Sales Methodology 101 for IT Staffing Firms:

Your 6 Big Questions Answered

MENEMSHAGROUP

About the Author

Dan Fisher is the founder and owner of Menemsha Group, a sales enablement solutions company dedicated to helping IT staffing and service firms improve sales win rates, accelerate their sales cycles, and increase overall quota attainment. Dan is a 20-year sales veteran and thought leader in the IT staffing and consulting industry and has authored the only proprietary sales methodology designed exclusively for selling IT staffing services.

In 2014, Dan launched Quota King, a SaaS-based sales application that plugs in with your CRM that visually and intuitively prompts sales reps to follow and execute a repeatable and scalable sales methodology in a wizard-like fashion, all from within their CRM/ATS application. In 2015 Menemsha Group launched a SaaS-based online learning management system to help IT staffing firms improve their new hire onboarding and training experience and to accelerate new hire ramp up.

Dan is also a popular speaker at industry events like TechServe Alliance and Staffing World, as well as sales conferences and leadership retreats. Dan has worked with over 350 IT staffing and professional services firms and has invested over 5,000 hours in coaching thousands of sales professionals in the IT staffing industry.

Prior to launching Menemsha Group in July 2008, Dan worked for Kelly IT Resources, Alliance Consulting, and Oracle in various sales and sales leadership roles.

Most IT staffing firms have no idea how to replicate their sales success. If pressed, even the most successful sales reps would have trouble pinpointing exactly what makes them so successful. It just comes instinctively.

For the hundreds of small IT staffing firms across the country stuck below their revenue goals and trying to scale, this is a problem.

It's one thing to take a deal from opportunity to close. It's another thing entirely to identify the steps you went through and the techniques and tools you used along the way, so that other people can replicate your success. This is what sales strategists, sales trainers, and sales effectiveness consultants like me talk about when we talk about a sales methodology.

Does your IT staffing firm need a sales methodology? Here are a few warning signs:

Warning Sign #1: Most of Your Sales Reps Aren't Hitting Their Quotas

If 80 percent of your firm's revenue is coming from 20 percent of your reps, clearly the winning tactics your top reps use are not making their way to the rest of the team.

Warning Sign #2: Sales Effectiveness is Inconsistent Rep to Rep

Take a closer look at how your top few reps have performed over the last six or eight months. Pay attention to the following metrics.

- Raw dials to connects.

- Connects to qualified leads (hiring managers).

- Qualified leads to meetings.

- Meetings to new job orders.

- Submittals-to-interviews ratio.

- Interviews-to-offers ratio.

- Sales win rate percentage.

Now look at your entire team in each of these areas. How do your core performers compare to your top performers? Are the results all over the map? If so then your numbers are telling you it is time to implement a sales methodology.

Imagine how your revenue would grow and your business would scale if you could improve the overall effectiveness of your entire team.

Warning Sign #3: One Branch Is Outperforming the Others — By a Lot

Does this sound familiar? Your headquarters in Boston is growing revenue at a steady clip while your Dallas branch bounces up and down — and your D.C. branch can't seem to get off the ground at all.

Why is there such a discrepancy between locations? It's not because there's less demand for IT staffing services in those areas. All indications are that IT staffing is a healthy industry, expected by most experts to continue to grow through 2016 and beyond. (For more details, read my recent article, "Can IT Staffing Firms Make More Money in 2016?")

The problem here is that every rep, at every location, is doing their own thing. Some reps are more effective than others, but none of them have a consistent methodology guiding their actions. Without consistency, IT staffing firms can't scale. Lack of a sales methodology is one of the primary reasons so many firms have plateaued, despite the huge opportunity in the industry.

Warning Sign #4: Your Gross Profit Margins are Inconsistent Rep to Rep

How is it possible that a sales rep selling the same services for the same company to virtually the same customers is averaging 22 percent gross profit margins and your other sales rep is averaging 27 or even 30 percent gross profit margins? Lack of a sales methodology.

Just imagine the impact on your bottom line if all of your reps averaged 27 percent margins!

Your 6 Burning Questions About Sales Methodology Answered

The concept of a sales methodology can be confusing. It's especially confusing when sales experts like me throw around similar-sounding terms like "sales process."

Here, we'll delve into some of the details, answering some of the most common questions IT staffing professionals like you have about sales methodologies.

Question 1: What Is a Sales Methodology and How Is it Different From a Sales Process?

In one of my recent ebooks, "5 Ways to Drastically Overhaul Your Sales Training Program and Boost ROI," I noted that one of the first things you should do to improve your IT staffing firm's sales program is to map out your sales process. If you read that ebook, you're probably thinking, "I've done that, so I'm all set. Right?"

Wrong. The concepts are related, but having a sales process does not mean you have a sales methodology — or vice versa.

- A **sales process** *defines the steps that a sales rep and a customer need to take to complete the purchasing process, from opportunity to close.*

- A **sales methodology** *describes how to execute each step within your sales process, and details how your sales rep will move the prospect from one stage of the sales cycle to the next.*

A Sales Methodology is How You Execute the Steps in Your Sales Process

Think of your sales process like a map. A map will show you the route from point A to point B, but if you encounter an obstacle along the way, your map won't help you get past it. Simply knowing your destination lies over a tall mountain isn't enough. To get over that mountain, you need climbing equipment and the skills to use them. That's your sales methodology.

Your Sales Methodology Comes from Your Sales Philosophy

My partner here at Menemsha Group, Gerry Gadoury, explains that a sales methodology is "externally focussed," that is, "It expresses how you engage your prospects and your customers." Because of this, your sales methodology emerges naturally from your sales philosophy and values.

For example, at Menemsha Group, we firmly believe that IT staffing prospects expect the time they spend with a salesperson to be a valuable use of their time. So when you look at our call plans, how we execute a call, or how we conduct a sales meeting, you'll see our emphasis is always on providing value.

Our sales philosophy and values are baked into our sales methodology.

Question 2: Why Will a Sales Methodology Help My IT Staffing Firm Sell More Effectively, Close New Accounts and Grow My Revenue?

On any map, there are a million different ways to get from point A to point B. It's the individual steps along the way that make all the difference. In the IT staffing business, customers judge you on how you present yourself and how you engage them; your methodology is how you differentiate from the competition.

Here are three other ways having a sales methodology will help your IT staffing firm achieve sustainable, repeatable growth:

1. Sales Methodology Accelerates New Hire Training & Onboarding

Most IT staffing firms try to hire salespeople with industry experience and/or a "proven track record." They hire them, provide company and CRM/ATS training, have them shadow a top performer on sales calls and sales appointments, and then leave it up to them to go figure it out. Instead of waiting for your reps to figure it out you can accelerate new hire time to productivity by providing them with a proven set of best practices and approaches that you already know works.

Train new reps on your sales methodology and reinforce the training by giving them a sales playbook that supports your methodology on day one. Armed with a sales methodology, your new reps will "figure it out" much quicker.

This approach is also scalable; you can put as many reps through methodology training at the same time as you need. With shadow training, how many new hires can feasibly shadow your top performer at the same time?

Finally, training your new hires on a proven methodology will deliver predictable results. Without a sales methodology you can't determine what is working and what is not working across your sales team.

2. A Sales Methodology Will Bring Consistency to How You Sell

When your firm follows a sales methodology based on best practices consistently, from lead to lead, and opportunity to opportunity, you will improve your sales effectiveness and efficiency. You will close more deals more often and increase your deal size without having to increase your sales activity output.

The prevailing wisdom in the IT staffing industry is that the only way you can make more deals is to make more calls. A good sales methodology turns that idea on its head.

3. A Sales Methodology Allows You to Build Consistent Training and Hiring Programs

You can construct a new hire onboarding and training program around the execution of your sales methodology. This will ensure that all your sales reps — no matter where they're based geographically — get trained in the same, consistent manner and they get trained to follow and use the same sales techniques.

With a sales methodology, successful sales tactics become easier to replicate, allowing your firm to scale and grow. The reps that follow your sales methodology will know when they've successfully completed the steps in the sales process to move forward.

Question 3: How Can a Sales Methodology Directly Impact My Results?

According to one Accenture study, sales reps who use a sales methodology 90 percent of the time achieve 70 percent of their targets. On top of that, the study found, 92 percent of reps who consistently used a sales methodology achieved their quota. We've found that, on average, only 50 percent of IT staffing sales reps are meeting quota. What percentage of your sales reps are meeting or exceeding quota?

The example below shows a sales methodology in action. On the left, a sales rep without a methodology struggles to get a follow-up meeting with a prospect. The rep on the right, on the other hand, is following a sales methodology that dictates she should always provide value in her interactions with prospects. Which rep do you think will move the deal forward?

Traditional Staffing Sales Rep	Sales Rep with Sales Methodology
Sales Rep: "Hi Mr. Customer. This is Jim calling from HighTech Staffing Inc. I was just calling because I will be in your neighborhood next week and I just wanted to see if you would have 15 minutes to get together." **Customer:** "I have a pretty busy week and I don't have any immediate needs. Try me back in 3 months." **Sales Rep:** "I understand. I want to get a chance to see your work environment and better understand your culture and your needs so that when the need does come up we will be ready. And again, I promise to keep it to only 15 minutes."	**Sales Rep** "Hi Mr. Customer. This is Jennifer calling from Acme Staffing Solutions. I'm calling today because I have been researching you and your company and I understand as the Director of Network Architecture you're responsible for managing the network and systems rebuild initiative, is that correct?" **Customer:** "Yes, that is correct, where did you get that information?" **Sales Rep:** "Like I said, I have been doing my research reading your web site, LinkedIn page and watching a few podcasts and talking to others. The reason for my call is we recently completed a network rebuild for XYX Company and we were able to reduce their network support and maintenance costs by 12%. I'm calling today because I have a few ideas to share with you that could make an impact on your rebuild initiative. Could we take a few minutes to talk?"

With a sales methodology, win rates go up, sales cycles are shortened, sales reps meet their quotas, and the entire team feels confident no matter what situation they find themselves in with prospects. This is why one of the IT staffing firms we worked with, Selectek, was able to increase revenue by over $1 million and gross profits by 26 percent within a year after implementing our sales methodology.

Question 4: What Are the Key Elements to Include in a Sales Methodology?

So now you know what a sales methodology is, why your IT staffing firm needs one, and how it will help you achieve your revenue growth goals. But how, exactly, do you go about building your sales methodology?

Here are the basic steps involved:

- **Map out your firm's sales process.** Head back up to question 1 if you're unclear on the difference between a sales process and a sales methodology.

- **Qualification criteria.** This defines the information needed from the prospect in order to determine if the buyer is worth pursuing and if we can help the prospect.

- **Break down each step of your sales process into individual "customer touch points," in which the sales rep interfaces with the prospect across each stage of the sales cycle.**

- **Plan how you want your sales reps to execute each step and "touch the prospect" based on your sales values, balancing those values with the best possible technique for achieving your desired outcome.**

An Example

Let's assume you're at the stage of the sales cycle in which your customer must schedule an interview with your candidate. Your sales methodology might detail any of the following:

- The point in the sales cycle the at which the rep attempts to schedule the interview.

- What medium (phone, email, face to face, other) the rep should use to schedule the interview. A different methodology probably applies for each medium

- A call plan that dictates what information is needed by the sales rep prior to asking the client to schedule the interview.

- A call script for what the sales rep will say to schedule the interview.

- Rebuttals to common objections for when clients resist scheduling the interview (fail to commit to the next step in the sales process).

As you can see, a well-defined sales methodology can get very specific for each step in the sales process. The more specific it is, the more repeatable — and therefore trainable — it is.

At Menemsha Group, we help IT staffing firms implement a sales methodology that includes four main "buckets," with detailed steps for each area: new account development, opportunity management, key account development, and sales metrics.

Question 5: How Do I Get My IT Staffing Firm's Sales Team to Follow a Sales Methodology?

It's human nature to resist change — perhaps for sales reps most of all. But If no one follows your sales methodology, it won't have much practical value for your IT staffing firm. How do you get your existing team of set-in-their-ways sales reps to follow your new methodology?

The most common mistake made by companies when they implement a new methodology — or a new anything, really — is overemphasizing the design and launch of the program and under-emphasizing what comes after. In other words, they are not prepared for the amount of effort it takes to sustain and reinforce the change so it permeates the entire organization.

To make a new sales methodology "stick," first ask yourself three questions:

1. What is the degree of change required by your organization for the methodology to be implemented and adopted?

2. How much change management is needed to sustain and support the sales team so they adopt the methodology long term?

3. What level of support is the executive leadership team able and willing to commit to for supporting their sales team in the adoption of the new sales methodology?

Remember, change is a process, not an event. Sweeping edicts handed down from the corner office don't usually get very far. As a leader, you need to map out what your sales team can expect from their managers, including how they'll be supported, how they'll be coached, and how they'll be evaluated on what they've learned in their training on the new methodology.

At Menemsha Group, we recommend creating a user adoption plan that includes things like:

- A consistent and unified communication from the entire management team that supports the changes needed to implement and support the program permeating your entire organization.

- Weekly coaching calls between managers and reps.

- Monthly coaching calls between the sales leader and sales managers.

- Quarterly workshops for everyone, including senior leadership, to practice and reinforce the methodology.

- Monthly meetings hosted by executive leadership sharing best practices and success stories.

For change to take hold, everyone, from the top on down, needs to be bought in and on board.

(For a more detailed discussion of the concept of change management and how it applies to IT staffing firms, read my recent article, "How to Train a Sales Team the Doesn't Want to Change.")

Question 6: If I Don't Have a Sales Methodology, Where Can I Get One?

In question 5 I described a process for building your own sales methodology. Understandably, most IT staffing firms have neither the time, the resources, nor the expertise to complete this process on their own. Very few IT staffing firms have a sales methodology which is why it is so difficult for them to differentiate while the most successful IT staffing firms either built their own or use a third party sales methodology.

So which third-party methodology should you choose?

Legacy Sales Methodologies

There are a number of well-known and widely-practiced "general purpose" sales methodologies on the market. You may have heard of some of them: SPIN Selling, Solution Selling, the Challenger Sale. These approaches all have their strengths and weaknesses, but here's their biggest weakness: They're designed for companies that are selling multi-million dollar solutions. Does that sound like your IT staffing firm?

A Sales Methodology Custom-Built for IT Staffing Businesses

At Menemsha group, we have designed a proven methodology exclusively for selling IT staffing services. I created our sales methodology after spending more than 15 years selling and leading sales teams in the IT staffing and consulting industry. It works for anyone selling IT staffing services in a customer facing role — rookie or veteran — who wants to demonstrate value to their customers.

Our sales methodology is designed to minimize customer objections, uncover customer needs, and build value for the customer while providing insights into how buying decisions are made. For your sales team, it will provide genuine skill development in a variety of areas, along with a platform for making permanent changes in sales behaviors.

Menemsha Group provides IT staffing firms with a proven methodology for:

- Market definition

- Value proposition

- Lead generation and qualification

- Objection handling

- Lead nurturing

- Opportunity qualification

- Opportunity management (managing the sales cycle)

- Key account development (account planning)

- Sales performance management (Sales metrics)

If you're interested in learning more about how our sales methodology helps IT staffing firms like yours scale, grow, and exceed your revenue goals by enabling your team to follow sales best practices consistently and effectively, the first place to start is in our ebook "Sales Training That Sticks: 3 Ways Menemsha Group Helps IT Staffing Firms Train Better, Sell Better, and Grow."

In this ebook, you'll not only learn about our proven sales methodology, but you'll also learn how we use change management techniques to ensure our programs take hold in your organization. For your copy of this free ebook, click on the banner below.

How to make your sales training stick [new guide!]

What's the point of having a sales methodology if your reps aren't following it today, tomorrow, and 10 years from now? Learn how to make your sales training stick.

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