The Sales Process Evaluation Guidebook

How to Create a Winning Sales Process Part 2

A step-by-step guide to identify, diagnose & execute sales process improvement

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Courtesy of TopOPPS

If you haven't defined and agreed internally on what “good” looks like, how do you know if you're doing a good job?

How do you measure success? How do you hold your sales teams and internal partners accountable? Your Sales Process formalizes the “right way” to sell for your organization. In the absence of a “right way” your sales teams and customers fend for themselves and revenue suffers. All of the best Sales Operations & Enablement executives I have encountered agree on this priority and deploy it as a mission #1 when working with a new organization. Gone are the days (thankfully) of debating the FACT that a best-in-class, automated Sales Process is a game changer. Unfortunately, although everyone agrees it’s important, not all sales organization have an honest assessment of how they are currently operating versus their ideal state and have deployed the right tactics to completely automate the process for their sales teams.

The struggle is real and the loss is profound.

Taking the time to really dig in, create and/or improve a winning process should be a priority for every sales organization. The cost of ignoring it is too high – squandered marketing investment, lost selling time, closed-lost prospects, crazy high new hire ramp time and/or an eroding customer base. Without a formal, rigorous, automated, winning sales process everything is so much harder. Even those of us with confidence in our current process are always looking for ways to improve it. For many sales organizations already realizing the benefit of a rigorous process, the way to further accelerate is through automation. The traditional way of forcing reps to update checkboxes will only get you so far. My hope is that this guidebook can either be a complete wake up call for necessary change or a reminder that constant learning and improvement is always needed.

Getting the timing right on getting it right.

Creating and automating a winning sales process is the best investment you can make for your business NOW. On the surface, it seems like a lot of work and as a result organizations push it off until "next quarter". The truth is that you already know so much of what needs to be done - you are executing the "right way" at least some of the time. At TopOPPS, we partner with sales organizations that range anywhere on the sales process spectrum. We are able to bring sales organizations from zero to an automated, winning process in a few short weeks by organizing, improving, and automating the "right way" that already exists. As my friend and esteemed colleague Dan Baker always says "if you don't have the time to get it right the first time, what makes you think you will have the time to do it again?" You don't ever get an "again" with your prospects - they are precious and you want to ensure your teams are "getting it right the first time."

How to get where you want to go starts with knowing where you are.

After collecting decades of research, CSO Insights has a Sales Relationship Process (SRP) Matrix that can help you identify where your sales organization stands currently. There are three parts of this exercise. (You can see the full report by accessing the 2017 World Class Sales Practices Report.)

1. **Sales Relationship:**
    a. Approved Vendor—You have acceptable products/services and are generally one of several companies the customer can buy from.
    b. Preferred Supplier—You have a successful track record of delivery, typically an expanded number of contacts in the buying firm, and knowledge of how customers use your products/services.
    c. Solutions Consultant—You may or may not have this word in your title, but this level is characterized by a decreased focus on your products/service offerings and increases awareness/knowledge of the customer's business, issues and challenges.
    d. Strategic Contributor—Similar to the prior level but having additional industry and/or domain expertise; this knowledge is recognized as true added value to buyers, and as a result, you are often asked to participate in and contribute to internal discussions.
    e. Trusted Partner—Today, a "partner" may also be thought of as a Trusted Advisor. In addition to all the product/service, application, business, industry and domain knowledge, you have a unique understanding of both your own and the buyer's organization and decision-making.

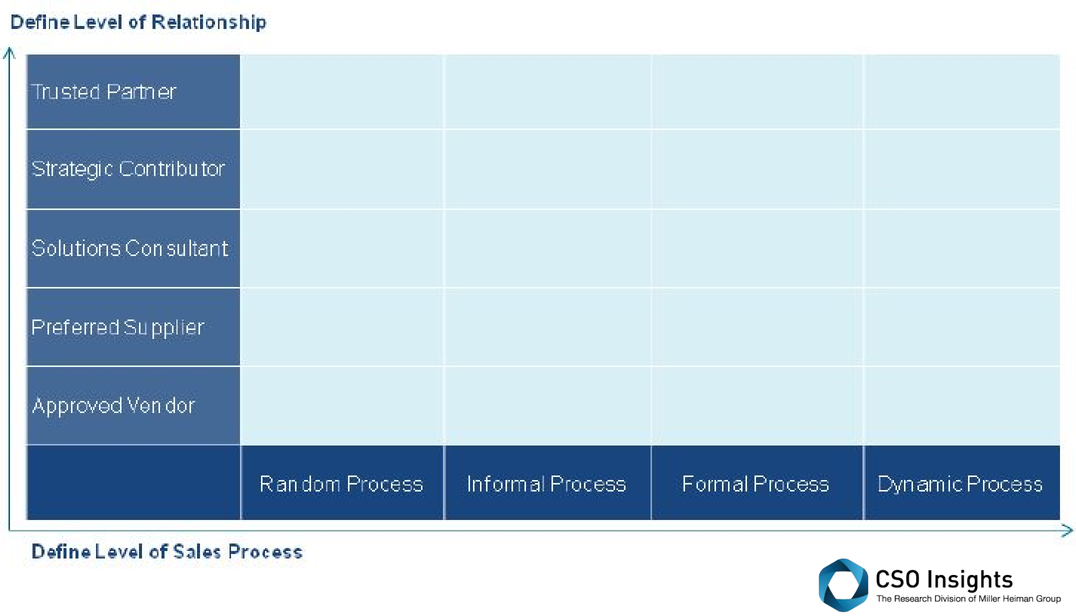
2. **Sales Process Assessment:**

a. Random—Salespeople determine for themselves what the most appropriate actions are to advance/pursue individual sales opportunities; there is no documented or adopted overarching sales process.

b. Informal—There is a documented sales process that salespeople are exposed to and expected to follow, but this use is not enforced, reinforced or monitored.

c. Formal—The adopted sales process is documented, and sales reps' adherence to this is expected and inspected on a regular and ongoing basis; this represents the standard operating procedure (SOP), reinforced and enforced by sales management.

d. Dynamic—In addition to all included in the Formal level, analytics and additional technologies (e.g., collaboration, CPQ) are also used to consistently and early on to identify changes in process metrics (e.g., period-over-period results, time in process stages).



3. Performance Levels:

CSO Insights has identified three performance levels defined by the metrics below. These defining metrics were chosen because they reflect key sales performance measures and are generally accurately known by sales leadership.

	Performance Level 1	Performance Level 2	Performance Level 3
Revenue Plan Attainment	84.1%	84.2%	88.9%
Quota Attainment	46.6%	53.6%	59.5%
Win Rates of Forecast Deals	41.3%	46.6%	53.3%
Loss Rates of Forecast Deals	37.1%	31.1%	25.4%
No-Decisions of Forecast Deals	21.6%	22.3%	21.3%
Voluntary Turnover	10.1%	8.1%	8.5%
Involuntary Turnover	6.1%	5.9%	5.5%

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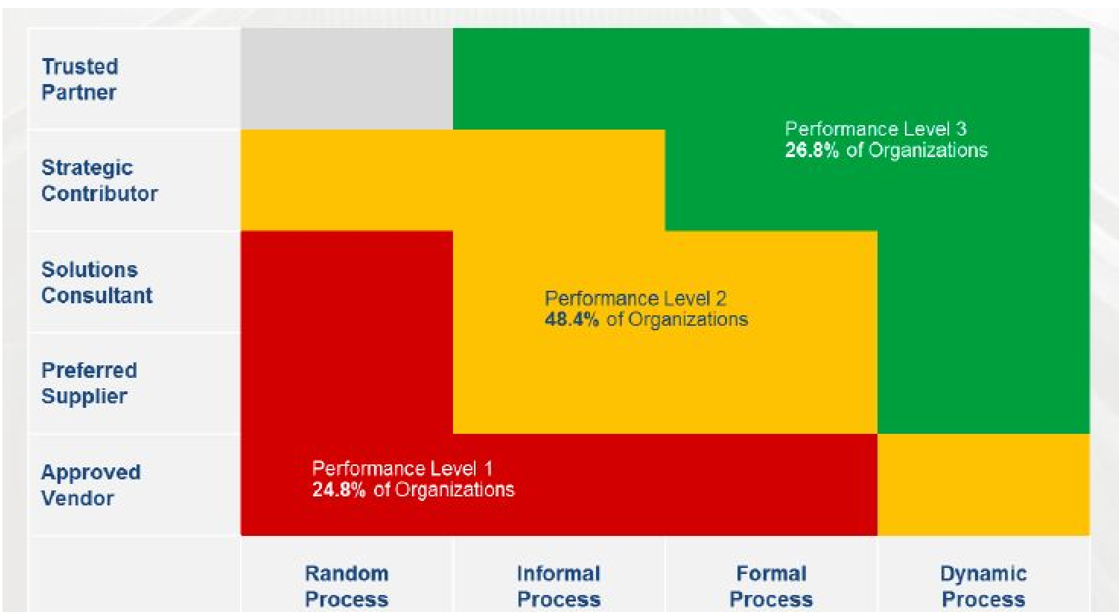

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These are the questions you should ask yourself and your organization to truly understand where you fall on sales process spectrum. Your gut response might be to answer in a way that leads you to think "we're not that bad". I urge you to verify your responses with other internal stakeholders. Take the time dig in and get the truth – especially if you aren't that close to the point-of-sale anymore.

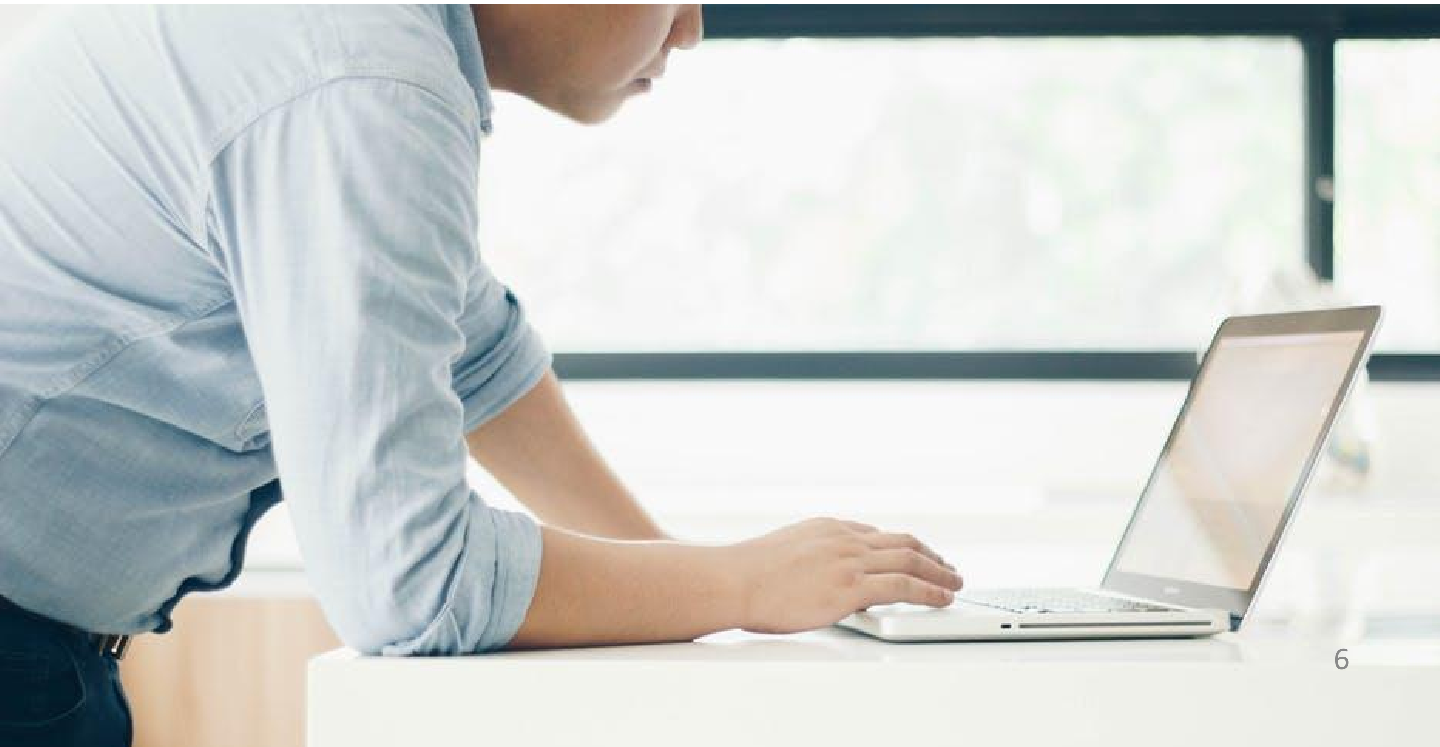
If it turns out your organization suffers from some or most of these issues you can get to work fixing them. The very first step in solving a problem that's impacting revenue is to agree you have one.

Is the process documented in the form of a sales playbook or a process document that is completely up-to-date?

Often I will hear, “oh yeah, we definitely have our process documented” only to discover that it has an outdated company logo at the top. Or the author of the doc no longer works at the company. A good barometer is to ask a veteran rep and a new hire about the process. If either cannot articulate the process and point to the documents then it is likely it does not truly exist. This is often a hard one for companies to admit to themselves. There is no half way with this – you either have one and it is a valuable asset or you don’t. Be honest on this first question…

If the process is documented, is it automated and easy for sales teams to execute?

A powerpoint, google doc or some form of electronic document is the starting point to help define the buyer’s journey and then apply the seller’s journey - and to review what happens at each stage. The problem with only having a document is the difficulty of having it handy when needed. Agreeing and documenting is the first necessary step in solving the problem; once in place, the next step is to automate it. Automatically prompting your reps - when ramping, and when updating status, plays, or next steps makes sure they are executing the right behaviors and that it's consistent - but based on the scenario. Static process milestones don't solve this - even with a formal and rigorous process.



How clear are your internal and external partners on your process?

Successful organizations have clarity and transparency of the sales process that is known across the buyer's journey. Marketing knows how you plan to talk to and convert the leads they generate, the customer is clear on the steps you plan to take and Service/Operations is clear on how the customer was sold and how the product should be delivered/implemented. Take some time to gather some consensus on this topic because it is a very good indicator of misalignment. You can spot disconnects when Sales doesn't really know what happens once everyone stops clapping that the sale was made (lol) or when your service team hasn't seen your sales process and doesn't understand the way you sell.

Make time to have these discussions and have them frequently. The dialogue alone will uncover issues that can easily be remedied. A typical "ah-hah" moment in these conversations occurs when service admits a hardship with collecting information the sales teams already have. Or some derivation of this… Finding ways to become better internal partners to better serve your customers. What could be better than that?

Is there any way to track the steps of the sale? Stages & Milestones

This question is easier to answer – most typical responses of those who fit into the informal & random categories sound something like this – "Yes but…". "Yes, but my reps don't update the CRM so technically we could but we can't now". This question is not so much about technical capabilities (technically we have SFDC) but more about what is in place now. If you don't have visibility right now into your sales stages and cannot tell right now how many deals you have in the 2nd to last stage (as an example) you don't have a solid way to track.

Milestones existing to accompany each stage doesn't always lead to a stellar sales process either. I find a lot of organizations have milestones programmed but don't find value in them. Milestones are the execution activities that need to happen to "win the stage" and progress the deal. They should be thoughtful so that they are helpful. Some Captain Obvious milestones – "ask for the sale" or "overcome objections"- doesn't actually help anyone sell nor does it provide meaningful data to track. Analyze your internal milestones to determine if they guide you to qualify a prospect, execute stellar discovery, prove your solution and win the deal. If they do not, it might be time to make some updates.

I have seen other sales organizations use customer signals to help sales teams differentiate which specific stage a late stage deal should reside. It made all of the difference in the world and as a result they have better forecasts and more meaningful strategy conversations regarding the deals.

The best milestones are the execution steps you ask your reps about today in deal conversations:

Standard Milestone	Valuable Milestone
Demo Completed (Checkbox)	Features Demo'd (Multi-pick List)
Meeting Scheduled (Checkbox)	Next Meeting Date (Date Field)
Sent Presentation Deck (Checkbox)	Presentation Deck Used (Link to file)

Do your first stages in your sales process align with the way Marketing and/or Sales Development reps are attracting prospects to your company?

What does Marketing say to get prospects to hand raise? What are they offering and how do they talk about the offer? Does this align with the way the Sales team interacts immediately after that hand raise?

Many organizations are now implementing a Sales Development Rep (SDR) model. If your SDR team sets appointments for your Account Executive (AE) team and an expectation is set for what will occur at that meeting then the formal Sales Process should align. If execution activities are expected, these should be formalized and tracked as milestones.

Do you have gaps and/or issues with service/implementation/fulfillment that could be attributed to variability in the way you sell?

First, healthy tension between Service/Operations and Sales is normal and beneficial when it's constructive. What I am describing above is when the lack of standardized sales process has made your product harder to implement/fulfill/service. If you hear a lot of "the sales rep sold it the wrong way and set unrealistic expectations" from your service teams AND you have no [point-of-sale documentation or] common practices it is likely your lack of sales process is hurting the way you serve your customers. A good sales process typically includes setting customer expectations specific milestones to ensure all (Sales/Service/Customer) are clear on what happens next. Ideally, Sales teams should be prompted to complete these milestones automatically to ensure success of the deal post "closed-won". If this critical piece is missing you could be causing unnecessary customer issues that lead to churn.

Are you able to deploy effective, data driven enablement tactics that will benefit most sales reps?

One of the greatest benefits to a formalized sales process is the ability to use data to make decisions about where your gaps exist. It is all too common for sales organizations to find one rep struggling with one part of the process and assume that the struggle is global. With a well-defined sales process you can easily use data to point you in a direction that solves a global problem. Below please find a few examples surfaced from some of our clients:

Customer Scenario	Recommendations
First Stage after SDR Handoff: win rate of the stage is low and deals are not progressing	SDR qualification criteria might need an adjustment OR AE's might not be successfully identifying a problem or might need different tools to execute the step
Discovery/Needs Analysis Stage: win rate of the stage is low or deals are stalling	AE's might need coaching on the right questions to ask to establish a problem or need for the product/service
Trial Stage: Deals are stalling and the average time in stage is really high	The process might need more standardization – clearer expectations on the value of the trial or timeline adjustments. Or you may find you want to forgo a trial altogether.
Closed Lost deals are skipping stages	If AE's are skipping critical stages this might be an easy fix. Often, missing a critical step in an early stage will cause a deal to be lost later in the process
Closed Won deals are skipping stages (or moving too quickly)	You might have too many stages or unnecessary stages. Underperformers and new hires will benefit from some refinement to the process.
Closed Won milestones aren't being executed:	You may not have a great hand-off to your Service/Operations/Fulfillment partners which could create a poor customer experience. Automation is key to easily fixing this problem.

Regardless, if you can identify where you are winning and where you are losing you begin to examine closer and execute better coaching, find necessary process changes, equip your sales teams with better materials/tools and ensure you are engaging prospects in the right way. Ever important is to ensure the deals you are winning – the ones who become your customers – are experiencing the best process that leads to a mutually beneficial relationship.

Do sales reps and/or managers have a "my deals are special" mentality?

As an explanation for not having a formalized process I will hear "this (or that) deal was complicated. It couldn't really be done that <the right> way". There are always nuances with each and every deal; they are no excuse for having a junky process. Instead of focusing on the differences between deals or the edge cases, solve for the 80% of execution activities in your informal process that are similar and formalize them, adding and adjusting as you go. Some of your best sales reps are typically "my deals are special" thinkers until they see the shining light and visibility a formal process brings. I find these superstars become the biggest believers and the best advocates for sales process excellence and automation.

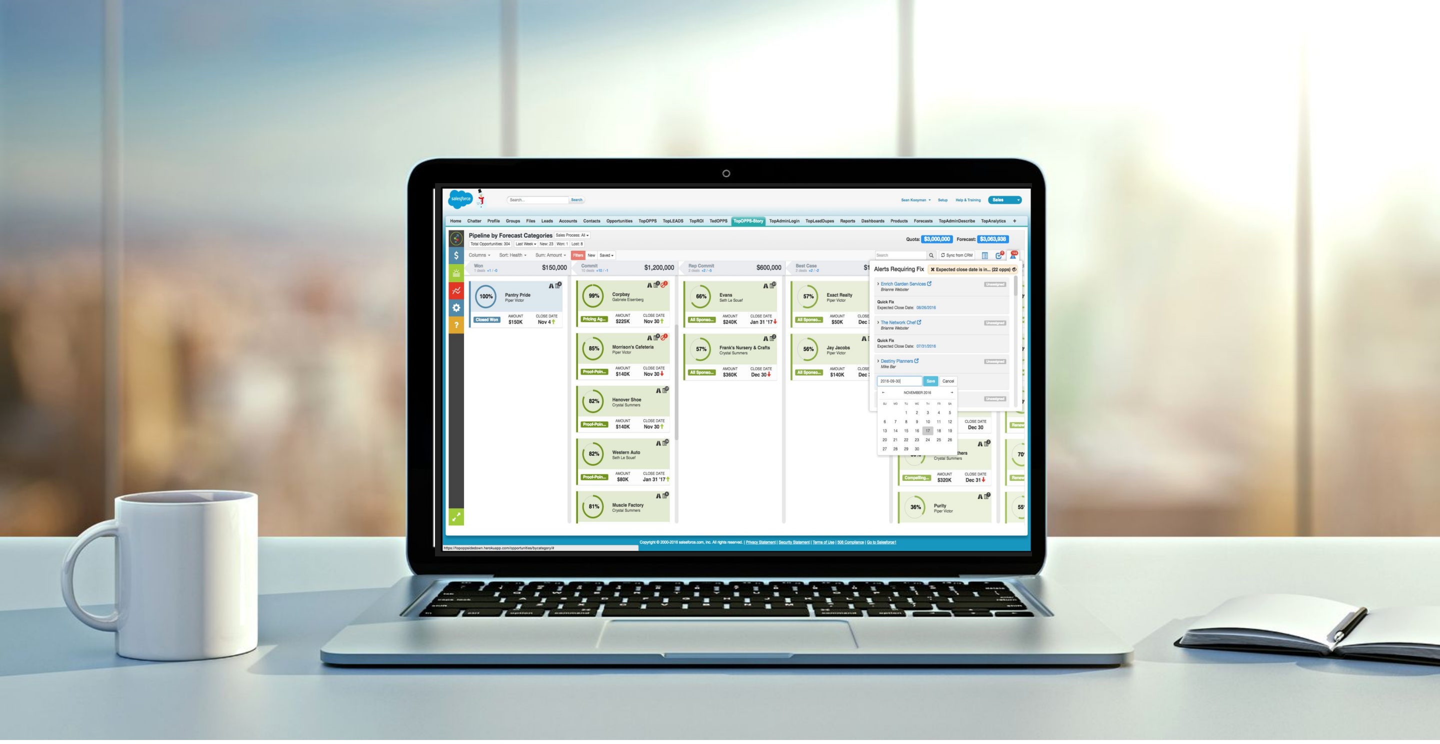
Does the process align with the buyer's journey and does it contemplate end-to-end?

If you haven't contemplated the way your customers make buying decisions and used it to craft your process you should immediately. The buying process has changed more in the last 10 years than ever before – the massive shift to digital has changed the way decisions are made in the B2B space. You could be selling using an old process or missing critical steps by expecting the customer to bend to your way of selling.

Is your ramp time for new hires too long?

Taking the time to formalize your process is hard work and heavy lifting up front but boy does it ever pay off down the line. Shorter ramp time for new hires is arguably one of the greatest derivative benefits of your sales process. A great way to determine if the process is the cause for your slow ramp is to talk to recent new hires – especially the top performers. Talk to enough people to ensure you don't just get the feedback from the people who will always blame others. Talk to the thoughtful and conscientious sellers – the people who want to win. They will admit to frustration with a lack of process. Talk to the top 5% - the best – they will tell you they had to figure it out themselves and say it like it is a badge of honor. Do you really want your teams to figure it out themselves? I don't think you do – "figure it out" is a high cost plan that doesn't ever end with revenue growth.

The description above sounds a bit dramatic but I have found this in otherwise seemingly functional sales organizations with a relaxed sales process. Perfect execution of the plan isn't possible if the plan is a secret to some members of your sales organization. Don't keep your plan for how to win a secret – formalize it, share it, automate it, improve and iterate on it…



Automation & artificial intelligence help sales organizations achieve winning sales processes faster and easier than ever before.

Hopefully the previous questions have allowed you to take stock of your current state and uncover areas of focus. Whether you've identified you are Random or Formal on the sales process spectrum, TopOPPS can easily and quickly help you get to Dynamic using automation and AI.

At TopOPPS, we partner with sales organizations that range anywhere on the sales process spectrum. We are able to bring sales organizations from zero to an automated, winning process in a few short weeks by organizing, improving, and automating the "right way" that already exists. We will guide you through consulting on your sales process and help you set and automate a winning one for your business. In weeks, you'll enjoy better forecast accuracy, improved win rates, shorter sales cycles and shorter ramp times - all while saving precious selling time.

If you'd like to see how our customers have achieved best-in-class sales processes, complete this form or call us at (866) 328-0867.