

# 3 Key Roles for Communications in a Sales Force Transformation



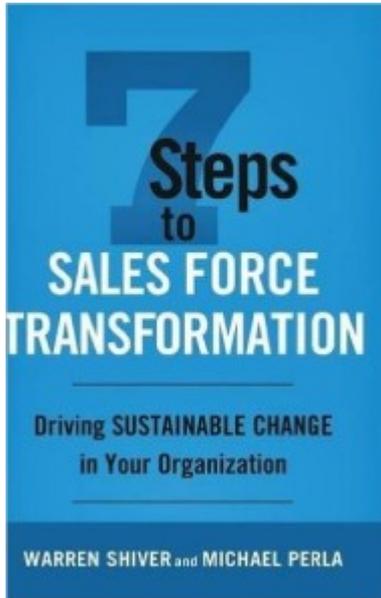
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In our research for our book, [7 Steps to Sales Force Transformation](#), we found that one of the critical factors – what we call “levers” – that can make or break a transformation is [communication](#). Many senior executives are surprised at how often they need to repeat themselves to demonstrate that they are serious about making a change.

Aside from being early and often, for optimal results and resonance, communications should also be authentic and transparent. As a VP of Strategic Accounts eloquently told us, “It’s more successful when we are transparent with the sales team about what we need to do. We put it in business terms for them by saying, ‘we’re getting fewer resources; we are going to do it this way.’ They see what’s driving things. The more transparent we’ve been with what’s happening and what’s driving it, the greater their understanding.”



Here are 3 ways in which communication serves as a valuable lever in your sales transformation efforts:

- 1. Treating Your Sales Transformation Like an Internal Sale** – Our experience and research have taught us that you should handle a sales transformation just as you would a hard-fought, drawn-out sales campaign; but in this case, it's focused internally on your organization. Like an external sales campaign, you need to have not only a sales strategy, but also a relationship strategy for capturing the “votes” of the key stakeholders, be they the sales star who always exceeds his or her “number,” or key members of the executive team. As with any sale, you'll need a strong and compelling value proposition that is tailored to each group of stakeholders. Keep in mind that although some sellers are “coin operated,” others, like that sales star, are motivated by rewards that aren't exclusively monetary. What is the compelling need for change? Be able to describe it in terms to which your audience will relate and find engaging, and constantly reinforce this message.
- 2. Communicating Results as the Transformation Unfolds** – From a communications standpoint, “early and often” is a key principle. In sales, it's easy to get lost in the next deal or making the quarter versus paying attention to a long-term initiative that may take four to six quarters or longer to realize material results. In

executing your internal sales campaign, ongoing communication to the sales organization is critical to ensure that the transformation stays top-of-mind, and to maintain momentum. To do this, build an overall communications plan and calendar that goes deeper than global and/or regional kickoff events. Instead, look to schedule team meetings – weekly, monthly, etc. – six months to a year in advance

- 3. Keep it Simple for the Sellers (KISS)** – At the highest level of a company’s strategy, the complexity issue is very real. In a massive study of 7,600 managers in 262 companies across thirty industries highlighted in the Harvard Business Review, “Why Strategy Execution Unravels—and What to Do About It,” the researchers found that middle managers, when asked about hurdles that impede understanding of the company’s strategy, were four times more likely to cite too many corporate priorities and strategic initiatives than to point to a lack of clarity in communication. Many managers are confused as to what matters most, which is corroborated by the finding that only 55% of middle managers can name even one of their company’s top five priorities. Simplicity does not mean simple; it’s one of the hardest undertakings for the executive team – rigorously defining, prioritizing and communicating focused messages will drive much great adoption with your sales team.

Overall, as Michael Conway, former sales operations executive with Thomson Reuters, told us in an interview, “I see sales as a communication, a relationship. The most important person in communications is not the sender of the message, but the receiver of the message.” As a communications professional supporting a sales force transformation, you need to choose those communication vehicles that will be most effective for each audience.

*About the Authors: Warren Shiver and Michael Perla are the authors of 7 STEPS TO SALES FORCE TRANSFORMATION: Driving Sustainable Change in Your Organization (Palgrave MacMillan). Warren Shiver is the Founder and Managing Partner of [Symmetrics Group](#) and has more than 20 years of sales, management and consulting experience. Michael Perla is a Principal with Symmetrics Group, and has more than 20 years of sales effectiveness consulting and strategic marketing experience.*