers do not care about your internal divisions. They care about results. They want to work with people who understand their businesses, can solve their problems and help them succeed.

The companies that figure this out — those that blur the lines between sales and service, and create seamless customer experiences — are going to win. The companies that cling to artificial divisions and continue fumbling handoffs are going to lose customers to competitors that get it.

So, here is my challenge: Stop thinking about sales and service as separate functions. Start thinking about them as different phases of the same customer relationship. Train your people accordingly. Measure what matters. And watch what happens when your customers start experiencing your company as one unified, competent team instead of a collection of separate departments. Trust me, your customers will notice the difference. And so will your bottom line. ■

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