At this point in your sales transformation journey, you have assembled your reports and your analyses; you’ve gotten buy-in from your sales team, other internal functional teams, and the C-suite. You know what transformation will require. Now it’s time to begin to implement your strategy. At this juncture, you are ready to move through implementation and your roadmap to close the gaps you have identified and to achieve your vision.

There is no shortage of clichés and platitudes about implementation. “This is where the rubber meets the road” and similar expressions exist for a reason: implementation is where you make your mark. You’ve built your case for change, your vision, and your roadmap. Now it’s time to put it all into practice. Even with the “best” roadmap, you’ll still need to be flexible. One of our mentors, Bill Frank, was a captain in the United States Army and flew helicopters in the Vietnam War. A highly decorated pilot who was twice awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Bill was one of the first to pilot the Apache attack helicopter. One of our favorite quotes from Bill, and there are many, refers to the disconnect we often experience between a plan and reality. As he told us many times based on hard-earned experience, “When the map and the terrain differ, go with the terrain.”

W. Shiver et al., *7 Steps to Sales Force Transformation* © Symmetrics Group 2016
Fortunately for us, a sales transformation doesn’t carry nearly the same impact or consequences, but the lesson applies: your roadmap will shape your overall effort, but you must adjust and allow for changes along the way. Your business, customers, and competitors are not standing around and waiting for you to transform, and your salespeople still need to perform during this time in order to meet their own goals and achieve their incentives.

Essentially, a sales force transformation centers on people: salespeople, sales support, customers, competitors, and even vendors and suppliers. All of the structure, processes, tools, compensation, training, and metrics are designed to enable your organization to have a unique and value-added conversation with your customers.

At Central Garden & Pet, the ability to have a differentiated conversation in a complex consumer goods market was critical to the success of a two-phase sales transformation in the pet division. Both of these sales force transformations involved consolidations of several sales forces that had originated from a series of acquisitions. Each of the separate sales teams were selling to different categories in the pet market. The transformations were designed to do three things:

1. reduce sales costs
2. enable broader, more strategic business conversations about driving the larger pet business
3. make it easier for customers to do business with Central

The first transformation involved determining how to integrate sales teams from five business units. Each unit was comprised of a team of product specialists who were experts in selling their unique product offerings. The sales transformation vision was to integrate these divisions into one unit that would drive more efficiencies and increase earnings while also delivering more value to retailer customers. In the current state, the retailers often had to sit through numerous—and sometimes overlapping—product-focused conversations with several salespeople from Central, rather than having broader business discussions about how Central could help them drive overall performance.