

Sales Training That Pays Off

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American corporations invest heavily in sales training, spending approximately \$7.2 billion each year, according to the *Journal of Personal Selling*. Despite the huge amount of green spent on sales training, most managers are unclear if the expense actually paid off and frustrated that training programs failed to deliver on the promises or expectations.

We have observed, facilitated and participated in hundreds of sales meetings over the past two decades and identified several attributes of sales training that yield better returns on a variety of levels—especially the bottom line. As you prepare for your next sales meeting, consider the following strategies:

ASSESS Talent to Clarify the Target

Sales skills assessments have come a long way since the personality tests of years ago. Today, resources are available to help you inexpensively measure specific sales competency, levels of motivation, temperament and the specific interpersonal skills that are the root of performance. Measuring these talents before training will help



you focus your training efforts in the areas your team needs most.

CUSTOMIZED CONTENT to Maximize Performance

Sales reps are much more likely to use information and ideas when they are relevant and practical. Generic training programs built on academic or theoretical models are being rapidly replaced by programs built from the ground up to meet the unique and specific needs of the team. In fact, some companies will even solicit the feedback of their customers to further customize training. Who better to teach your reps than your customers? Custom training content delivers much more usable information that you can quickly implement.

REINFORCE Learning

A popular phrase in instructional design circles is “What gets reinforced....gets repeated”. Research shows that 87% of what is learned in sales training is forgotten within three months —unless reinforced outside of the classroom. Apparently, this has more to do with a company’s culture than a salesperson’s

apptitude. Even great training will produce disappointing results unless managers and executives provide reinforcement after the training program is over.

Sales training doesn't stick because steps are not taken to practice and reinforce the key ideas presented. How many times have you attended training and the role play or practice sessions were rushed or eliminated in order for attendees to make their flights or too tired to even try?

Seasoned sales reps learn best with frequent participation in 'real world' scenarios. Any meeting is difficult for sales people where they are forced to just sit and listen. Sales people learn best then they are engaged, involved and have frequent opportunities to share their knowledge and experience. It's critical to find creative, fun ways to reinforce learning during each training program, to boost retention for better performance long after the training ends.

EVALUATE RESULTS

Sales training may not appear to deliver on expectations when results are not evaluated.

Evaluating training effectiveness can be perceived as a very complex process—if you want it to be. On the other hand, as author Steven Covey offers, if you, "Begin with the end in mind," evaluating training becomes more streamlined and focused on the things that matter to you and your reps.

As you launch any training initiative, consider the results that matter most. Figure out your current reporting and data access capabilities to help create metrics that your systems can measure. In addition, consider expanding your definition of sales training success by polling customers, prospects and end users. So often, sales managers build training around metrics that are too myopic. How might our customers define sales success? What attributes might they require in our sales team that will ultimately drive the results we look for?

Incorporating these strategies into your training program will ensure your training pays off. Training done well, will deliver significant returns to your top line, bottom line as well as what it will do for that magnificent middle---the core talents of your team!

About the Author

Anita Sirianni, *The Professional Sales Coach*, has over 20 years of sales success in healthcare. Today she is one of the industry's most popular consultants and sales trainers, providing customized programs for leading corporations throughout the United States. For more FREE sales tools and information visit our web site at www.AnitaSirianni.com or contact Anita at Coach@AnitaSirianni.com or 800-471-2619.