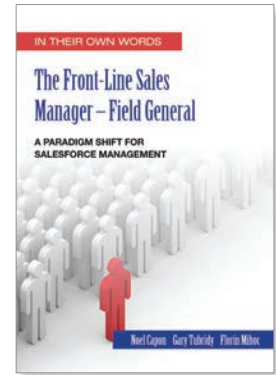


# THE FRONT-LINE SALES MANAGER – FIELD GENERAL

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There are many books about sales and account management, but to my understanding the relevance of direct sales management for sales success is extremely underrepresented when it comes to systematic descriptions and research. Therefore, I'm happy to introduce a book that fills this gap.

It starts with the right title: *The Front-Line Sales Manager – Field General*. The authors take the strong position that the firm succeeds or fails based on the performance of its sellers. But in addition, the fundamental underpinning of this book, and the research that drove it, is the assertion that the key influencer on seller success is the front-line sales manager (FLSM).

As sellers' direct supervisors, FLSMs hire, fire, train and coach sellers; travel and visit customers with sellers; and close sales with sellers. The FLSM also leads, directs and manages sellers; secures resources from the firm to assist in the selling process; and is, by far, the dominant influence in sellers' work lives. The research underpinning this book, combined with the authors' experiences as sellers, sales managers, FLSMs, consultants and researchers, enables the authors to redress this state of affairs.

In their research study, the authors interviewed sales leaders and successful

FLSMs from more than 20 corporations. Combined with their own experiences, the authors developed a six-fold *acumen* framework for successful FLSMs. Each *acumen* dimension comprises several sub-dimensions.

These acumen dimensions, and their core foci, are:

- **Strategic acumen** – the ability to think and act strategically
- **Organizational acumen** – the ability to navigate customer organizations
- **Business acumen** – the ability to make deals
- **Team-building acumen** – the ability to make the group of sellers greater than the sum of its parts
- **Resource acumen**—the ability to enhance selling effort with firm resources
- **Personal acumen** – a set of personal characteristics including, but not limited to, leadership, integrity, communication skills and managerial courage

I found the authors' acumen framework to be comprehensive, elegant and straightforward. The acumen dimensions provide a powerful means of assessing current and potential FLSMs and are a solid basis for coaching and training FLSMs. Many of the authors' interviewees believe that because FLSM is a boundary-role position and one of

the most important, yet most difficult, jobs in the entire corporation, FLSMs overall were generally in need of upskilling. The FLSM acumen framework is an excellent place to start.

In the second part of the book, the authors discuss requirements for the rest of the salesforce for helping FLSMs and their sellers to succeed. The authors believe that FLSMs and their sellers shoulder the firm's burden of securing sales revenues. In this view, all others in the salesforce, especially more senior sales managers, are *non-revenue-generating overhead*. The authors do not suggest that these roles are unimportant. Rather, they argue that sales leaders should take a serious look at all managerial roles and be very clear that they are helping FLSMs be successful, either directly or indirectly.

Companies and researchers put a lot of emphasis on sellers and selling, as indeed they should. But in many organizations, front-line sales management is not an issue of high concern – as it should be.

In addition to the acumen framework identifying specific areas where sales leaders and senior sales managers can help FLSMs succeed, the epilogue contains a fascinating perspective on the future of sales management and sales organizations.