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How Is Your Annual Sales Plan Working So Far?

It seems like yesterday that you were developing your sales plan, and as you moved through the holidays and into January, the strategy seemed invincible. However, most of us get knocked off the tracks by the middle of February. Whether a prospect lost funding, a competitor came out of nowhere to make life difficult for you, or you simply got knocked out by the Flu – you probably got punched in the face and your strategy hasn't gone as planned.

The good news: This happens to everyone and now is the time to correct your course. In fact, the six week point is the ideal time to take action.

The bad news: If you don't modify your plan now, your results will fall short of your goals.

So, what do you do? Below is a four step process to correcting your course and getting back on track to achieving your annual sales goals. Block off two hours for this exercise. Although it's painful for most salespeople to take two hours for planning, do it anyway - this four step exercise will save you dozens of hours throughout the year.

1. Read your plan.

Before jumping to conclusions, invest a few minutes to read the entire plan that you developed. Reading your plan in its entirety will remind you of your thought process in the development of the plan and bring you to a solid paradigm to start making decisions and changes. Take notes if needed, but don't make any decisions or jump to the next step until you've read your entire plan.

(Ok, I know most of you just skipped this step, but don't. Take the few minutes to read the whole plan – I promise you'll gain value from this short exercise.)



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2. Examine your year-to-date activity.

Where are you exceeding expectations? Where are you falling short? Why - what activity has led to these results? Don't worry about modifying the plan yet – just assess the current activity and list the reasons that you're ahead or behind on each metric that matters.

For example, you might be 150% of bookings run rate, but 30% on developing new opportunities. Why? Is it because you've been spending your time closing and implementing business and not enough time prospecting and generating demand?

3. Modify your plan and objectives.

This appears to be a huge task, but it isn't. With the intelligence from step 2, proactively make changes to your annual Sales Plan that will be necessary for you to have a successful year. This isn't done in a random manner – follow the procedure below.

- Do NOT modify your goals. Your goals were set as the final result of your strategy, and other plans in the business were determined by the assumption that you would meet your goals. It's too early to modify any annual goals (unless there is an extreme situation that requires such a drastic move).
- Modify your Key Performance Indicators (KPI). KPIs are metrics that lead to achievement of the goals, so modification is probably necessary by now. For example, let's assume that one KPI was to perform 120 product demonstrations during the year but your pipeline value just dropped 40%. You should probably get more aggressive in creating demand and increase your goal by one or two demos per month for the remainder of the year.
- Tweak your plan. There are plenty of areas of the plan that you can tweak after six weeks of activity. Extra potential obstacles have probably developed; new targets or alliance partners have become attractive; etc. Don't invest too much time on this, but feel free to make some minor changes that will benefit you.



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4. Take action now.

Shock yourself into action. You know the changes that have to happen and have tweaked your plan to reflect those changes – now shock the system. What can you do this week, tomorrow, today? What can you do right now? Don't think too strategically, just do something. Make five calls right now to your highest priority prospects, book a flight to your most active area and fill in the calendar later, schedule dinners at the next trade show, or take the online training course to becoming more effective on your CRM.

Intelligence and a strategic approach are very important to your success, but immediate and tactical action will jump start your shift to your desired paradigm.

In conclusion, virtually every sales professional has some course correction to make in their annual Sales Plan by February – something or someone has knocked you off course. However, very few take a proactive position and do anything about it. They blindly move forward as though everything is moving perfectly – like the guy who gains ½ a pound per week and finds himself 25 pounds overweight at the end of the year. Don't underestimate the importance of this correction. It is imperative to your success to execute the four step exercise described above – and do it now.

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