

Why Sales Training Does **NOT** Work

Why Sales Training Does **NOT** Work

Have you ever sent your staff on a sales training course only to see zero change in their behavior or sales results? Comments like, “that was a good course ... and the food was great too” are disturbingly common with little or no lasting improvement in sales performance. If these words resonate with your own experiences, then a word of advice; don’t waste your money of sales training.

Recent studies have shown that 94 percent of companies invest in some form of sales training with an average of 4 days per year whilst top-performing companies are investing an average of 6.5 days per year. Despite this, the same research found that only 9 percent of companies see behavioral changes in trainees and that 85 to 90 percent of sales training has no lasting impact after 3 months! Why does this happen with such monotonous frequency? Here are some reasons:

Training Companies Have Been Milking You!

It’s not generally intentional, but with the trend towards developing, “smart economies” it has been said that the Information Age has extended into the Education Age. That being the case, corporate companies are investing more in developing staff capability, and more training companies have sprung up to take advantage of this opportunity. However, there are several problems with many sales training organisations:

1. It can be cheap for new market entrants to set themselves up as sales trainers. There is no relevant qualification for this occupation, so clients engage them at their own risk. I personally know sales trainers with limited or even zero sales experience who teach people how to do what they have never personally done. It’s a scary thought when we begin to realize that we might actually be paying for advice from trainers who are more messed up



than we are. One example of this is a sales trainer I met who teaches cold calling, yet has never done it personally. In fact, he struggles to develop his own business because of the fear of rejection that comes from prospecting. He hoped we would give him leads instead. Other trainers have relevant sales experience they can draw upon, yet they cannot teach. It can be fairly easy to find successful salespeople, and it is fairly easy to find people who can teach. However it can be difficult to find both of these qualities in just one person. To make matters worse, a frightening number of trainers teach out dated practices. Their poor commercial

experience combined with a lack knowledge of the very latest research actually results in teaching of sales skills that no longer work, often leading to poor differentiation and ultimately, discounting.

2. If a sales training company just provides training, then no matter how good their people are your investment is still wasted. This is because training is only a single piece of a more complex puzzle when it comes to growing our sales. For example, research conducted by Michael M. Lombardo and Robert W. Eichinger at the Centre for Creative Leadership concluded that training only accounts for 10 percent of behavioural change. The rest is made up of managerial coaching observation and feedback (20 percent), and trying it on-the-job for oneself (70 percent). This finding is commonly referred to as the 70/20/10 Rule. Such a model requires more than just a classroom remedy. It requires high levels of sustainable collaboration with your leadership team too (but more on that later). If a training provider cannot provide a system that effectively factors this model into their programme design, run!

3. Most sales training companies do not measure results. The extent of their measurement may be a post course evaluation survey. This is only level 1 of what we call the Kirkpatrick Model of evaluation, and any monkey can evaluate at this level. Level 2 determines participant understanding of the course content, and this is not too hard to determine either. However, it is levels 3 and 4 that few training providers are able to measure. Level 3 determines whether their actual behaviour has changed as a result of the training. Usually, it is your management who can determine this through their pre and post training observation and coaching (the '20' from 70/20/10), but only if they are heavily engaged in supporting such training. Level 4 determines the results. For example, have sales increased and has return on investment (ROI) been achieved? The Kirkpatrick model is a form of Balanced Scorecard. For example, if sales have increased we may not be sure if this is because of the salesperson or due to some external influence such as an improved economy. However, if all levels balance, then we know the training is working. Here is the point: The Kirkpatrick Model is a globally respected form of determining measurable results. However, most sales trainers cannot measure beyond levels 1 or 2. That being said, the value they offer is highly subjective.



Our Own Staff May Be Untrainable

For over three decades the Objective Management Group has been conducting arguably the biggest research project in the history of selling, having evaluated more than 750,000 salespeople and 100,000 sales managers. Some of their findings from such a large sample include:

1. Some salespeople are simply untrainable. They lack core attributes such as desire, commitment, positive outlook, or a willingness to take responsibility. Prior to training evaluation of your sales force to determine whether they have these qualities can save you thousands of dollars in a wasted investment. In his book, "From Good To Great" Jim Collins tells us that such people should not even, "be on the bus" let alone have money invested on the futile exercise of training them.

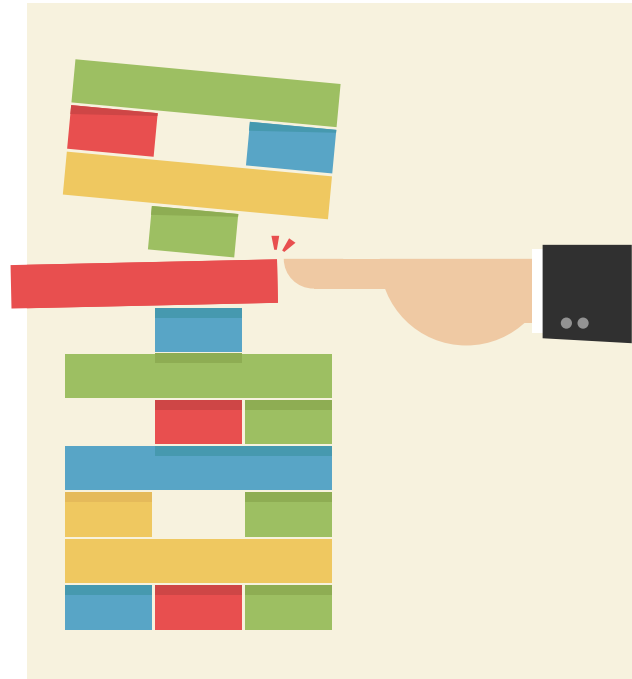
2. Mindset is more important than skillset. The Objective Management Group concludes that skillset accounts for only 20 percent of a salesperson's success, whereas mindset is responsible for a huge 80 percent. This brings into question the value of skill based sales training. The sales skills learned on courses are of limited value if their mindset prevents them from executing what they know. For example, a salesperson might have been taught how to make a cold call, or may have learned the tactics to close a sale, but if their mindset comes with a high need for approval from others their fear of rejection prevents them from putting their training into practice. In other words, they fail to execute in spite of all the skills based training they had. Other mindset related weaknesses can range from self limiting beliefs such as, "our prices are too high" or "there's no point in calling on this prospect – they've

been with our opposition for years”, to displaying too much empathy when hit with a put-off such as, “we want to think it over”. Such empathy comes from a salesperson’s own cautious buying habits. Objective Management Group call this weakness a, “non supportive buy-cycle”. Research shows that weaknesses such as the latter can impact our sales effectiveness by 50 percent. Remember, this is a mindset issue, not a skillset issue. And most sales training is centred around skillset.

Your Company May Lack Sales Process

A disturbingly common discovery we make when engaging with clients is that by far the majority lack a best-practice sales process – or any process at all. Training is unsupported in the absence of a sales process or if it comes into conflict it. As a result salespeople are often left to figure out their own practice standard, and application of training is haphazard or inconsistent to say the least. Any application of what they learned becomes a matter of good luck rather than good management. In contrast companies like Xerox and IBM used to have global practice standards that supported their own in-house training and development programmes. In other words, they had a sales process. And it was a process scientifically developed from analysis of 35,000 sales calls by Professor Neil Rackham and his research team. Best-practices were established, consistent behaviours were driven, sales cycles were shortened, and new recruits “ramped-up” faster. Process also gave them a basis on which to hold their teams accountable and to coach them if any steps were missed. 70/20/10 was heavily used and this is why they developed some of the finest and most professional salespeople of their time.

You will be astonished by the number of people we talk to who do not know how to position themselves as a Trusted Advisor (as opposed to yet another ‘rep’ peddling products), or who cannot articulate their unique value proposition (UVP). More than 90 percent of those asked cannot do this convincingly, in spite of being the company representatives. But it’s not always their fault. Management have usually failed to develop their company’s strategic messaging. Strategic messaging determines positioning, UVP, and much, much more. Training courses often omit strategic messaging because these usually have to be determined by management. When such courses do give attention to these matters, they frequently fail to deliver. For example, a unique value proposition may be far less than unique. Competitors often make similar claims, and this commoditizes the whole discussion.



Training Is Often Met With A Leadership Deficit

A disappointing truth I observe with tedious regularity is that trainees have been ill prepared by their managers. Many say to me they have no objective for attending because they were simply told (usually via e-mail) to show up. No objectives were established, no managerial expectations were set, and no benefits were sold to the salesperson. Much of the time their managers do not even know what their staff are taught, so they cannot support what is learned. Very little post course debriefing takes place by management and as a result, no goals or actions are agreed to, let alone monitored. It gets worse when the sales manager promotes a sales practice that conflicts with what their staff were taught. We have made reference to the 70/20/10 principle several times in this article, and this implies a very heavy level of managerial involvement, most especially, leadership of training initiatives. Many managers openly confess to being guilty of not coaching their staff in the field nearly enough. They fail to perform the ‘20’ or observe their staff attempt the ‘70’ from the 70/20/10 principle. ‘Leadership’ as opposed to ‘Management’ is defined as dealing with people as opposed to achieving task. A core leadership attribute is development of teams and individuals – coaching. Objective Management Group and the Adair leadership model both tell us that leaders should spend 50 percent of their time developing their people. Sad to say, in this busy age managers tend to get bogged down with task (management) rather coaching (leadership). The

conclusion? Sad to say, we as managers may be the very cause of expensive training not working through our lack of leadership. And no wonder – a 2011 survey of 3,000 managers in New Zealand and Australia concluded that the second highest business skill deficiency (next to technical skills) was leadership.

How To Make Sales Training Work

You may have already discerned some of the steps to take when it comes to capability development of your sales team. In summary these are:

- 1. Perform proper due diligence on your training provider.** Do they have a relevant track record of successful commercial experience? In addition to this, can they also teach? Ask them if they know about the 70/20/10 principle. If they don't, run! And if they do know but cannot satisfactorily explain how they model their programme design around this, run anyway! Ask them how they measure their results. Remember, measuring only one thing such as ROI can be highly subjective. Be very weary if they cannot propose a method that resembles a Balanced Scorecard.
- 2. Evaluate your team before you invest in them.** Leading diagnostic tools such as those provided by the Objective Management Group both allow you to target your training to address very specific weaknesses, or can save you thousands of dollars by identifying those that are untrainable. When you have done this, choose a programme that has heavy emphasis on mindset development in order to ensure your team actually execute what they learn.



- 3. Develop your sales process – a company wide practice standard that supports training so that salespeople get consistent messaging as to what is best-practice.** And speaking of messaging, take time to develop strategic messaging. Then drill your salespeople accordingly so that they can for example, articulate your UVP fluently and convincingly.
- 4. Finally, commit to developing your own leadership capability.** Remember, if these initiatives are not managerially led, you will waste your money. Training will not work.

As we said earlier, training is only one piece of the puzzle in the pursuit of developing our sales capability. Take a holistic view to sales development. Commit to implementing all of the pieces, and training will work. ★

Want to find out more?

Contact the team at SalesStar today.



09 524 0999



katherine@salesstar.com



steveb@salesstar.com