ESSENTIAL ACCOUNT PLANNING

5 KEYS FOR HELPING YOUR SALES TEAM DRIVE REVENUE

MARK DONNOLO

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Foreword

I first encountered Mark Donnolo's work when I read his book *The Innovative Sale*. I was impressed with how he applied a step-by-step approach to thinking creatively as a sales professional. His observations about the link between teamwork and sales innovation resonated with my experiences as a practitioner and consultant. When he approached me recently about reviewing his new work, I leapt at the opportunity, and later agreed to write this foreword.

Essential Account Planning: Five Keys for Helping Your Sales Team Drive Revenue is an important book for sales leaders and contributors because more than ever, strategic accounts are critical to enterprise success and harder than ever to win and keep.

Your most strategic accounts are your marketing department's best friend when it comes to building a brand as a trusted winner in your market. With so many cloud and niche companies eating away at the midsized and smallest accounts in your market, only the strategic ones serve as a barrier to entry. Moreover, strategic accounts offer your enterprise a volume of transactions, challenges, and insights that enable you to stay one step ahead of your market.

Ten years ago, your strategic account likely had a decision maker or two, in a situation where you sold belly-to-belly against a handful of competitors. Today, the game has changed significantly, as your average high-quality sale involves six or more decision makers, end users, sign-offs, and influencers—many of which you'll never get face time with! Globalization, cloud computing, and crowdsourcing have created a highly competitive marketplace in which any strategic account can be lured away by a hungry startup looking to work cheap or for free to "win more logos."

In this book, you'll discover five imperatives, or strategies, that will help you cut through the rising complexity of the sale, win the account, and keep it—growing it year over year. It's likely that your current sales methodology was not created with the strategic account in mind, opting instead to "average out" the account mix so the funnel works right at any sales level. Few if any methodologies possess a detailed plan that treats strategic accounts like the unique animals they are. To paraphrase a chief sales officer at a major computer-hardware maker, “When it comes to your most critical accounts, without a process, you get a mess.”

I’m not just a fellow author; I’m also a business-book reader, just like you. I buy books like this one because I want to be on top of my game and solve sales challenges. The best way to approach reading *Essential Account Planning* is to put yourself inside the many great stories shared in the coming pages. Note how the challenges and organizational issues described are similar to yours. After you finish the book, locate at least three situations where you can apply the imperatives immediately. Use the templates in the appendices as your tools; they will be very helpful in implementation.

Share what you learn with your team and challenge them to think about the existing strategic account planning process (if there is one) and how important it is to master. If you want to make the leap from contributor to sales leader, driving a winning process that moves the needle is a good path to success. If you are a sales leader who wants your team to win in the market consistently and grow in their professional skill set, invest the time to learn and then share Mark’s elegant framework for strategic account management.

There’s an underlying perspective to *Essential Account Planning* that offers you a chance to dramatically boost your sales performance: Strategic account management is a team sport. Unlike transactional accounts, which buy off-the-shelf products or services based on price, convenience, and reliability, most strategic accounts require customization and compromise. This means that sales must work across departmental lines, with strategic account managers serving the role of quarterback, marshaling political and organizational resources to satisfy the demands of high-value clients.

I believe too many people practice fake strategic account planning these days. They confuse activity management, forecasting, and service-plan review with the type of defined process this book lays out. To them, I quote my old friend, quality guru W. Edward Deming: “If you can’t describe what you are doing as a process, you don’t know what you are doing.”

Tim Sanders, Former Chief Sales Officer at Yahoo!
Author of *Dealstorming: The Secret Weapon That Can Solve Your Toughest Sales Challenges*

Introduction

I sat across the table from the head of sales for a multinational manufacturing company. The end of Q3 loomed near, and he said it had been a tough quarter for the sales team. Last year, most of the team members nailed their quotas, and the organization overall came in above goal. In fact, sales were strong enough to carry revenue into the first quarter of the new year. But by midyear, the team's hot streak had cooled. The team was scrambling while its forecasts fell short of its goals. Everything had been great: "We're hot. Who needs a plan?" he said, describing the sentiment of the team until that time. Now they needed to do something—quickly.

Nobody liked to plan. Nobody liked to come in from the field and work through the challenges of devising strategies for reaching sales goals. When it came to planning for the accounts that made up about 70 to 80 percent of the company's revenue, the account managers and sales team members typically avoided it. The voices could be heard throughout the sales organization: "It's a pain." "It takes too much time out of market." "I'm a relationship person, not an operator." "Can't the sales support team put this together for us to react to?" When customer demand was strong and close rates were high, it was easy to find reasons why the team didn't need account plans. But when the dry spell hit, the head of sales realized that they were all victims of their success.

Account planning is one of those hot topics that receive a disproportionate amount of attention and create more than their fair share of heartburn for sales teams. It's is right up there with sales compensation, quotas, and coaching as disciplines that tend to catch the spotlight in sales meetings. Companies know they need to do account planning well, but don't. Most times, when the topic of account planning arises in a conversation, I hear:

- We don't do it well, but we really need to get better.
- We already do it. The key sections of the account plan are . . .
- We've tried it in the past, and it doesn't work because the team isn't on board.
- It turns out to be an administrative exercise, and once it's done, we end up putting it away until next year.
- It's critical. But we don't have time for it.

Notice that none of these responses outright diminishes the value of account planning. Effective account planning is one of the most powerful drivers of sales performance, yet it's one of the most overlooked because of its paradoxical relationship to sales: Many salespeople intuitively think that spending more time selling will create more sales. But the salespeople who invest in account planning as they sell actually sell more.

SalesGlobe research shows that the most successful sales teams combine consistent account planning with selling. Poor-performing or inconsistent sales teams typically have a pattern of reacting to opportunities and only planning in response to lagging results.

While implementing a strong account planning process sounds like a no-brainer, most sales organizations face these 10 questions:

1. How should account planning fit within our sales strategy?
2. What accounts should have account plans?
3. Who should own account planning?
4. How do we align functions such as marketing, operations, finance, and human resources?
5. What are the most important components of the account plan?
6. How should a good process work?
7. Can we make the organization conduct account planning, and how do we get compliance?
8. How can we reinforce the value of account planning?
9. How should the customer be involved in the process?
10. How do we keep the account planning process alive throughout the year?

Difficulties in answering these questions sideline the account planning process, hinder the sales organization's potential, and result in missed growth opportunities.

Essential Account Planning concentrates on the big challenges sales organizations face today regarding strategically planning for growth at the account level. This book addresses these challenges with practical approaches and tools you can apply right away with your sales teams to see results this year. It also includes stories, interviews, and wisdom from executives in leading companies about how they use account planning to grow their businesses.

This book begins by addressing why you need account planning in the first place. It will help you sort through the arguments you're certain to hear about organizational commitment, ownership, politics, and time. It will also help you make the case for account planning and how it fits into your broader sales strategy.

Then this book will look at the five keys for successful strategic account planning:

- **Key 1: Use the right structure (chapter 2).** This chapter will look at the big picture of the sales strategy, account plan vision, and account plan execution, as well as the components every good account plan should have.
- **Key 2: Set the goal (chapter 3).** This chapter will examine how the account plan supports the business plan and growth opportunities, and how to build the revenue goal for the account.
- **Key 3: Create the habits (chapter 4).** Without this key, the account plan is just a document. This chapter discusses how to bring the account planning process to life.
- **Key 4: Understand the politics (chapter 5).** At the core of the account planning process are the people who make it happen. This chapter examines the importance of getting the sales team and others within the company to work together to solve the people, role, and political challenges.
- **Key 5: Think big (chapter 6).** This chapter will focus on moving past incremental thinking and toward planning in an aspirational manner to take your team beyond its current horizons.

Essential Account Planning looks at each of the keys from the perspective of sales leaders and sales enablers by studying their stories, as well as the stories of hundreds of companies I've worked with in the past 25 years, to lay out methods to help your organization profit from these experiences. Once you've read about the five keys, you can use the templates included in the appendix in your account planning process.

I hope you enjoy the book and leverage it to improve your sales team's performance. Let me know about the challenges you're addressing or the results you're seeing by sending me a note at mark.donnolo@salesglobe.com or on Twitter @MarkDonnolo #EssentialAccountPlanning. I'd love to learn about your experiences.

Chapter 6

Think Big

A few months ago, my wife and I took our teenage daughters to Iceland. It was an incredible place, like an outdoor museum of geology, meteorology, and mythology with mountains, waterfalls, and extreme weather.

One day, we were driving along the southern coast to a well-known glacial waterfall, Skógafoss. It was easy to see as we approached—it's one of the largest waterfalls in Iceland, standing 200 feet high and 82 feet across with glacier fields in the distance behind it. We parked, and along with hundreds of other tourists, began walking closer.

The scene was truly magnificent. And yet, we knew the view was even better from the top. Most of the visitors just observe from the bottom of the waterfall, but there's a footpath that winds up the side of the mountain in a wide slalom, allowing almost anyone to meander up and enjoy the view from above. Being Donnolos, however, we were sure we could get there faster by skipping the path and scrambling straight up the side. So, with nothing more than our hands and determination, we started climbing.

It was an almost vertical trek. As we climbed, volcanic rock rolled loose beneath our hands and feet and tumbled down the mountain. I began to realize this was slightly dangerous and probably crazy. But we persevered. We knew we could get there because we had seen other people do it, and we knew it was better than the sight from the bottom because we had seen pictures, even though 90 percent of the tourists seemed satisfied with the view from below. A few were taking pictures of us.

We were rewarded at the top. The view was spectacular in every direction. Literally as far as the eye can see—which on this day was about 20 miles because we could make out the famous rock formations along the coast in Dyrhólaey. Behind us rose the massive Mýrdalsjökull glacier. The waterfall itself was more impressive from above, roaring with power that couldn't be appreciated the same way from below. We could see the water flowing beneath us away from the falls, marking its path across the stark volcanic rock and on to the northern Atlantic Ocean.

Despite the arduous climb, we were pretty happy at the top.

Mountain climbs like this are an easy analogy to achieving any goal. Both require an objective, sometimes beyond what you think you can accomplish. They produce challenges along the way. Aspirational account plans require the strength and commitment of mountain climbing, but they need something else as well. To reach the goals set by an aspirational account plan, you have to know what the view looks like from the top. You have to be able to visualize how you got there—not just the continued journey up, but the leaps, shortcuts, and dodged falling rock. You have to think big—to want to climb the mountain, rather than be satisfied with the view below or to take the slow, meandering path up. That direct, vertical hike offers achievement beyond what you might have accomplished otherwise.

Aspirational account plans are unique. Almost every company will have strategic account plans (determined by the 20 percent of accounts that generate 80 percent of the revenue); they will have tactical plans for their transactional products and services; and they will most likely have pursuit plans that focus on winning new business. In my experience, few companies devote additional time to aspirational plans. While it may not be an idea you've considered before, aspirational account plans can apply to the sales organization in any company.

In this chapter, I'll cite examples from large business-to-business companies with aspirational revenue amounts in the $50 million–$100 million range, because that number is significantly larger than their average deal size of $2 million. If your average deal size is $100,000, your aspirational revenue numbers might be in the $1 million to $2 million range. The point of aspirational account planning is to step out of the comfort zone of incremental thinking (growing the account 10 percent by next year, for example) and believe that you can climb straight up the mountain. While incremental thinking has a place in strategic and tactical account plans, aspirational account plans require much bigger steps and innovative thinking.

Thinking Big Requires Vision

Last year, my team and I worked on three aspirational account plans with Glenn Hoogerwerf, president of the software business unit for Aricent, a product engineering services firm. Hoogerwerf asked three of his superstar sales teams to create an account plan that would get their customer to $100 million in the next three to five years. For each of those accounts, $100 million was an enormous leap from the current revenue, and it took the sales teams weeks to adjust to what Hoogerwerf was asking. So Hoogerwerf had to change their perspective. He asked them to imagine they were five years in the future, and they had already achieved the $100 million account goal. He then asked them to describe what that account looked like, in terms of Aricent resources. How many new salespeople were working on that account team? What were their roles? Although part of the Aricent sales team, did they physically work at the customer's offices so they could be an on-site resource? Which customer departments were using Aricent's services? What changes had been made to Aricent's delivery systems?

"I always try to work backwards from the end goal," says Hoogerwerf. "What will the account look like five years from now when we're a $100 million account? It's easier for people to describe the end state of what the operational footprint would look like—where the business would be coming from, specifically which division, which services—at that end state. Once you can describe it at the end state, work backwards to your next milestone. What does it look like four years from now? Three? Then work backwards to one year from now; then work backwards to today."

Once the sales team can begin to describe the end state, Hoogerwerf asks them to describe each year leading up to that. If year five is $100 million with 20 new Aricent employees and a new delivery center closer to the customer, how much of that has been done by year four? By year three? Hoogerwerf asks his team to map out the steps, year by year, necessary to complete that five-year vision.

"You have a vision that you're articulating to people: 'Here's where our business is going to go, here's what we're going to try to achieve. I want to be the number one vendor, I want to be the number one product, I want to have this number of licenses.' You can now very quickly articulate where you're going, what your vision is," he explains.

You should be able to articulate where the revenue will come from and how much will come from each division. Then you can start thinking operationally about how to make that happen. What kind of sales team will you need? What kind of marketing will you need? What kind of products will you need to bring to the table? What engineering or operational team do you need to bring in? Those are the mechanisms of how you're going to do it.

Thinking Big Goes Beyond Increments

While strategic, tactical, and pursuit plans rely on incremental growth, incremental goals don't work for aspirational account plans. Growing a $1 million account by 10 percent for five years will get you to about $1.6 million. But consider what might happen if that same customer is deemed an aspirational account, and the goal is set at $25 million. Your thinking understandably changes, and chances are even if you achieve only half of that $25 million in five years, the account will be far more successful and valuable to your company than if you had limited it to annual incremental growth.

It's worth noting the obvious here: Not every account qualifies as a potential aspirational account. I'm talking about Fortune 500 companies that can spend tens of millions of dollars on individual vendors and partners. And as part of your aspirational account plan you have to ensure that you can deliver your product or service at that level, within the timeframe you've set out. You'll likely have to invest heavily in your own company or acquire another company to meet the demands, but that's all part of the plan.

Once you've identified an aspirational account, here are some pitfalls to avoid so you don't lapse into incremental account planning:

- **Incremental account planning gives your competitors an advantage.** You should have a goal regarding your competitors in your aspirational account plan. Do you want to be one of 100 vendors for your client? Do you want to be in the top 10? Is your goal to be one of their top three partners? With incremental thinking, you can never answer that question, because you're not looking at the long-term competitive landscape. You're looking to win incremental business in a few short-term areas. Aspirational planning charts a path to differentiate yourself this year, become a core partner next year, and be a top 10 provider in year three.
- **Incremental account planning promotes short-term thinking rather than a long-term strategy.** For example, imagine you're not hitting your account plan goals in Q2 and the team is behind in its quota. Incremental thinking says, "I'll cut back on my costs because the revenue isn't there." Ironically, cutting costs at this point sacrifices any long-term investment for short-term returns. If you don't have an account plan that says, "Here's where I need to be year one, here's where I need to be year two, here's where I need to be year three," in

terms of resources, relationships, and strategic goals, you don't have a framework for judging those investments. Instead of investing in a $100 million partnership, all you're really doing is incremental, tactical transactions. You won't ever make a strategic move because you'll gauge any investment on short-term results. It can be very misleading, and there's a danger of reconsidering your entire strategy because you missed that near-term mark. Sometimes you have to have perseverance that says, "I'm going to continue to invest, because I need to get to this specific point in the future."

- **Short-term wins can take you down the wrong path.** We've all been in a scenario where a surprise win catches our attention. It becomes the shiny object that we want to chase, thinking that this win surely marks a road full of many similar wins. Unfortunately, it might be an area that isn't going to yield a lot of long-term business. While it might seem attractive today—your team is beating its numbers and you're getting great revenue—it might burn out quickly. You risk diverting investment into an area that has limited long-term potential because you had a positive short-term experience.

Think about setting a destination in your GPS. You have a goal: a point B that you want to get to from your point A. There might be traffic on one street, and your GPS will reroute you to another street. But the end destination is always in mind, right? When it comes to aspirational account planning, you must keep the end destination in mind.

Motivation and Challenges

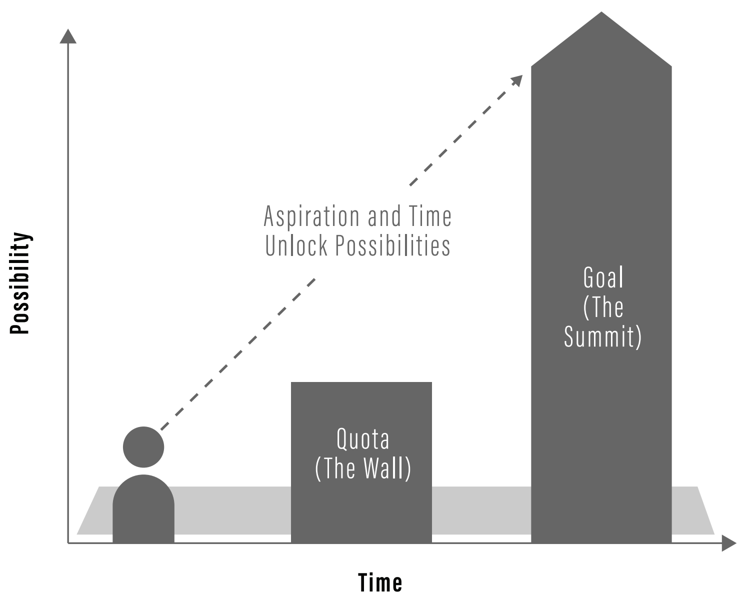
The concept of long-term aspirational planning is not easy to grasp. Even in Hoogerwerf's case, when presenting the challenge to his sales teams, they were used to incremental thinking. Sitting in a small conference room in San Francisco, we heard comments like, "This will take 10-15 years," and, "The customer will never let us have proportionately that much business," and, "We're too small," from the first team. The other two teams reacted similarly. Hoogerwerf wasn't concerned with his teams' ability to get to $100 million with these accounts, but with their perceptions that they couldn't.

One reason the teams were apprehensive about a $100 million account was that they linked it to their quota attainment. There were about three salespeople on each account team, and it didn't take long to calculate how much revenue each would be responsible for toward this goal. And since their sales compensation was tied to quota attainment, they quickly became concerned about cutting into their own wallets.

The terms *goal* and *quota* are often used synonymously, but there is an important distinction when designing aspirational account plans. Focusing too much on quota can limit a sales representative's thinking because it affects his near-term commitments—and his compensation. It's hard for sales team members to talk about how they're going to build their quota because they naturally want to minimize anything being added to it. They fear that their next quota will be unattainable, and they will thus earn less money. Or, that they might attain that quota and be punished the following year with an even higher one.

But goals and quotas are not the same. Quota conversations start with, "What am I going to sell next year and how much will that affect my compensation?" Aspirational goal conversations start with, "Where am I going to be five years from now with this account?" These plans focus on the long-term objectives, and ask salespeople to disconnect the aspirational goal from what their quota will be for next year. Figure 6-1 illustrates how an aspirational perspective can propel you beyond any quota barriers.

Figure 6-1. Goal vs. Quota



In aspirational account plans, the sales team has to think beyond its quota. Setting a revenue goal for the account and a deadline to achieve that goal helps salespeople overcome the imaginary "wall" created by their quota.

When my family and I were climbing the Skógafoss in Iceland, we knew we could get to the top because we could see other people ahead of us who had done it, even those crazy enough to climb straight up. The same is true when motivating your team to achieve their goals in an aspirational account. Look at companies that are already doing $50 million or $100 million with a particular customer. What are they doing? What value are they offering? How are they working with the account? What's the difference between what you're doing and what that competitor is doing? How can you look like that or look even better than that?

For example, my company, SalesGlobe, provides consulting services to clients. If we can't see our way to a bigger number—a multiple number—with an account we've identified as an aspirational account, then we might look at what another large consulting firm is doing with that account in terms of the value they provide, how they work with the client, and their level of financial engagement. Or, we might look at what other consulting firms are doing with accounts similar to our client. This shows us what can be done and often done better to provide greater value to the client. In the same way, y think about what your team could provide to an account. You might see yourself in a frame that's too small. But if a similar company is generating $50 million of revenue with that account—perhaps even one of your competitors—then it stands to reason that you can too.

In my experience, there are three reasons why a company cannot accomplish a $100 million account: opportunity, timeframe, and capability.

Opportunity

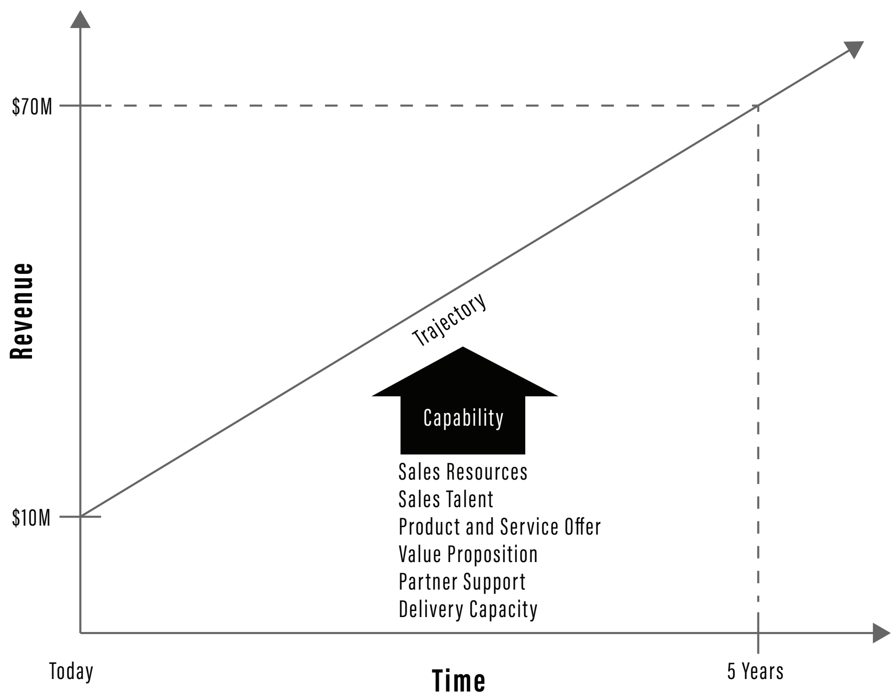
Opportunity is the ability for the customer to buy or consume your product or service. If a company similar to yours is doing $70 million of business with an account, that may be an addressable opportunity. If the customer is already purchasing at that level, the opportunity is there. If one of the customer's competitors or another company in a similar industry is consuming $70 million of a product or service similar to yours, the opportunity is there.

If a customer is not used to buying at that level, this could be a latent opportunity. Consider how you can help the customer find new markets or increase the demand for your services.

Timeframe

How fast can all of this be enabled? If the opportunity is there, then the next step is to set a timeframe and start with a hypothesis: "We think three years is enough time for us to get to this level with our customer." Once you set a timeframe and a revenue goal, you have a trajectory for the aspirational account value (Figure 6-2). You know how fast the sales team will have to work over a certain period of years. A goal set with a deadline starts the action.

Figure 6-2. Goal Plus Time Equals Trajectory



Setting a revenue goal and a deadline to achieve it creates a trajectory that defines a path to achievement. In the example above, the aspirational goal for the account is $70 million in five years. During that five years, the sales team will have to make decisions about its ability to service a $70 million account. Working with other internal functions, the company may have to increase its capabilities. Specifically, this means hiring additional sales resources, training or coaching salespeople to increase sales talent, expanding product and service offers, differentiating value proposition, adding partner support, and increasing delivery capacity.

Capability

Capability refers to resources, talent, and funding. Once the trajectory has been set, look backward and see what you need in terms of sales resources, sales talent, product or service offers, the value proposition, and partner support for access or delivery. You'll have certain requirements for each of these areas that are included in the account plan. While it may not be fair to get saddled with a significantly bigger goal each year with the same resources, it's perfectly fair and reasonable to take on a big, aspirational goal for an account with the condition that certain capability be provided by the company.

Another important key to goal attainment is emotion. The sales team members need to want to reach this aspirational goal; they're probably going to need a little extra oxygen for the climb. So help them visualize their personal perspective. What will it look like for the sales team when they're at $70 million? Perhaps they'll sell across all of your lines of business. They'll be working at a different level of the customer's company, with the president and the COO. They'll be spending a lot of time at their New York headquarters. They'll be talking about bigger ideas and partnering with major companies that complement your offer, having strategic conversations. The team has to know what it would look like from their eyes and feel like to live it. It's not just a P&L exercise. It has to be visual, tangible, and exciting to the team.

Getting Your Customer Involved

An account plan is all about the customer, but a lot of companies write their plans without any customer input. They're planning for the account rather than with the account. You may be able to get away with it for tactical account plans, but strategic accounts will suffer without customer involvement. And you'll never reach an aspirational goal without the customer. You can't grow an aspirational account by climbing every rung of the ladder by yourself—it will take you decades. You have to jump rungs and take leaps, and you need the customer's help.

My team and I recently told one of our clients, Scott, about our intention to become a strategic partner and substantially increase our revenue with his company. His initial reaction was surprise because we're not doing anything like that now. He considered it for a minute, and the idea of becoming strategic partners began to take shape. He said, "OK, you will have to hire a team internally to be able to manage the technical aspects of this." He saw the opportunity and benefit to his business over that timeframe. Then he started talking about capability. He started telling us what we needed to do differently to meet that threshold. He started to talk about the technological requirements. Scott started to see the possibilities.

Once he started to think about us differently he realized the opportunities for him and his company. His tone changed, and he began to think of ways he could help us get there. He went very quickly from disbelief to wanting to enable us.

"Taking this idea to your client is important, because it raises your visibility to them," says Hoogerwerf. You might not even be on the customer's radar screen; however, by saying that you want to do $100 million of business within three years, and having a plan to get there, suddenly the customer will start thinking about you differently, rather than as just another supplier.

"One of our largest customers has 1,000 vendors," Hoogerwerf says. "They get peppered every single day by somebody asking them for business. Do you want to be one of the thousand, or do you want to be a strategic partner? You have to communicate that in your first sentence."

Aspirational accounts are built around a 360-degree relationship with the customer. That relationship must include:

- **What you can sell to the customer.** This includes all the core components of the account plan with a few key differences. First, the objective is a lot bigger—a lot more aspirational. Second, you're usually selling higher up in the organization to more senior-level buyers. Third, your value proposition has to be a lot more meaningful, clear, and connected to financial return for the client. Fourth, you are usually partnering more creatively with other complementary organizations that can give you better access to senior levels, strengthen your offer and value proposition, and enable you to deliver on a larger scale.
- **How you can help that customer sell more.** How can you help the customer increase its growth as a partner, through different ways to market? Where are the synergies between your businesses? This is where you ask, "How do we do something that we haven't already done? How do we do something that we haven't thought of?" That's the magic point, and where the fun begins.
- **What you can buy from the customer.** It might not always be possible to purchase the products or services of your customer, but it's worth looking for reciprocity points.

Think about the aspirational revenue amount—let's say $100 million—as 360 degrees of total value. A certain percent is what you sell, a certain percent is what you help the customer sell, and a certain percent is what you buy. The $100 million may not be pure revenue to your company; you might sell $80 million to the customer, help it go to market for a total of $18 million, and purchase $2 million of its products or services. Or the balance may be different depending on the opportunities.

When we first began working with Aricent on its aspirational account plans, Hoogerwerf set three goals: Become a $100 million account, accomplish that within three years, and create a 360-degree relationship.

"For some of our major customers, $100 million is the minimum threshold for attention as a partner or as a vendor," says Hoogerwerf. "It's a critical mass number to them. That's what it takes to be a strategic player. Now, for another account, maybe that threshold is $1 billion; for another account, it may be $10 million.

"The 360-degree relationship says not only do we want to sell our products to them, but we would like to buy their products and we want to help them go to market with their products," he continues. "If you only sell to these aspirational accounts, as opposed to purchase from them, you're a tactical player; you're not a strategic partner. The 360-degree relationship is a qualifier to being a strategic partner."

Aspirational plans consider the coverage model in a different way, too, says Hoogerwerf. "We want to sell across all divisions, not just take that one division and work that neighborhood, but work across the entire company. There also has to be a timeframe, like three years, that creates a trajectory. Every conversation I have with the client, I use that. I'll say, 'Hey, our goal is to be a $100 million, 360-degree partner across all your product divisions.' And then I can start articulating how we're going to help them. It should be simple and succinct. 'I'm growing it to $100 million, and I'm going to do that by having key relationships with three to five $20 million accounts, and then some medium-size businesses in these three markets of software, Internet services, and media and entertainment.'

"They might ask me how I'm going to do it, but that's what a great account plan should do; it should draw you in. It should tell a compelling story of how you're going to get there, and what it's going to look like when it comes together.

"Forget what you have to achieve in the next quarter. Thinking three years out is easier and tends to break inhibitions. It shows a lot of ideas and potential. A good account plan should point to the areas of opportunity and come up with ideas that can be explored," he concludes.

It pays to think big and plan big. To start, you may identify a few of your accounts that warrant the time and investment of an aspirational account plan. Your goal should be big enough to shock you and your team at first, but it should be somewhere in the realm of imaginable after more thought. Start with the accounts that represent sizeable opportunities, set an aspirational goal and timeframe, get your team's head into the mindset of what it looks and feels like in the future to be at that level, and then work back to how you got there with the capabilities and short-term goals you need to achieve over your timeframe.

5 Questions to Ask About Thinking Big

1. What handful of accounts might warrant aspirational account plans?
2. What aspirational goals and timeframes are in the realm of possibility?
3. What does it look like when you reach that goal in terms of who is on your team, what it's doing differently, and the value it's offering the client?
4. How have you engaged your customer in a conversation about your aspiration with a tangible number?
5. How will you work with your customer to get there?

About the Author

Mark Donnolo is managing partner of SalesGlobe, a leading sales innovation firm. He is author of the books *The Innovative Sale, What Your CEO Needs to Know About Sales Compensation,* and *Essential Account Planning*. Mark has worked with Fortune 1000 companies around the world for the past 25 years, focusing on sales innovation, sales strategy, sales coverage, and sales motivation. He holds an MBA from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a BFA from the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. He has served on the Board of Trustees for the University of the Arts and serves on the Alumni Council for Kenan-Flagler Business School. Mark lives in Atlanta with his wife and daughters. When he's not consulting, writing, or spending time with his family, he enjoys driving through the woods in his Gator with his dog, Winston-Bubba.