



Sales Engagement Trends

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New year, new strategy.

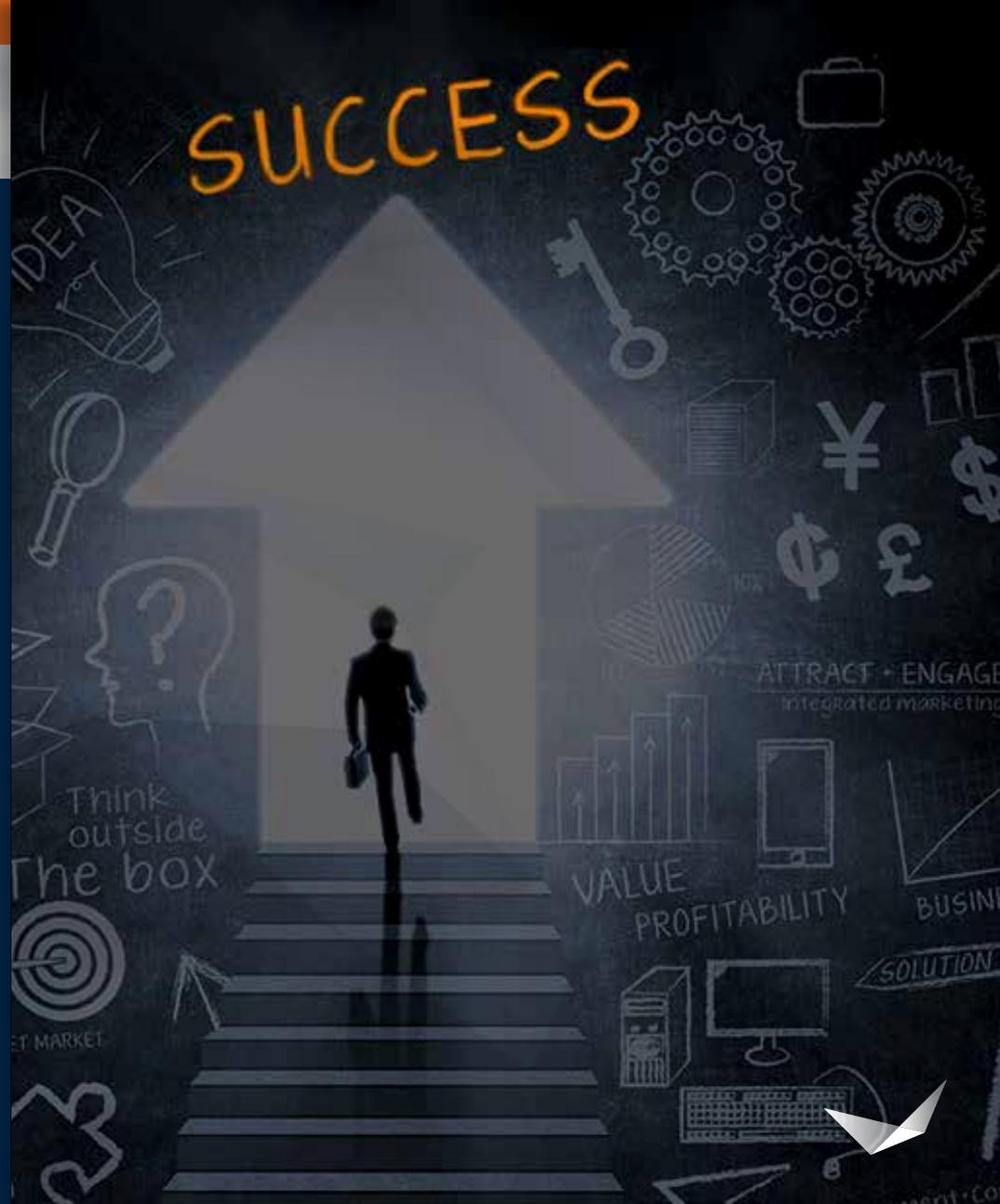
If you're in sales, you're probably feeling stuck in the middle. On one hand, you have a huge employee engagement movement going on. HR departments are focusing on developing leaders and recognizing achievements with substantial budgets. On the other side, marketing departments are using technology and creativity (and also large budgets) to connect with and educate customers about their products, solutions and brands.



The trend is to challenge every dollar spent on sales compensation to maximize ROI. HR departments are treating salespeople like all other employees. And customers are going online to avoid anyone with sales in their title.

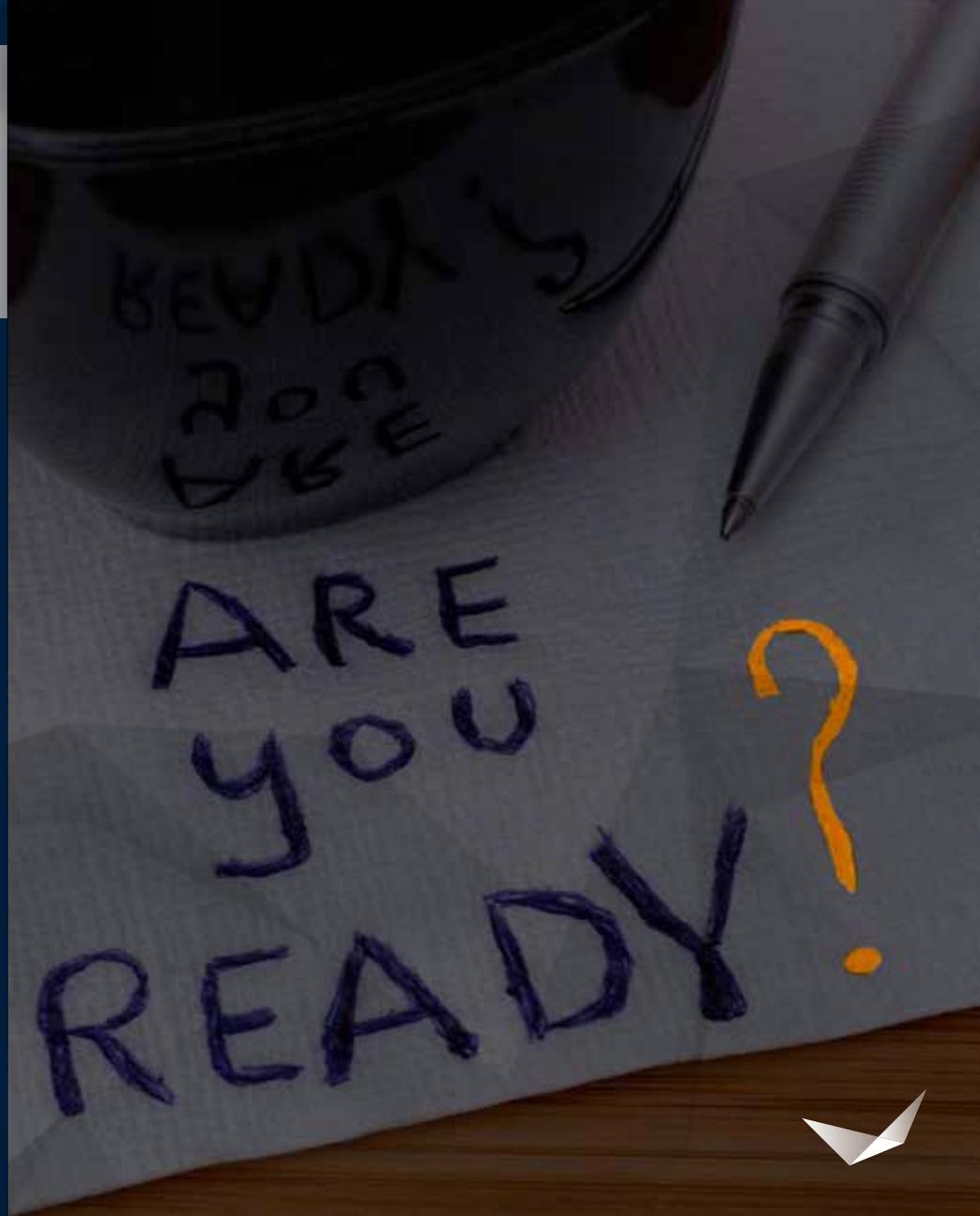
The bottom line?

Any salesperson that doesn't add value, understand his or her products, or help their customer through the buying process will be irrelevant, ignored and likely, let go.



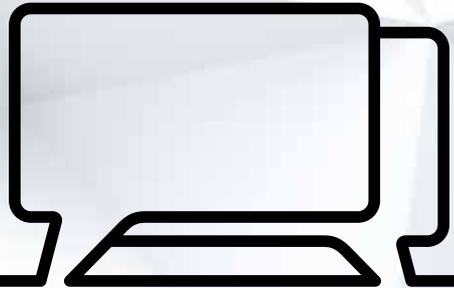
So what are top sales leaders doing differently this year?

Based on our research and applications we see in our customers' leading sales initiatives, here are eight trends to consider as you strategize for the year.



1. Fast brain, slow brain

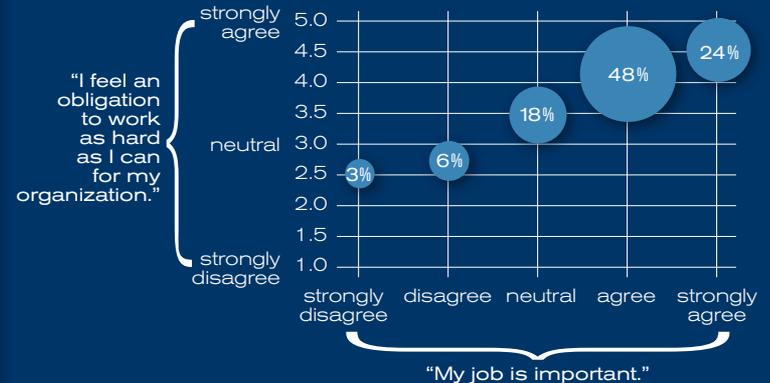
Whether you are trying to connect with your own sales team or with customers and prospects, understanding how the brain makes decisions can unlock more powerful sales presentations and lead to better results. Pairing the right mixture of dramatic, creative stories and visuals with the right amount of data to back up your ideas and claims, will result in your message being believed – and most importantly – remembered.



Behavioral economists use the term “anchor” to describe the emotional starting point your audience has in their minds. A simple analogy is suggested retail price. Retailers know the power of suggesting a high starting point and focusing more on the discount versus the final cost. Your anchor point may be price. It could be results. Or improvement in performance. Setting the right expectations for your team and your customers will result in a more provocative conversation – and will set the tone for a better long-term relationship.

2. Meaningful work

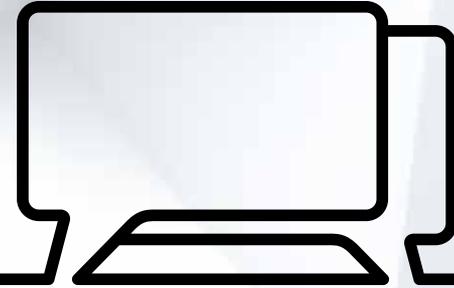
According to BIW's New Rules of EngagementSM research, salespeople who feel they are part of something bigger than just a paycheck will have more intensity in their work. This can inspire them to set higher goals – and then work harder to achieve those goals.



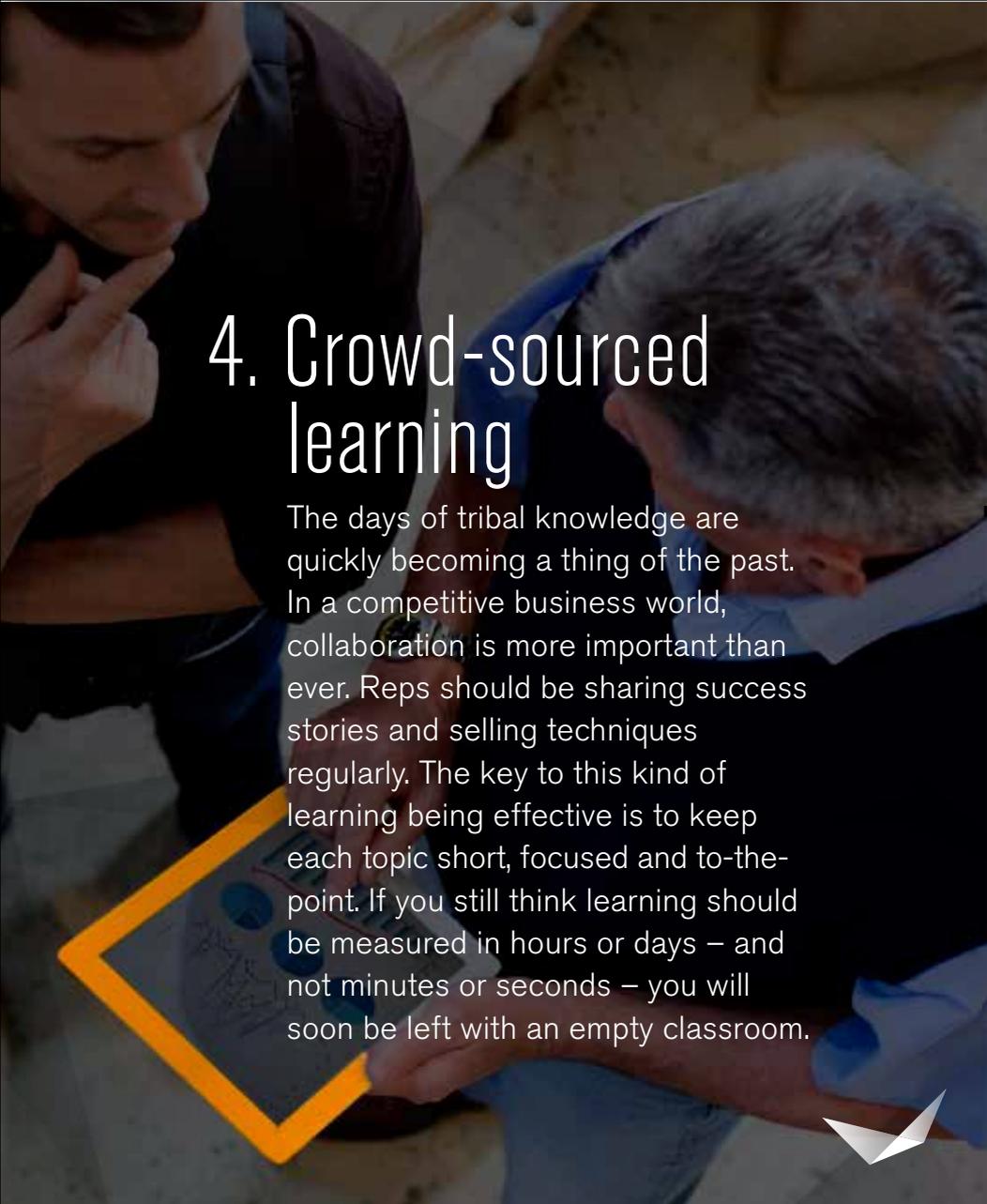
Sales reps in the medical device industry tend to have a higher level of meaning in their work than most people. Products they sell can save lives for patients on a regular basis, which is intrinsically motivating. So how do you increase intensity when the work you're doing isn't saving lives? One sales team moved beyond spreadsheets and emails and visually showed each rep how he or she was performing on a regular basis, making each update a strong reminder of the important work they were doing. Another sales team used immersive storytelling at their annual meeting to share powerful accounts of success.

3. Self-selected goals

Even with data that supports the power of self-selected goals, sales leaders are still reluctant to turn control over to their reps. We know that in the long run, quotas and minimum standards aren't going away. But using self-selected goals to drive short-term improvement is the perfect way to allow reps to challenge themselves to achieve their personal best.

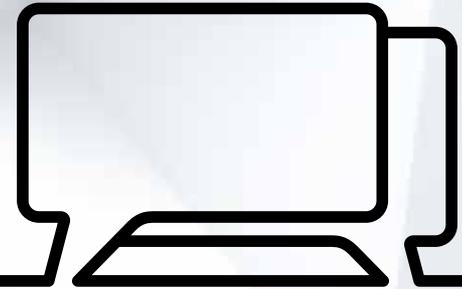


Tracking and rewarding for achieving short-term self-selected goals may require specialized technology and increased reporting but adding this strategy to your game plan can yield double-digit ROI. Not only that, you'll have a better chance of engaging middle of the pack reps who are usually the hardest to motivate.



4. Crowd-sourced learning

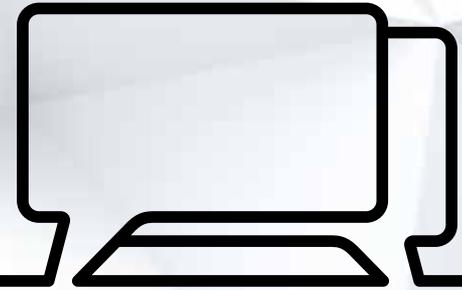
The days of tribal knowledge are quickly becoming a thing of the past. In a competitive business world, collaboration is more important than ever. Reps should be sharing success stories and selling techniques regularly. The key to this kind of learning being effective is to keep each topic short, focused and to-the-point. If you still think learning should be measured in hours or days – and not minutes or seconds – you will soon be left with an empty classroom.



Thanks to new apps like SkillFitness[®], sharing best practices and sales presentation techniques has never been easier. Any time, on any device, sales reps watch the experts demo a product or tell a story, then try to beat the expert by uploading their own video. Once those are shared, the best examples rise to the top to help your whole team see what's working.

5. CRM adoption and expansion

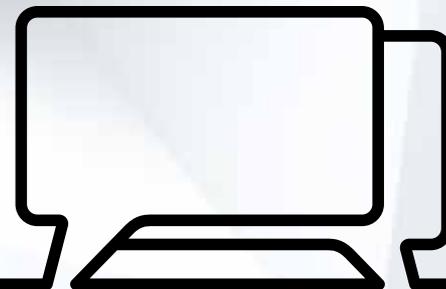
Sales leaders of teams large and small are invested in CRM systems because they find endless benefits and are passionate supporters of the concept. Why then, are those responsible for updating the data and tracking activity not 100% on board?



We know from the study of behavioral economics that humans tend to choose the easiest way to complete tasks and solve problems. While many apps gamify your CRM for short term results, sustained adoption and usage requires longer-term strategies (that ultimately benefit your reps as much as they benefit you). Also, most of these plug-and-play apps rely on intrinsic motivation and game mechanics to create competition. It might be time to try introducing extrinsic rewards and goal-setting to ensure lasting success.

6. Salesperson as customer

Whether your salespeople are your own employees, or they work for a channel partner of yours, they often act like customers. It's a fact of life that we need to sell the salesperson before they have the skills, abilities and confidence to effectively connect with customers.



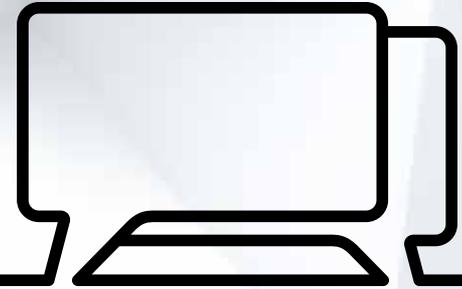
One recent survey targeting independent channel sales reps shows that having an involved and enthusiastic field sales force makes your channel reps almost 15% more excited, proud and motivated to participate in your programs and sell your products.





7. Customer as salesperson

Think about it – when you are buying something big or small, who do you trust the most? A salesperson who has financial stake in your decision? Or a current customer who provides an unbiased online review?

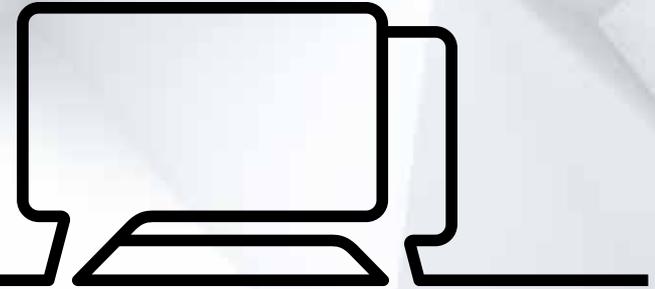


This new reality means it's critical to connect your sales efforts to your marketing message. Use training and communications to ensure your salespeople understand key differentiators and stay up-to-date on marketing offers. And consider working with a strong agency that can get your message to key influencers along the way.

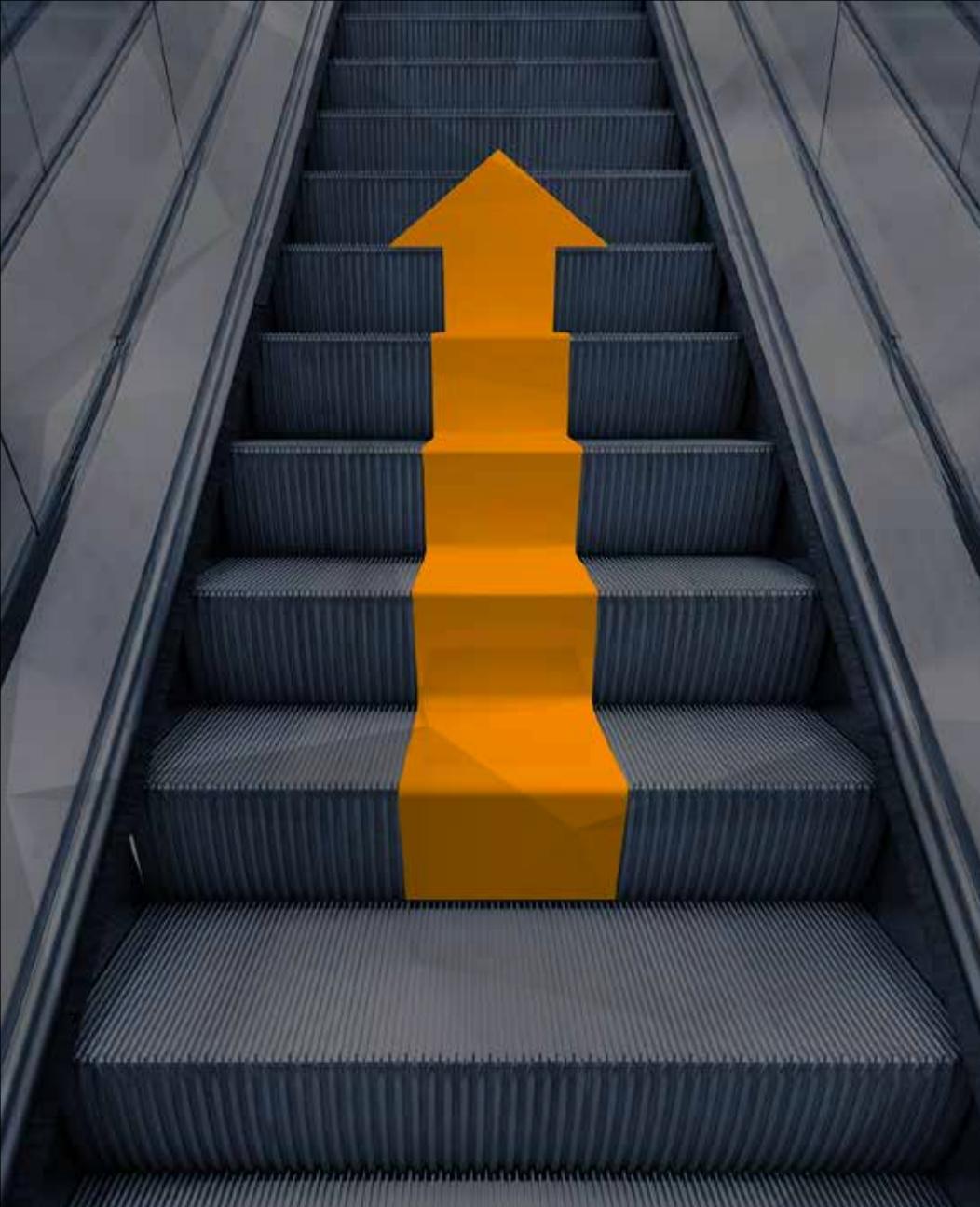


8. Knee-jerk vs. sustained performance

If you have the word sales in your title, your inbox is filled daily with promises of quick fixes to all of your problems. Short-term solutions can sometimes be building blocks to sustained performance but the best sales leaders carefully and thoughtfully plan their overall strategy before committing to any one solution.



Moving beyond spreadsheets and pep talks takes a little more planning but yields massively higher results. Your top performers might be motivated to achieve their goals and max out their comp plan – but at some point more money is not the answer. Communicate, educate, motivate and update your team to engage both sides of the brain and get the most sustainable results out of everyone.



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