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## Playing Your Song

A fascinating tidbit in a recent *Harvard Business Review* included a 1990 study conducted by Elizabeth Newton, in which a “tapper” had to tap out the rhythm of a well known song on a table while a “listener” tried to guess the song. The tappers predicted that listeners would guess the song about half the time, yet only a tiny fraction of listeners actually made the right guess. Why the disparity? The tappers could not help but hear the song in their head as they tapped out the rhythm and so it seemed obvious to them that the rhythm was good enough language to communicate the song.

## Our Take

Most corporate executives realize the need to get an outside agency involved when developing copy for consumer advertising, yet this is far less often the case when it comes to direct sales messages and almost never the case for internal communications. As a result many (if not most) salespeople are tapping out the corporate song while customers give them puzzled looks, and when it comes to the corporate vision the rank and file just “don’t get it.”

Is it possible to develop a truly excellent selling message or presentation using internal resources? Of course. But it’s unlikely. A decade of experience reviewing internally-developed sales presentations confirms most companies are too immersed in their own business to write messages that are music to customers’ ears. This is going to sound heretical, but often the worst selling presentations are developed by your salespeople. My advice is to *always* get outside input or review on important selling documents.

Similarly, most organizations I encounter are rife with misalignment among departments because the “obvious” meaning of the official corporate direction sounds different depending on the listener. Sometimes all that’s needed to clear up major issues is an independent voice challenging the assumptions (“we already know the song”) and making every note ring loudly and clearly across the organization. As with sales messages, it’s well worth taking the time to get an outside look at your internal communications... that is, if you want the whole organization to understand what you’re saying.

For more advice on getting your organization singing from the same sheet, contact:

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