



Aligning Your Ag Business: Sales Team Development and Coaching

Challenges are facing the agronomy industry. It is critical to evaluate, rethink and align your business to meet those challenges.

“How do we structure and develop our sales positions to align with the needs and expectations of growers?”

Our Expert for the Sales Team Development article is Jerry Van Oort. Jerry functions as a consultant in assessing talent development needs and designing solutions for clients. Like many of you, he has a lifetime of experience, 30+ years of working in various positions in agriculture: livestock & dairy production, retail ag & wholesale manufacturing positions including sales, training, marketing, operations, general management, and division management. Jerry has worked with cooperatives and corporations: United Suppliers, Land O’Lakes, International Multifoods, AGP/ADM – Consolidated Nutrition.

We have identified Five Key Actions that we believe are necessary to minimize erosion of sales and profits and to position agronomy businesses for growth and prosperity in the future. What is the Fifth Action?

The Fifth Key Action is a successful sales team alignment, development, and coaching process. We have found that designing group and individual training and coaching plans that develop core competencies aligned with each grower market segment, will produce “Trusted Advisor” grower relationships and better sales results.

What are the measurable results to expect from a successful sales team development and coaching process?

Trusted Advisor type relationships with growers produce high-level customer satisfaction and loyalty, and consistent above standard sales performance measured in both leading indicators (sales behaviors), & lagging indicators (sales results). The sales culture created by the development and coaching process will produce exceptional customer experiences.

What are the major components of a sales team alignment, development, and coaching process?

The major stages of an [Ag Sales Team Development and Coaching Process](#) are....

Stage 1: Sales Team Evaluation: [Skills Assessment](#); [Customer Survey](#); [Sales Observations](#)

Stage 2: [Segmenting Sales Team](#): to align with customer segments and development needs

Stage 3: [Training & Development](#) – Levels 1, 2, 3: delivered over two to three years

Stage 4: [Coaching](#) – group and [individual coaching](#) to reinforce positive sales behaviors

Stage 5: [Individual Development Plans](#): 1st 12 months and annually

Stage 6: [Manage the Plans](#): quarterly and annual reviews of plan progress.

Stage 7: [Sales Team Observations](#) and Score-Carding – repeat periodically

Where do we start? What are the tools used and steps taken in completing a [Sales Team Evaluation](#)?

During the completion of the [Sales Model Analysis](#), Action #3, we develop profiles for the sales team positions. The profile development for the “Trusted Advisor” agronomy sales position requires a deep understanding of what progressive growers need and want from their sales agronomist. This understanding will define the critical



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competencies, and the associated knowledge, skills, and behaviors for this position. Each agronomy salesperson will complete a competency based self-assessment developed for the Trusted Advisor profile. The self-assessment data in addition to their supervisor's assessment, grower feedback, and in-field sales observations, will provide the information needed to move into Stage 2, Segmenting the Agronomy sales team.

How does [segmenting the sales team](#) to align with the [grower segments](#) impact the training, development, and coaching?

The competencies and development levels needed to be successful with progressive growers, requires the curriculum content, development plan and coaching plan to be specific to the knowledge, skills and behaviors being developed and the desired learning outcomes. Expectations by progressive growers require the agronomy salesperson to

- Establish trusting relationships using a deep discovery process, and convincingly sell progressive growers on the full value of their agronomic knowledge & technology skills using a consultative selling approach.
- Use digital communications to assist grower crop input's planning, agronomic updates, trial data, and new cropping practices.
- Write and present B2B proposals that meet the growers' specific requirements and demonstrate ROI data on each field.
- Articulate and demonstrate their expertise, Agronomic Knowledge & Technology skills, to gain credibility with progressive growers.
- Lead yearly farm business planning meetings with each progressive growers.

What do you recommend in the coaching process needed to continue development and to reinforce positive sales behaviors?

[Coaching and reinforcement](#) are used to help ensure ongoing focus and to extend the behavior. This helps ensure that performance change is achieved. Coaching sessions can be designed for flexibility. Individual or small-group are options as well as in-person and virtual. Coaching is important both after the initial sales training and during each 12-month development plan period.

- Implement use of a flexible coaching and sales skill development process that is effective throughout an agronomy salesperson's career.
- Sales coach(s) complete Ride-Along (one-half or full days) with agronomy sellers. A minimum of one-half day of coaching & development with each agronomy sales consultant is recommended in each stage of development.
- Sales competency-based scorecard used to evaluate sales calls. Scorecard provides evaluation of sales techniques.
- To build on strengths and fill skill gaps, we recommended reading, completion of online modules and other skill development resources.

What are the important actions to take?

1. Completing a Sales Team Evaluation that measures the agronomy sales team current aptitude (knowledge, skills & behaviors) associated with each core competency.
2. Segmenting the Agronomy Sales Team to align with the three grower segments and corresponding development needs.
3. Implementation of Group and Individual Training & Development Plans for all positions and levels of agronomy salespeople, to be delivered over two to three years.
4. Commit to coaching your sales team to reinforce positive sales behaviors and provide feedback using score-carding for sales team in-field observations.

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