

# Building a Sales Force fit to travel the ‘Last Mile’

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Selling and distributing goods that have social impact is a daunting challenge. Life-changing, life-enhancing and life-saving products and services are being developed at a torrid pace, but inefficient and ineffective sales and distribution continue to confound the most well intentioned organisations.

The terrain over the proverbial ‘last mile of distribution’ is often unforgiving. It requires socially-minded organisations to be *more* organised, trained and disciplined than their counterparts in developed countries. Conditions on the ground demand exquisite attention to product development, financing, human resources, infrastructure, logistics and supply chain.

But what is often overlooked – even neglected – is the last *yard* of the last mile – that three-foot piece of real estate in which the sales transaction takes place. Social enterprise leaders often fail to anticipate, let alone develop and execute a robust sales strategy – including recruiting, training, and managing a sales force – and this failure severely limits the impact they wish to have.

We are sales consultants who, for nearly a decade, have specialised in sales transformation in the developing world. We have a deep and unique experience across multiple sectors (agriculture, energy, water, sanitation, education, health) and types of organisations (NGOs, social enterprises, socially-minded businesses, commercial organisations) in over 20 countries on four continents. Among our many dedicated clients have been Barefoot Power, CleanTeam, Dharma Life, iDE (in multiple countries), Kickstart, M-KOPA, Off Grid Electric, One Acre Fund, Proximity Designs, PSI, RUMA, Sanergy, Sanivation and WAVE Hospitality.

With these partners, we have learned some valuable lessons about making sales work in the developing world. Here's our ‘Top 10’ list, and an additional comment on *significantly* increasing sales impact by harnessing the 50% of humanity often overlooked in the development of outstanding salespeople. While this article is primarily geared toward working in the B2C sector, there are many key points that can be applied to B2B as well.

## 1. Hire attitude, not experience

When companies hire people ‘with sales experience,’ they often find it's the *wrong* experience. In developing countries, the great majority of existing salespeople have only sold within the category of fast moving consumer goods (FMCG). The fast and often aggressive FMCG “product pitch” style of selling doesn’t lead to the deeper conversations required for behaviour change. Disruptive products and services require a selling style that is far more consultative and penetrative; sellers must learn to engage customers in a conversation about the problem to be solved and then skillfully lead them to a life-changing decision.

This style of selling requires new skills. Keep this in mind if you decide to hire people who have already been selling. We have found that, almost always, their prior bad (and even unethical) habits keep resurfacing. Our clients have often found greater success by hiring *eager, talented learners* and then training them to sell well. It's often easier to start fresh with the right people than try to change the wrong ones.

Recruit people with traits that might indicate a predisposition to skills needed for selling: e.g. a small business owner (risk taker), a community opinion leader (already confident), community organisers (people-oriented), college students (aspirational learners), teachers (socially-minded and authoritative). Be wary of hiring people with political ties – they may

look good and be persuasive, but they often arrive with baggage and arm-twisting tactics that might tarnish your brand.

Avoid *passive* recruiting methods. Radio announcements, newspaper ads, posters and handbills will bring in the masses, but you'll have to do a lot of sifting to come up with a few good prospects. Instead, find trusted people who you can ask for referrals. Business owners, NGO workers and village elders are the types of people who may be able to steer you in the right direction. Instead of waiting for people to come to you, go and find the people you want. This *active recruiting* methodology requires more effort, but it pays off in higher productivity and lower turnover.

## 2. Train your salespeople wisely and well

Almost every organisation we work with claims to train their salespeople, but, when we explore the details with them, we find *product* and *process* training, not *sales* training. And when we do find sales training, it is nearly always of the 'tips, tricks, and scripts' variety – delivered via PowerPoint, with minimal practice, and then people hit the field. Rarely does the training prepare people emotionally, mentally and physically to sell.

We've seen worse. Some organisations have proudly told us they *will* train their salespeople, but only *after* their new recruits have proven they can sell. This disturbing and illogical approach virtually guarantees high turnover, a culture of desperation, and the development of bad habits, which are very difficult to dislodge.

Salespeople require *more* training than most other employees because their job is *significantly* more difficult. Salespeople are judged on results they cannot control – they *influence* a sale, but they cannot *control* it – and it requires significant skill and fortitude to succeed. Yes, the job is filled with excitement and a constant sense of opportunity, but it is also fraught with disappointment and, often in the developing world, significant hardship.

This is why product and process training alone is inadequate. A holistic sales training programme is required. Here's our formula – both for analytics and training design:  
 $R=A+C+E$  – *Results = Attitude + Competence + Execution*®.

- *Attitude* training teaches people to recognise the emotional ups and downs that happen on the job, and how to quickly return to a state of mind that generates their most effective behaviour.
- *Competence* training focuses on the art and science of selling: how to approach prospects, probe for customer problems and impact, demonstrate features and benefits by matching them to the problems, close the sale, and remove blocks as they arise.
- *Execution* training teaches the practical strategy required to succeed: territory and prospect management, tracking and analysing input data, using time effectively and avoiding distraction.

Selling expert and author, Neil Rackham, conducted extensive research over 35,000 sales calls in 20 countries and established that 87% of what people learn in classroom sales training is lost within 30 days if no follow-up intervention occurs. We've found that intensive, experiential classroom training is required to instill new learning, AND it requires *months* of careful follow up to make the new learning stick. Don't train people without an effective follow-up plan.

The next step is to *align your field management practices* with what you're teaching in the classroom. Be sure that your field management team is trained to support the sales methodology you've installed. Your field management needs to know how to sell in the way

you want your field team to sell. Otherwise your field team's habits and "tricks" will become the norm of how your salespeople operate.

Sometimes our clients want to set up their own sales academy. If you have the time, the human resources, and the investment to make this happen, it can be a solid foundation for your continued success. One of our clients wanted to cut into agent turnover, so they devoted the resources to set up an academy to drive recruitment and training. Within two months, they reduced their agent attrition by over 40%.

### **3. Train your managers to build your sales team**

Your sales team is only as good as your sales management. Good quality sales managers with all the right stuff are hard to find, *so you'll need to train them too.*

Sales management is different than general management – it cannot be learned from a book. Sales managers need to know how to sell if they are going to be helpful to their sales agents. If they have never had to earn a living as a salesperson it will be exceptionally difficult for them to understand what it takes to be a successful salesperson. They don't have to have been the best salesperson, they just have to know what it *feels* like when one goes through all of the 'ups and downs' experienced in a sales job.

This prior sales experience feeds directly into the requirements of being a sales manager. He must know the basic skills of salesmanship if he is going to be of help to his team. Knowing how to prospect for customers, how to approach and engage them, how to lead a problem-led sales conversation, how to close and handle objections, etc. are all very specific skills that the sales manager must know or else he will be of little use in developing his sales team. Nuances like reading body language, being assumptive, using time wisely, and qualifying are all important details to know how to do.

However, your best salesperson tends not to be the best person to choose as your sales manager. In fact, it rarely is a good choice. Great salespeople are often good because they tend to be *individualistic*: they take full *responsibility* for their performance, they are *demanding* with their time, and are *uncompromising* with their competence. These abilities contrast with a great sales *manager*: he must *praise* the top performers, *encourage* and take care of people when they falter, and *nurture* brand new salespeople and facilitate their growth into productive salespeople. Good sales managers have the patience to work with a broad group of people and assemble them into a team of producers, all while treating them as individuals. They are able to set their ego aside and take pride in helping others win.

Effective sales managers need to be good at recruiting new agents, training them to be competent producers, and coaching them continuously to improve. They need to be good at helping salespeople set personal aims that go beyond the targets wanted by the company. The sales manager needs to be effective at helping people recover from setbacks and disappointments found in selling, of which there are plenty. Above all, they need to manage in a way that salespeople *want* to do the things they need to do to be successful.

Regardless of their CV or previous experience, don't assume your sales manager knows how to do the job well. Don't abdicate the responsibility to lead them, even if you have limited sales or sales management experience. Stick close to new sales managers and train them to your standards. After all, they will build and run the sales engine that will drive your company's performance.

### **4. Use a problem-led sales approach**

Selling suffers from a poor image. The profession is notorious for pitching, arm-twisting, conniving and outright lying. Much of the criticism is deserved. However, selling *can* be performed honestly and respectfully. The problem starts with how *companies* approach

selling, which is by pitching their value proposition – trying to convince people of the product features and benefits.

Literally, in *every* sales transformation project we have led over the last decade, we have *never* found salespeople spending enough time discussing their clients' problems before presenting their 'pitch' for a solution. If customer problems are mentioned, they are usually one-liners, delivered by the salesperson, in a "you already know this" manner. Indeed, this is the greatest sales *competence* mistake.

Early sales results for a new company often appear promising. This is commonly known as the "innovator" and "early adopter" stages, labeled as such by Everett Rogers, PhD, the economic researcher who developed his well-known disruptive innovation adoption curve made famous in The Tipping Point, by Malcolm Gladwell. However, selling becomes more challenging as the third group, the "early majority," are approached and engaged. Selling tends to become more difficult, slow down and even stall because the buyers are more cautious and conservative – they wait for others to act and need lots of proof to buy. Young companies often can't quite figure out why or what to do about stalled sales except throw more people at it.

A product *pitch* succeeds when you're selling to innovators and early adopters, not because you are selling well, but because you're dealing with the most eager buyers. However, as you penetrate beyond these early buyers, a pitching approach begins to show its weakness; the prospects to whom you are selling require a deeper conversation about *their* problems, not *your* products.

To transform sales performance, the sales team must become skilled at helping customers discover, define and deepen the understanding of the *problem* and what it's *costing* the customer not to solve it. This approach helps customers wake up to what they are putting up with, and causes a sense of urgency to find a solution. The now eager and open-minded buyer can receive the presentation of the solution, or the value proposition at this point.

Train your salespeople to follow a well-designed problem-led selling methodology that is executed with discipline. This approach is well matched to behaviour change products and can serve to reduce or even eliminate the need for awareness campaigns.

One client in the smallholder agriculture sector in East Africa was plagued by low sales of its innovative organic fertiliser. The problem, they thought, was that farmers needed to see the proof of concept before they would buy in quantity. However, once the sellers learned a problem-led sales approach, they discovered that farmers were willing to buy without proof. The result was over 300% growth in sales in the four months after the shift in selling method.

Another client wanted to increase sales of drip irrigation, which was a new concept for smallholder farmers in Myanmar. The belief was that the smallholders needed to see the product in action before they would invest in it. After installing a problem-led sales methodology, the client realised a tripling of drip product sales without the need for demonstration farms.

Adopt a problem-led sales method, and you will see your salespeople perform with a relaxed confidence, knowing that they are using the most powerful and persuasive approach in selling and behaviour-change.

## **5. Manage a tight territory plan**

Salespeople tend to move too fast through their assigned territory. They are always on the hunt for 'good' territory and buyers. This phenomenon causes salespeople to drive many unnecessary miles and wander far afield to chase sales. They will capture the 'low-hanging

fruit' – people who are easy buyers – but it is a fool's errand because it wastes time and money and it costs them having even *more* customers.

Sales forces are typically sloppy in how they work territory and therefore lose multitudes of sales they could have made had they executed a systematic prospecting plan. What they miss are all of the benefits of working a tight territory footprint. They never create the buying momentum that is right in front of them. They fail to ask for pre-approach, use names, ask for referrals, and gather testimonials from the people who have bought from them – the practices of which stimulate the local market and drive sales volume and density.

Train and manage your sales force to stay in one area and work systematically to see *everyone* who is a prospect. Consider mixing group selling and door-to-door, which, when combined, provide a highly effective penetration strategy. This systematic, saturation approach generates enormous benefits to the salesperson and the company:

- Buyers are more confident to buy because others nearby have bought.
- Referrals work because of the network that is created within a tight geographical area.
- Callbacks to interested prospects are executed because it is convenient to do so.
- Your brand becomes recognised because of the team's daily visibility in the area.
- Costs are reduced, travel time is reduced, and time in front of more prospects is increased.
- Human wear and tear is reduced because people stay close to home.

We often work with clients whose salespeople have *never believed* that door-to-door selling would be as productive as or even more so than group sales events. However our research usually indicates that many prospects are never reached and, furthermore, the closing percentages from group events are usually lower. Both methods have benefits, so we usually install a mixture of door-to-door and group sales to generate significant selling momentum and coverage within a territory.

When working with a water filter company in Laos in 2012, the CEO proudly proclaimed that they had sold at least one filter in every province in the country. Our response to this was, "Stop doing that." Stretching yourself thin to grab easy sales is an inefficient pursuit that has a great chance of failure because selling requires a focused strategy.

When the client restricted work to two provinces, sales skyrocketed. This did create a new problem, however – their factory couldn't keep up with the demand so they now have to source from another manufacturer next door in Cambodia – a 'good' problem to have.

Determine your prospecting cycle: the frequency you believe your product needs to be offered to your target demographic. Estimate the number of sales presentations that should be made per week by the average salesperson, both in group and door-to-door. Then, estimate an appropriate sized territory in which one representative can work during one prospecting cycle. Once the territory is worked, *rework* it to pick up new sales from prior prospects. Only when a territory is truly saturated should you either add another territory or a second product line.

## **6. Count the right numbers**

Sales results are of paramount importance, but companies and managers are often clumsy and even clueless in how they communicate with sales teams about sales targets and sales results. Teams often report feeling 'harassed' by sales managers about results, and managers in turn report the same treatment by upper management – all in service of 'driving' sales results. The conversation with the salesperson is how much they sold today and how much they are going to sell tomorrow. This banter, though well intended by sales

management, actually interferes with performance by generating too much pressure to perform, which in turn can fuel turnover in the sales force.

Instead, management needs salespeople to track and report on the right input numbers that *lead* to sales and tie it to sales outputs. Management needs to use this information to analyse what is happening so that course corrections can be made and coaching can accurately solve problems that are limiting sales performance. Then management needs to teach salespeople how to look at their input numbers so they themselves can drive their own performance.

To be more in control of sales, every organisation needs to define its unique sales equation – the way that sales are generated by the sales strategy. Then it needs to be applied at the macro level to teams and to individual salespeople who need to know how these numbers work together to create their sales results.

One of our clients in Cambodia relied on the ‘how much did you sell today?’ strategy and suffered under flat sales, high turnover and expensive promotions. They failed to collect three critical pieces of input data that actually drove their sales results: the number of sales events held, the number of people who were invited and the number of people who attended.

When they began collecting this input data, they gained visibility of their sales teams’ activities. The company now had a sales “equation” with visible and measureable “levers” that would drive sales results predictably. Then they were able to direct training and coaching interventions to support the sales teams’ development. The results have been solid sales growth and low churn.

## **7. Use technology wisely**

We live in great times – amazing and inexpensive technology that provides efficiency, visibility, connectivity, communication, tracking, easy payments, and so many other benefits. Many of our clients are relying more and more on this cutting edge technology. It is a contextual shift that must be planned well and introduced with great care. We’ve seen it done well and we’ve seen it done poorly. Often the problem lies in the unintended consequences of a change that has been introduced.

One client sold over 150,000 latrines over five years – one of the best performances ever in this field – but often ran into supply shortages. This resulted in delivery delays and cancellations of sales that had gone stale. In response, they developed a sales and supply app whereby the salesperson registered a sale on a smartphone and then it would be dispatched for delivery according to product availability from multiple suppliers. The upside was that the app is working well. The downside was that it created a big distraction to their sales function, which resulted in leadership taking their eyes off sales results. They have recovered to previous sales levels, but lost about 30% of their potential sales volume over a period of about one year.

Another client installed a sales app that registered leads from a call center and fed them to the field force. Unfortunately, it caused the sales force to run around chasing leads, which resulted in extreme time inefficiencies. While these leads generated some sales, the selling benefits of tight territory management were destroyed. The result has been poor territory penetration, undisciplined salespeople, and results that are significantly less than what they should be. The sales team now depends nearly entirely on these leads for their sales, which is disastrous. The problem was that the technology was not integrated into best field practices and ended up disrupting effective selling habits.

If you introduce technology, realise there are downsides that must be planned and accounted for, including user acceptance and the difficulties encountered when you straddle the old and new systems. Have a well-thought-out introduction to the system and a robust plan for completing its installation. Seek outside advice to help you see your blind spots and downsides that are not easy to spot when you're an insider.

Above all, remember that technology is no substitute for wise management and human connection. While the benefits of instant information, dazzling reports and automation are helpful, be wary of drifting toward replacing human contact with machine. No application will ever replace the bond that exists between people, especially sales managers and their sales teams.

## **8. Be thoughtful about using microfinance (MFI)**

An MFI loan can be a terrific tool if applied thoughtfully, but it is not a panacea. In fact, it can actually interfere with your sales growth in several ways.

Consider the experience of one of our customers in the clean water sector. They had arranged an MFI scheme with a known global player. Unfortunately, our client consistently hit a loan-processing ceiling month after month in many provinces. The impact on the company was that they could not grow the company beyond the loan limit.

A second problem introduced by product loans or MFI is the inability of salespeople to easily alternate between cash and credit sales. While theoretically it should work, attachment to easier selling makes it incredibly difficult to return to more difficult cash sales. Once credit has been introduced as an alternative payment method, it is difficult for sales team to go back to cash-only sales or even a mixture of cash and credit.

Another mistake often made with MFIs is the assumption that the loan officer can do the selling for your organisation, but there are very few examples of this arrangement bearing healthy fruit. In theory, a loan officer can give a presentation, but with other competing priorities the quality of the presentation is often substandard.

In an ideal set up, the MFI would give you access and an introduction to its members, which then would give your organisation credibility. The MFI would endorse your company and product and bonus its loan officers and branch managers on the loans made. You would be sure that you were set up to handle any customer complaints immediately. And, you would always have a backup plan to assure business continuity should the relationship with the MFI go sour.

One client we work with has established a terrific relationship and arrangement with two MFIs. All of the above "ideals" are being met and sales are booming. The MFI works off of a joint liability group arrangement, which provides training to the borrowers before a livelihood loan is issued. During this training period, the MFI allows our client access to the borrowers to promote the products they are selling. Then, when the loan is issued in a few days' time, the borrowers can increase their underlying loan to buy the additional product. It is a system that has worked brilliantly and our client is doing an excellent job managing the relationship with the MFI.

Finally, if you don't really need microfinance to make your organisation fly, stick to cash. If your product will do significantly better with microfinance, be sure you manage it well, segregate your cash and credit sales teams, and take care of the relationship with the MFI.

## **9. Pay a good commission**

Salespeople live on the pointy end of the spear. The measure of their success – and the company's – is based upon how many sales are made. Compensation ranges from 100% variable to 100% salary, to a mixture of both.

Overwhelmingly, organisations in the developing world *underpay* their salespeople. Companies worry over how much is too much and how little is too little, and almost always err on the low side. The result is that low variable earnings lead to dissatisfaction, discouragement and high probability of turnover.

We encourage companies to err on the high side, but do so with the *variable* component. If you pay people a salary, make it enough to keep the rent paid and the lights on, then give them an opportunity to earn the lifestyle they want through variable income. If you do offer a salary, manage the individual closely to assure that they are holding up their part of the agreement and are developing into a worthy employee.

A pay plan by itself will not cause your sales to skyrocket, but it is an important component in the overall package. Take for example a client of ours in the WASH sector in SE Asia who paid its people on a straight commission at \$0.50 per \$36 latrine sold – about 1.5% commission on top of zero salary. Turnover was astronomical. We advised they immediately raise the price of the latrine to \$40 and gave the seller a 10% commission. The leadership simply didn't believe they could make sales at the higher price, but it worked and the programme went on to increase their sales ten-fold.

## **10. Right-size the span of control**

Large teams are hard to manage for one person. We often find up to 30 salespeople reporting to one manager. The result is that salespeople are mostly on their own – if they make it, great; if not, they'll be replaced by the next warm body. Group management is the only alternative and it is highly ineffective.

If a business is serious about sales performance – building a great sales force and eventually scaling – they must invest in the team by providing the best management possible. This includes training managers to be highly skilled at providing coaching to boost performance.

For new managers, start off with three to four direct reports. If they perform well, advance the number to five to seven. If they become really good at what they do, increase direct reports up to ten. Managers who manage ten people well deserve the chance to move into the management of managers.

Of course, you need to make your management approach relevant to your business model. If you are building a *part time* sales force, you will likely need to have large, if not very large teams and spans of control. Therefore the team sizes need to be quite large to make your model work, but expect very high turnover with a few stars. However, if you are building a full time sales force, right-size the sales teams to numbers that will work for each manager and then hold the manager accountable for developing her people.

## Women make great sales agents

In addition to the top 10 ways to improve sales performance, we've included a short section on how gender considerations can drive sales. Donors often require organisations to proactively address the matter of gender in projects, and some impact investors do as well. Rather than looking at these requirements as an obligation, you might well profit from regarding them as an opportunity to build your business.

### Four false beliefs about women and sales

Repeatedly, we encounter four misguided beliefs about women and sales that interfere with a business's ability to grow.

**1. "Women can't make their own buying decisions."** This widely held belief about women is one of the leading beliefs that interfere with sales success (and social impact targets). Typically, when we start to work with our clients, their salespeople pay absolute deference to such local customs that claim "women must ask their husbands before they buy."

We take a different view. We believe that if women (or men) want something badly enough, they will find a way to get it, even within cultural constraints. Therefore, we teach organisations to assume that a woman can make her own decision, and that if she wants to, she can choose to ask her husband.

This seemingly minute shift in attitude can have a significant impact on sales. Salespeople begin believing that women can make their own decisions and thus act accordingly. They make the most of their day and treat women and men the same, thus use their day fully rather than feel discouraged when they find a woman without her husband at home. Salespeople are often surprised the first time when a woman decides to buy on her own or when the husband defers the buying decision to his wife.

We conduct hundreds of infield interviews each year, many of which touch on the role of women as sales people, sales managers and customers. Generally speaking,

**2. "It's impractical to hire women because of their limits."** Women have many responsibilities around the home, which actually do limit both the amount of time they have available to work outside the home, as well as their ability to travel. Sometimes there are religious and cultural barriers that limit movement, to which they must comply. Recently we worked with a client in Nepal where we learned about the cultural restrictions on a woman travelling outside her village and surrounding hamlets. She was by far and away the highest producing sales person out of 150 people, but had to travel with her husband as she worked outside her own village.

We work extensively in East Africa where we find fewer restrictions on women in the workforce when traveling outside their home areas. There are, however, practicalities like transportation and safety considerations.

These limits do not mean that women cannot act as sales representatives or sales managers. There may need to be accommodations, but local focus will actually play to a woman's favour.

- By seeing everyone she can build sales momentum with names and stories of local buyers.
- She can have in-depth conversations with her prospects, making each one of these interactions count.
- By making her time count she'll use the time she does have in a practical manner.
- Being local, she is available to offer effective aftersales care. Having a company representative close by will build the brand, generate goodwill and create more sales.

- She can take care of customers so they buy multiple times. She can build a trusted relationship with the people who buy from her, creating robust brand loyalty.
- Products that are geared toward and used mainly by women likely will be sold more effectively by women.

**3. “Women have no sales experience.”** Thankfully, this is a plus. Often, many women in a village have never had formal work experience, therefore most will have an open mind and be eager to learn. If you have a good training programme you will have subjects who will soak up what you teach them, and you can teach them how to sell, indeed.

Generally speaking, women are naturally good at connecting and conversing, on both logical and emotional levels. They are well suited for problem-led sales conversations because they innately understand the challenges faced by women. You’ll find that women, if given the chance and managed well, will prove to be some of your very best performers.

We work with a direct sales water filter company in SE Asia. After we trained them, a small team of three women figured out how to sell a hugely disproportionate number of products. So we studied the women and learned how they were achieving such amazing sales results. We replicated their excellence in attitude, competence and execution, packaged it, trained it and manage the team into a significant organisational sales transformation. An additional benefit has been the acceptance of women as peers and has resulted in an equal balance of male and female sales representatives.

**4. “Women work differently than men.”** There is much that men can learn from women about working successfully with customers, particularly around activities that build relationships. For many women, the relationship is everything; in selling, the relationship is everything. People buy from those they like and trust.

From an effort perspective, women may not be able to travel great distances, but this plays to their advantage because they work a territory deeper rather than wider. They are less inclined to run around looking for ‘low hanging fruit’ and instead see everyone. Using names, prospecting, gathering referrals, telling true stories, and branding all work exceptionally well in a focused territory. People begin buying because of the impact of such a concentrated effort. While men may be able to rely more on *quantity* of sales input activities, most women must rely on the *quality* of sales interactions.

### **Things to consider when hiring women as salespeople**

There are many reasons why females make great choices as salespeople. Reliability, good communication skills, and commitment are significant considerations that can build a sales organisation’s performance capability. Here are some things to consider when hiring women:

1. **Recruiting.** When selecting and assessing the potential of female sales agents they may not have experience in sales. We believe in recruiting for attitude and willingness to learn, not experience, whether male or female. However, there are ‘life’ experience signs that may indicate good candidates:
  - Community activists and connectors
  - NGO workers or affiliates
  - School teachers
  - Micro business owners
  - Anything that indicates personal discipline and a capacity for learning

The recruitment process can be conducted by men or women, but if you’re building an all-female sales organisation, it naturally follows that female recruiters will be

more effective connectors and communicators with other women. They will be more capable of relating to questions women might have about the job, discuss sensitive concerns, and can most likely frame your opportunity to appeal to women.

- 2. Training & ongoing support.** With female agents, you may need to consider availability and mobility. Since many homestead responsibilities fall to women, training and sales meetings may need to be formatted to match these considerations. For instance, sales training may need to be broken into modules that can be delivered locally rather than a multi-day residential training. In fact, this manner of delivery can support more effective learning of sales practices when it is combined with thoughtful field training.

Sales strategy will likely need to be altered to match female agents as well. One-on-one personalised sales connections or small group meetings, such as party plans, are very effective. And selling products that are geared toward women are likely to be sold more effectively by women. In India, one client sells feminine hygiene products. It's more than just selling a product – it's teaching women about a change in behaviour that requires very personal conversation, one that only a woman could have with another woman. However, women should be retained also to sell a broad spectrum of products.

- 3. Performance measurement.** When considering women in your sales force, you may need to assign a smaller territory footprint due to travel limitations, which means there will be fewer potential buyers. With this condition you would be wise to embrace a depth strategy, one that sees everyone in a territory, builds a multi-touch customer experience, and provides a series of products for sale, or a renewal payment. Another consideration is to build your aftersales customer experience into this model and enable your female agents to fulfill this role.

Identify performance metrics that measure your business model, and set role activities and expectations to fit male and female agents. This approach should consider time availability, logistics, cultural considerations and safety sensitivities. Then set up these roles with clear job descriptions, input and output metrics, incentives and rewards.

## **Final thoughts**

Increasing productivity and driving results from a sales force is hard work whether it is in the commercial or developing world. The sales function is as important as any other in a business, and demands the full attention required to make it a robust and whole component of your organisation. It takes enormous determination and commitment to fundamentals, many of which are outlined above. We strongly recommend that you plan carefully and pilot any changes you want to make before you attempt to roll them through your organisation.