

WORLD-CLASS SALES TRAINING

*How to Build and Implement Your
Own Sales University*

by Mike Schultz & John Doerr

Develop a sales education system that drives real behavior change and results.



THE STATE OF SALES TRAINING

Customization. Gamification. Blended learning. Reinforcement. These have all been positive trends in sales training over the last decade, but sales training is still not effective.

In fact, 85% to 90% of sales training fails by 120 days after it is delivered.¹ The world is full of opportunity to increase sales, yet almost one third of top sales executives report that the majority of their reps do not have the skills they need to perform in their jobs.²

Sales training is supposed to deliver these skills, but it often doesn't.

When sales training does work, however, it makes a huge difference. At companies where sales training programs exceed expectations, sellers are more likely to:

- + Make quota (69.4% vs. 60% for the "Needs Improvement" in sales training group)
- + Have a higher win rate for sales (54.3% vs. 44%)
- + Lose fewer sales to no decision (20.5% vs. 26%)
- + Stay at the company (15.7% turnover rate vs. 25.6%)³

Where sales training exceeds expectations, sellers are 56% more likely to be able to differentiate from the competition.

It's tempting to share even more data about the sad state of sales skills and training. Suffice it to say that a preponderance of research supports the following points:

1. Sellers need to improve their skills and knowledge
2. Sales training often fails
3. When sales training succeeds, it makes a direct and quantifiable impact on sales team effectiveness and revenue growth

It's time for an entirely new way of approaching sales education; an approach that changes the way sales training is conceived, designed, and executed over the long-term. An approach that *drives real behavior change and results.*

The end result: a team of top performers who not only meet, but consistently exceed quota. Keep reading and we'll share how the few companies that make it happen are getting it done.

SALES TRAINING DESIGNED FOR LEARNING AND CHANGE

Sales training is often approached with a car wash mentality. Pull in when needed and come out the other side shiny, new, and ready to be a top seller. This kind of training might be fine for learning basic tasks.

Selling is not a basic task.

Not only is there a large body of sophisticated skills and knowledge to master, but sales training is often about changing the behavior of adults who are set in their ways.

Discrete-event training doesn't have nearly the effectiveness of a well-planned, concerted effort over time. Given that the car wash approach is the standard for most organizations, it's no wonder that most training fails and billions of dollars are wasted each year.

Leading organizations don't see sales training as an event, they view it as an ongoing process.

1. Dave Stein, *Sales Training: The 120-Day Curse* (ES Research Group, 2011).
2. Dianne Ledingham et al., *Mastering the New Reality of Sales* (Bain & Company, 2014).
3. *The Business Case for Sales Training* (CSO Insights, 2013).
4. 36% of sales leaders cite "ramping up reps takes too long" as the reason for not reaching quota. Source: *The State of Sales Execution: 2015 Trends Report* (Qvidian, 2015).
5. Association for Talent Development.

Companies spend \$20 billion on sales training each year,⁵ yet 85% to 90% of sales training fails.



UP TO 77% OF
LEARNING IS
FORGOTTEN
WITHIN 6 DAYS.⁷

They develop a sales education system where they not only build sales team capability, but also design the training so that it gets applied and enables sellers to transform the way they sell.

A NEW APPROACH: BUILDING A SALES UNIVERSITY

World-class sales training feels less like discrete events and more like a university education. Indeed, world-class companies build their own sales universities. Figure 1 shows how this looks different than the more common, but less effective, approach.

The sales university approach works, gets applied, and makes a significant impact. And it doesn't just make for great training—it's where sales training meets sales enablement.

Transforming your approach to sales training by developing your own sales university won't happen overnight, but getting there is certainly worth the effort. According to data from a

recent Aberdeen Group study, companies that deploy formal sales training initiatives lead non-adopters in:

- + Overall team attainment of sales quota (78% vs. 63%)
- + Customer retention (71% vs. 66%)
- + The percentage of sales reps achieving quota (64% vs. 42%)⁶

You might think that setting up a corporate university is not so new. The largest companies have been doing it for some years. However, with the way learning technologies and approaches have evolved—and with some forethought—companies of virtually any size can now set up their own sales university.

6. Peter Ostrow, *It's a Marathon, Not a Sprint: Best-In-Class B2B Sales Training For an Ever-Changing Market* (Aberdeen Group, 2014).

7. Hermann Ebbinghaus, *Memory: A Contribution to Experimental Psychology*, (Teachers College, 1885). Accessed: <http://psy.ed.asu.edu/~classics/Ebbinghaus/index.htm>.

Figure 1. Sales Training vs. Sales University

CATEGORY	TYPICAL SALES TRAINING	SALES UNIVERSITY
Approach to sales training	Flavor of the month, jumbled	Focused, organized, logical, long-term view
Staying power	Learning forgotten, not applied	Learned, internalized, applied
New hire ramp-up	Time consuming, ineffective	Efficient, repeatable, effective
Delivery method and components	Limited	Live and online blended learning, multiple modalities, testing and certification
Customization	If done, lots of effort, little use	Maximum use for sales enablement
Sales approach (method)	Aging, limited, jumbled mix	Research-based, current, field-tested, comprehensive
Ramp-up	Slow, inefficient process to get new hires to full capacity	Fast, effective, well-planned ramp-up
Effectiveness	Not remembered, not connected to daily work	Internalized, integrated with sales performance environment, behaviors applied on the job



When a sales university is developed well, companies:

1. **Define** goals and objectives for sales training, and how training should affect sales force results.
2. **Develop** custom sales training and improvements to the sales performance environment in areas such as sales process, sales management, and performance support tools like sales playbooks.
3. **Deliver** blended sales training with strong reinforcement that is well-received by participants and immediately applicable to their jobs.

4. **Enable** sellers so that sales training translates into the desired behavioral change.

5. **Measure** effectiveness of sales training itself and its effect on sales results, and continuously improve the training and performance environment.

In the pages that follow, we'll cover each stage in depth.



STAGE 1 Define

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, SUCCESS METRICS

For most companies, transforming their approach to sales training by establishing a sales university is not really a training initiative. It's a change-management effort. Like any change initiative, the first step is to create a sense of urgency, a belief that it is important. If senior leaders, colleagues, and other stakeholders don't believe it's important—that it's worthy of their focus—then you start the change process with a steep hill to climb.

Let's assume the powers-that-be have an appetite for raising your sales training game. Now it's time to bring your sales university vision to life. To do this, you need a plan, a message, and a convincing story for why everyone should get behind it.

Establishing goals, metrics, and objectives are essential for doing this.

One common goal across sales university plans is to establish world-class sales education in the form of your <Company Name Here> Sales University. Sure, this might seem obvious, but it's important to know—and to be able to communicate—where you are headed. You have to inspire people with your vision of transformation.

Other common goals and objectives of sales universities include:

- + Creating a path to top performance for each sales role
- + Linking sales training to sales enablement
- + Making training and enablement resources readily available as sellers need them

- + Establishing an effective, common approach to your company's way of selling
- + Raising quota and quota attainment
- + Ramping up new sales hires quickly, efficiently, and effectively

Your objectives should then tie to metrics that, when you achieve them, are likely to drive sales success. See the sidebar for examples of sales training success metrics.

It's also important to define the return on investment measures. Whether you control the purse strings or not, making the ROI case is critical to getting people to buy into the initiative.

CURRICULUM

A lot of sales training is done on little more than a whim. Problem is, next quarter someone else has another whim, leading to another "priority" training issue. When this happens, sellers tend to dismiss the importance of whatever the training is because, well, something else was critically important two months earlier, and now it's off the radar screen.

Having a sales training curriculum solves this problem.

Almost all training needs for a sales force can be defined in advance because you know what people need to *produce* and *do*. If you know what they need to do, you can define the knowledge, skills, and attributes required to do it. If you have defined the skills, knowledge, and attributes, you can define the content and format of training programs best suited for building them.

8. Why care about the participant perception of training? See data on page 1.

EXAMPLES OF SALES TRAINING SUCCESS METRICS

> 85% of sellers rate training as highly effective⁸

90%+ adoption of your <Company Name Here>'s Sales Methodology

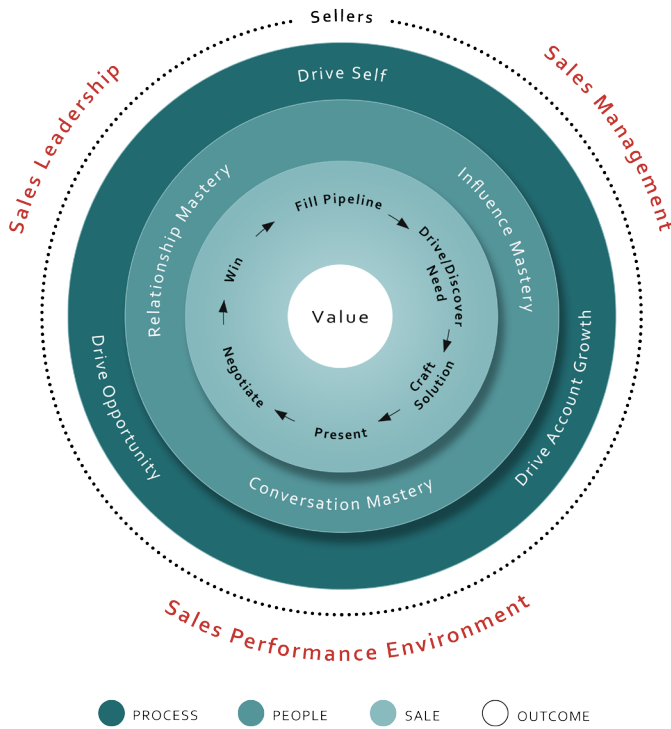
Decrease in sales ramp-up time from 9 months to 5

120% increase in new clients

15%-20% decrease in unwanted sales turnover

300% increase in account growth

SALES COMPETENCY WHEEL



proactively. With needs discovery, the idea is to find out what may be most valuable to a buyer when they indicate they have need. With driving need, the idea is to find untapped value in the market and at accounts, and then make a case for doing something about it that creates value for the buyer.

- + **Craft Solution:** Whether you or the buyer drives the need, once you understand it, you must craft a solution that actually creates the most value.
- + **Present:** You have to communicate the full value of the solution so the buyer understands it as well as you do.
- + **Negotiate:** Assuming you are selected by the buyer, often you enter a negotiation phase. The idea is to maintain margin and prices by focusing on value over price.
- + **Win:** The ultimate recognition of creating value is winning the sale. Winning doesn't just happen, though. Sellers have to make it happen and beat the competition.

PEOPLE

To make sales work, sellers must succeed with people. The areas they need to focus on here are:

- + **Conversation Mastery:** Sellers must lead masterful conversations across the sales process.
- + **Relationship Mastery:** Sellers must build strong relationships as they affect success at every stage of the sales process.
- + **Influence Mastery:** It's the job of a seller to influence buyer agendas, actions, and decisions.

PROCESS

For sellers to succeed at any of the inner circles, they must be able to:

- + **Drive Opportunities:** Leading the process of winning a sale, including planning to build relationships, leading masterful conversations, and influencing buyers.
- + **Drive Account Growth:** Penetrating, expanding, and protecting a company's most important accounts.
- + **Drive Themselves:** Directing their own success, making their own plans of action, managing their own time and activities, and managing their pipelines to yield maximum business.

These are all the skill areas sellers must have.

Factors influencing sellers' abilities to get all of this done, are:

- + **Sales Leadership:** Defining the path to overall success, and architecting the system to allow the teams to achieve at their potential.
- + **Sales Management:** Working to help each seller reach their potential on a day-to-day basis.
- + **Sales Performance Environment:** Allowing sellers to sell effectively, and providing the tools to help them win.

It's much easier to build a curriculum if you have a checklist to guide what sellers need to do well to succeed at your company. At RAIN Group, we use the Sales Competency WheelSM to help us build curricula for a particular role.

The RAIN Group Sales Competency Wheel identifies the core areas where sellers must have proficiency in order to succeed. Not every seller must do everything in the wheel (e.g., not every seller must fill their own pipelines or drive account growth), but every sales role is comprised of some mix of these areas.

To use the Sales Competency Wheel yourself, just ask, for each of the areas:

- + Is this important for this sales role?
- + What does it look like when someone in this role does this well?
- + What should someone in this role do that we're not doing here now, but that sellers at other companies are doing?

The Sales Competency Wheel itself has a number of categories. We'll look at it from the center out:

VALUE

At the center is value. When sellers can create value, they win. This is the end goal.

SALE

Then there is what sellers need to do to create and win a particular sale or opportunity. Note that each area is connected to the concept of value.

- + **Fill Pipeline:** You can't sell if you don't have opportunities. If value is the outcome, then infuse value in the prospecting process itself.
- + **Drive | Discover Need:** Most sales processes focus solely on needs discovery. That's only half the story. Sellers should also drive need



One common misconception about having a curriculum is that everyone needs to take every program. Go through the process, though, and it becomes obvious that some programs are ‘core’ programs that everyone must take at some point. Others are electives that may be taken depending on the role, the need to strengthen a particular capability, or the interest of the participant. (Starting to sound like a university, yes?)

Defining the curriculum starts with the output a particular sales role is expected to produce.

For example:

OUTPUT	SKILLS TRAINING NEEDED
Complete thorough needs discovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Sales opportunity management + Leading masterful sales conversations (i.e., core consultative selling) + Questioning skills
Inspire buyers, shape buyers' agendas for action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Presentation and storytelling skills + Selling ideas and insights (i.e., advanced consultative selling)
Sell value, reduce price pushbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Sales opportunity management + Core and advanced consultative selling + Sales negotiation
Growing key accounts	Strategic account management

This example covers skill topics. Knowledge topics spanning these outputs could include:

- + Industry knowledge, yours and the buyer's
- + Common areas of client need
- + Product and service knowledge
- + Sales and value messaging
- + Competition

It's also essential in the process of defining a curriculum (see fig. 2 on the next page) to define the new hire ramp-up curriculum and schedule. It takes an average of 7.3 months to hire and onboard a fully contributing seller, and with complex sales it's often quite a bit longer.⁹

We've seen ramp-up time get cut by greater than 50% when companies home in on improving

in this area, increasing seller effectiveness and decreasing turnover of sellers for whom getting up to speed was taking too long.

Getting teams on the right track, and getting them ramped up to full productivity as quickly as possible, is a core component of the sales training curriculum.

IMPLEMENTATION AND ENABLEMENT

Companies that get sales training right don't just define the training; they define how it will be used and how selling will be executed.

Many companies fall short, so the sales training doesn't actually enable seller success.

You must define the tools, processes, and technologies that will enable your team to apply what they have learned on the job. Having an enablement and implementation plan is essential for doing this.

A primary—and often overlooked—determinant of success or failure in enablement is the effectiveness of sales management. If sales managers coach and lead their teams well, it's the difference that makes it all work.

This includes:

- + Establishing clear goals, expectations, and action plans
- + Reinforcing skills, knowledge, and expected behaviors at regular meetings
- + Co-selling when appropriate, including observing and modeling expected behaviors¹⁰
- + Dealing with issues and problems quickly and effectively

⁹. Peter Ostrow, *Beyond the Quota: Best-in-Class Deployments of Sales Performance Management* (Aberdeen Group, 2014).

¹⁰. Doing this the correct way is tricky as you don't want the sales managers to overshadow the sellers. With the right strategies, sales managers can co-sell while also helping the seller establish and maintain the role of primary buyer relationship manager.



Figure 2. Sample University Curriculum

Sample Curriculum

For: Business Development Manager

Live
 Online
 Coaching
 Certify

		Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
YEAR 1	Skills Training	Mastering the Sales Opportunity			← →											
		Prospecting & Appointment Setting							← →							
		RAIN Selling												← →		
	Knowledge Training	Client industries and trends		← →												
		Value proposition and key messaging		← →												
		Needs we solve and our capabilities			← →											
		Sales process and strategy			← →											
	How client businesses work			← →												
	Our industry			← →												
	Competition and competitive strategies				← →											
YEAR 2	Skills Training	Selling at the Peak			← →											
		Insight Selling							← →							
		RAIN Sales Negotiation											← →			
YEAR 3	Skills Training	Strategic Account Management			← →											
		Developing Executive Relationships							← →							
		Sales Presentations that Win											← →			

Companies that don't consider sales management strongly enough—including having a curriculum for sales management success—find themselves spending a lot of time and money with little to show for it.

ACQUIRE NECESSARY RESOURCES

Once you define what sales training and performance support will look like at your company, you can then step back and ask, “What resources do we need to get this done?”

There are two hurdles to jump in the “define phase” of a university. The first is to define the university itself. Goals, curriculum, enablement plan, etc. The second is funding the university.

Define the goals and outcomes of a university and you should have a fairly good ROI story to tell.

Too often, however, companies charge forth with a beer budget and expect champagne results. If resources are going to be severely limited, start with making a case for training a smaller group. Then make sure the training succeeds and shows impact. A great way to get your change effort to go big is to create smaller successes that prove the concept.



STAGE 2 Develop

After defining a set of goals, a curriculum, and a plan to implement your sales university, the next steps are developing the training and optimizing the sales performance environment.

CUSTOMIZE TO SUPPORT TRAINING AND PERFORMANCE

If you want to connect with participants and make the learning most impactful, you must customize. Certain topics, of course, may be universal, but if you don't customize examples, exercises, tools, and reinforcement activities to match the context of your company and market, sellers *won't accept it*.

Customization can be labor intensive, but most people understand that it's necessary to make any corporate training initiative effective. Unfortunately, much of the customization work for training:

- + Isn't readily applicable to the seller's job
- + Gets lost or forgotten after the training, so it's not used even if it's applicable

If you want to create effective customization, don't just focus on classroom-focused case studies. Build customizations the team can use on the job, including:

- + Opportunity and account planning tools
- + Needs discovery guides
- + Sales messaging, including selling new ideas and positioning company value
- + Sales playbooks for supporting behavior across the sales cycle, from prospecting to negotiating to winning major opportunities

Receiving, practicing with, and using these kinds of sales performance support tools are often cited by sellers as the most beneficial part

of training. Plus, they're critical for helping the training stick.

USE ASSESSMENTS

Assessments can aid the learning and development process in a number of ways.

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Assessments can give you a sense of what knowledge and skills a seller has. This will affect whether they take a certain class or participate in a course of study. One of the greatest wastes of time and money is putting people through unnecessary or duplicative training. Good assessment instruments and processes can help you avoid this problem.

Along with assessment instruments, good assessment processes—like assessment centers and certification—are important for measuring whether your sellers have gained a skill or knowledge from training.

ATTRIBUTES AND MOTIVATIONS

Understanding attributes—the factors that drive whether someone *will* do something and *why* they will do it—is crucial for learning. Knowing if someone has a natural tendency to do something you want them to do, or whether it will be a struggle, will help you know whether and how to pursue training with that person. And understanding an individual's motivations is critical to connecting the behaviors you want them to exhibit with what's important to *them*.

COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING PREFERENCES

If you get a sense of your team's learning styles and communication preferences, you can develop the training—and lead coaching conversations—that are most likely to succeed with them. It takes effort, but sales managers who do this don't merely get the most out of their sellers: they *retain* them.



UNDERSTANDING BUYERS AND BUYING

Some assessment instruments serve double-duty. Not only are they useful for developing training and delivering coaching, they are very effective for helping sellers understand buyers, their buying preferences, and motivations.

Indeed, assessments have a significant impact on sales education.

OPTIMIZE SELLING AND SALES MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

Many companies don't have a consistent and effective sales process. When this is the case, they leave sales results to chance—to the whims of what each individual seller thinks is important to do to shepherd a sale from the first conversation to the win.

It's also true that many companies don't have a consistent and effective sales management process. When this is the case, companies often find themselves with wildly inconsistent approaches to:

- + Sourcing new sales opportunities
- + Winning opportunities and growing accounts
- + Motivating the sales force
- + Executing across teams

- + Developing sales messaging and using it consistently
- + Leading effective sales conversations
- + Developing the sales team
- + Retaining top performers
- + Hiring new sellers

If you want sales training to meet sales enablement, training and then sending the team out into the Wild West doesn't work.

One other common mistake is that some companies opt to improve these processes before implementing any training because they think they have to. This isn't the case. You can, and often should, build the plane while you're going down the runway. You'll achieve faster progress than those that take a more linear approach.

The companies that make sales training most effective make sure the selling and sales management processes are as strong as they should be simultaneously, and continuously look to improve them.



STAGE 3 Deliver

“Tell me and I forget,
teach me and I may
remember, involve
me and I learn.”

Benjamin Franklin

Think of your best experiences when you were at your own university. Remember your favorite professors? Remember how they could take a dry subject and make it interesting, teaching in new and novel ways? Remember when you were most involved on campus and how it affected you? Remember working hard to get a good grade in a tough course?

The best sales universities do this by design. They're engaging, they employ powerful teaching methods and modalities, and they reinforce the training so it sticks.

ENGAGE

A pivotal point in the success or failure of a training initiative is the delivery itself. While trainers often dismiss 'smile sheets,' (the participants' individual ratings of how much they believe they got out of a training program) they are vitally important. Not because a "5 out of 5" in satisfaction with the program ensures success, but because a "2 out of 5" ensures failure.

When participants are highly satisfied with training, they:

- + Are open to applying what they learned in the field
- + Are willing to accept reinforcement and coaching
- + Will come back for future training

Deliver training that is boring, disconnected from their daily work, or delivered by someone who can't gain respect and trust, and you lose your sellers.

The following components are important for the live delivery portion of training to be successful:

- + Credible and skilled facilitators
- + Custom cases and job aids (see the previous section, Stage 2: Develop)

- + High level of interaction vs. lecture
- + Gamification and technology embedded in live learning

Live delivery, however, is only part of the story.

TRAINING METHODS AND DELIVERY MODALITIES

It wasn't so long ago that there was only one core way sales training was delivered: instructor-led in the classroom. Sure, there might have been computer-based training that was reasonably useful even 20 years ago, but it wasn't until recently that blended delivery approaches have become common and effective.

Delivering learning through multiple modalities has two effects:

- + It makes the training more engaging
- + It has a cumulative effect on learning

Video and gamification, such as computer-based simulations, have always made training more engaging and fun. If you're not using these, you should. However, they're not the only delivery mechanisms outside of live training.

In some of our live training courses, we've found that certain self-study methods can be highly effective.

Wait, did you say self-study during a live training?

Yes.

For example, in one seminar, it was important that participants learn specific responses to and messaging for 20 different questions. We delivered the training on the content and then conducted an exercise to bring it to life. Then we broke for the day.



As the second day of the training began, we asked participants to close their books and, from memory, write out the 20 situations and the strategies for responding. On average, they remembered six situations and got the strategies for responding about 70% in line with what they learned the day before. Then we put the situations and strategies on flash cards, and conducted a high-energy, fast-paced self-study session.

Twenty minutes later, almost everyone had memorized all the situations and got the response strategies closer to 95% in line with what they had just learned. This is a good start in making the learning permanent, but just a start. Reinforcement comes next.

REINFORCEMENT

Reinforcement has been a trend in the world of sales training for a while now. It's always been common sense, but all of the research data in sales training, and learning and development in general, supports the point.

Yet it's still not happening.

Fewer than half (44%) of companies formally follow-up initial sales training with reinforcement. At the same time, the companies that do reinforce training see 20% more salespeople achieve sales quotas.¹¹

One of the major advantages to approaching sales education through the sales university concept is the ongoing learning and reinforcement that happens.

Like any well-thought-out curriculum, the classes and programs build on each other. And often you have to demonstrate a certain level of proficiency before moving on to the next program. This helps the learning become permanent and important concepts stay top-of-mind. Only with consistent reinforcement will you transform the behaviors of sellers, and will sales training meet sales enablement.

¹¹. Peter Ostrow, *It's a Marathon, Not a Sprint: Best-In-Class B2B Sales Training for an Ever-Changing Market*.



STAGE 4 Enable

You defined your enablement plan in step 1, and now it's time to implement. The devil is in the details.

According to a study by Bain & Company, 90% of executives surveyed ranked sales execution as one of their top five business priorities, but fewer than half of the respondents felt that their sales forces were operating at full potential.¹²

The companies that get it right answer two important questions:

- 1. How will sellers implement what they learn?** Companies don't consider how sellers will implement what they learn, or they make assumptions that end up not flying with sellers. Sure, there will always be some naysayers, but there's often a disconnect between the thinking and expectations of the sponsors of the training and the training participants themselves.

Posing the question of *how* something will be implemented goes a long way towards solving this issue. Involving forward-thinking sellers in training development helps establish the right path forward, and creates the social proof for other sellers that they should accept and take on what they learn.

- 2. What will it really take to change the way our sellers sell?** Most companies underestimate the effort needed to change the way their teams sell. Even if skills and knowledge training is effective in that it builds capabilities, it doesn't ensure that sellers will change the way they sell. In other words, sometimes sellers *learn it*, but they don't *do it*.

Let's assume for a minute that company leaders do want to change the way their teams sell. Two things are critical: asking, "What will it really take to change the way

our sellers sell?" and having people around who have seen it happen.

ENSURE EXECUTION THROUGH SALES MANAGEMENT AND COACHING

If you've been following the process outlined in this paper, you have everything set up for success. Now you have to ensure it's all applied and adopted. A core leverage point here is sales management. It's their job to:

- + Help sellers define goals and action plans, and guide them to the behaviors that will help them succeed the most
- + Work with sellers to use the tools and resources available so sellers execute more consistently and with better results
- + Motivate sellers to get to, and stay at, the top of their game
- + Advise sellers on how to win sales
- + Guide sellers to develop into top performers
- + Hold sellers accountable for their results

It's also up to the sales managers to make decisions about sellers who veer off, or just won't get on, the recommended path.

If a seller is wildly successful while only taking their own counsel on how to sell, assuming they sell with integrity, it's likely the best path is to just leave that seller be. But if the seller isn't producing what they should, it's up to the sales manager to help the seller find the best path to

¹². Giovanni Arnese et al., *Perfecting Sales Execution* (Bain & Company, 2011).



success, or counsel them to pursue some other position besides selling in their current roles.¹³

OPTIMIZE THE SALES PROCESS

Defining the sales process doesn't mean simply laying out the steps a seller takes from first conversation to a sales win. It's about making the selling process as effective as possible, including the strategies, technologies, job aids, and other performance support mechanisms to help them sell most efficiently and effectively.

Optimizing the selling process means:

- + Investigating what works consistently for sales wins at your organization
- + Defining what sellers *aren't* doing that they *should* be doing, and creating tests to see if it works better than the current approach
- + Building in performance support tools to aid seller success at each stage of the process
- + Mapping out the flow of how all the stages and pieces interrelate, including actions to take and milestones to reach, to move from stage to stage
- + Teaching sellers to understand and adopt the selling process

Once you optimize the selling process itself, sales training efforts will have the most impact.

PROACTIVELY-MANAGED SINGLE RESOURCE LOCATION

The promise of an elegant environment for CRM, selling tools, training, and other performance support resources eludes many sales organizations. Sometimes people talk about them, and sometimes they buy sales enablement software, but they still end up being jumbled, useless messes.

For the most part, it's a lack of confidence and trust in sales resource environments that lead to them gathering virtual mothballs. Challenges that face most organizations are:

- 1. Lack of tools:** They don't have the performance support tools, training, collateral, and other resources sellers need to succeed.
- 2. Organization:** Whatever they have is organized poorly—everything is difficult to find.
- 3. Proactive Management:** Resource environments, and resources, are not intensely managed for being up-to-date, accurate, and easy-to-use.

As a result, sellers waste time searching for materials, don't trust that the tools and collateral are the most up-to-date versions, and spend inordinate amounts of time creating their own versions that aren't brand compliant and miss the key messages you want to get across.

The solutions to these challenges may be hard work, but they are straightforward.

For **lack of tools** and performance support, follow the framework presented in this paper: define what you can do to best support sellers, and build it into your system.

For **lack of organization**, adopt a consistent organizational framework for how sellers find and access critical information.

For **lack of proactive management**, make sure someone's life depends on the environment getting to—and staying in—pristine condition.

¹³. Best-in-class companies are 26% more likely than the rest (72% vs. 57%) to provide structured performance feedback beyond the typical "you aren't hitting your quota" conversation. Source: Peter Ostrow, *Beyond the Quota: Best-in-Class Deployments of Sales Performance Management*.

¹⁴. Peter Ostrow, *It's a Marathon, Not a Sprint: Best-In-Class B2B Sales Training for an Ever-Changing Market*.

73% of best-in-class companies—those with above-average performance in achieving quota, year-over-year increase in total company revenue, and year-over-year increase in average deal size—have a central repository of sales best practices and tools compared to 37% of laggard companies.¹⁴



SALES PLAYBOOKS

How do the best people:

- + Fill the pipeline with qualified leads?
- + Conduct thorough needs discoveries?
- + Inspire buyers to consider new, important ideas?
- + Craft the most compelling solutions?
- + Communicate the value of their offerings?
- + Win sales against tough competition?
- + Penetrate and grow accounts?

The answers to these questions are gold. If you want to make people successful, help them do what successful people do. They can't do it, however, without guides. Sales playbooks are these guides.

Sales playbooks are repositories of the best practices for salespeople at a particular company to create and win sales.

The best ones capture and communicate what to do and what resources to leverage when facing critical sales situations across the sales process. Some playbooks are good, but many aren't. They aren't thorough, user-friendly, or (worst of all) are not good guides on what to do.

When sales playbooks are good, they create huge advantages. By describing what the best sellers do, other sellers have a guide to do the same and raise their game.

Just having a playbook is not enough, though. You have to train people how to use it. If something in the playbook is different than how someone normally does something, it's unlikely simply reading about it will be enough for them to zig instead of zag.

If you want behavior change, you need training, practice, and reinforcement to help you get there.

SALES PERFORMANCE ENVIRONMENT

Imagine many of the areas we've covered thus far come together. Now you have:

- + Strong sales management
- + An effective sales process
- + The right sales method
- + Sellers with the right expectations who have bought into the process
- + Good technology to support selling efficiency
- + A path for sellers to gain the right skills and knowledge
- + Strong sales messaging and collateral
- + Effective coaching to keep sellers on track, and help derailed sellers get back on track

You've created an environment where sellers can succeed.

However, imagine for a minute you are applying for a sales job where *none of this* is in place. Most people wouldn't want to work there even if the product or service they would sell was great.

Sellers are like runners. When the performance environment is good, they have the right clothes, shoes, and water on a nice day. It allows them to focus on running and winning. When the performance environment is bad, however, it's like running on a hot, muggy day with weights on your ankles while wearing a wool sweater and jeans.

If this happens, the focus shifts to the challenges, not the opportunities. You get more excuses than wins. If you want sales training to work, create a great environment for selling.



STAGE 5 Measure

You'd be hard pressed to find a piece of management advice that doesn't advocate for measuring, analyzing what you find, and applying those measures for continuous improvement. Yet, for as often as you see the advice, you don't see it actually happening.

It's worth it.

I know of a leader who was very successful at corporate turnaround. I asked him once, "What is the key to leading a successful turnaround?"

His simple reply: "When I'm at the controls, I need to know what buttons to push."

If you don't know what's going on, it's impossible to know what buttons to push. Fortunately, a lot—though not all—of the world of selling lends itself to measurement. While this is by no means an exhaustive list, here are a number of areas where measurement is *meaningful* and has helped many leaders know what buttons to push:

1. TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS

MEASURE	HOW IT HELPS
Satisfaction with learning	Seller perception of sales training affects adoption and thus business results from sales training, and willingness to participate in training in the future.
Skills across selling topics	Measure the effectiveness of training to create capability (i.e., after training on insight selling, can sellers actually do it?). Note that skills training is often measured by written tests. These aren't very effective. Skills are best measured by observation, either in the field or internally through case study, assessment center, and presentation methods.
Knowledge across selling topics	Skills notwithstanding, if sellers don't have the necessary fluent knowledge, they will be ineffective across the sales cycle. As with skills measurement, written tests are largely ineffective as they don't indicate whether or not a seller can apply the knowledge to their selling behaviors. Direct observation of sellers, and certification tests that are strong proxies of actual fluent knowledge in important topics, are better approaches for measuring the effect of knowledge training.
Adoption / effectiveness of learning modalities (e.g., online learning, self-study)	Improve sales training usage rates and improve effectiveness of training to improve adoption and sales results.
Ramp-up (e.g., time to full productivity, efficiency of process)	Affects revenue results, retention, burden on the system and sales management of onboarding new sellers. ¹⁵

¹⁵ The average price of replacing a full-time rep is \$29,000 and over 7 months to locate and onboard each individual. Note this cost does not include the revenue lost when a producing seller leaves the company. Source: Peter Ostrow, *It's a Marathon, Not a Sprint: Best-In-Class B2B Sales Training For an Ever-Changing Market*.



2. SELLERS & SELLING APPROACH

MEASURE	HOW IT HELPS
Seller personal attributes	Matching candidates to selling roles, coaching and development of sellers to exhibit behaviors that may not be in their comfort zones.
Sales method and process adoption	A number of independent studies have shown that the percent of sales force adoption of consistent processes and methods leads to greater effectiveness across the selling cycle (e.g., more opportunities opened, greater number of proposals won, fewer sales lost to no decision).
Satisfaction with job	Affects retention, which directly impacts financial results when core performers turn over.

3. SELLING EFFECTIVENESS

MEASURE	HOW IT HELPS
Pipeline (e.g., new opportunities created, opportunities that become qualified, proposals generated, discounting prevalence and percent, proposals won, lost to no decision, average size of sale)	<p>Pipeline measures are the lifeblood of managing sales effectiveness. Small improvements in any area tend to create significant increase in revenue and margin.</p> <p>Top performer results create benchmarks for possible performance for all sellers.</p>
Account (e.g., penetration in divisions, wallet share vs. competitors, satisfaction with purchases, relationship strength, profit margins, quota attainment)	<p>Like the pipeline, small improvements in any one area can create significant increase in revenue and margin.</p> <p>Top performer results create benchmarks for possible performance for all sellers.</p>
Buyer satisfaction with buying	Affects repeat business and referrals, which are major determinants of financial success.

Imagine for a minute having your finger on the pulse of sales force effectiveness because you have access to real-time, reliable data like this.

For those that do, they certainly know what buttons to push to drive increased sales training and sales force success.

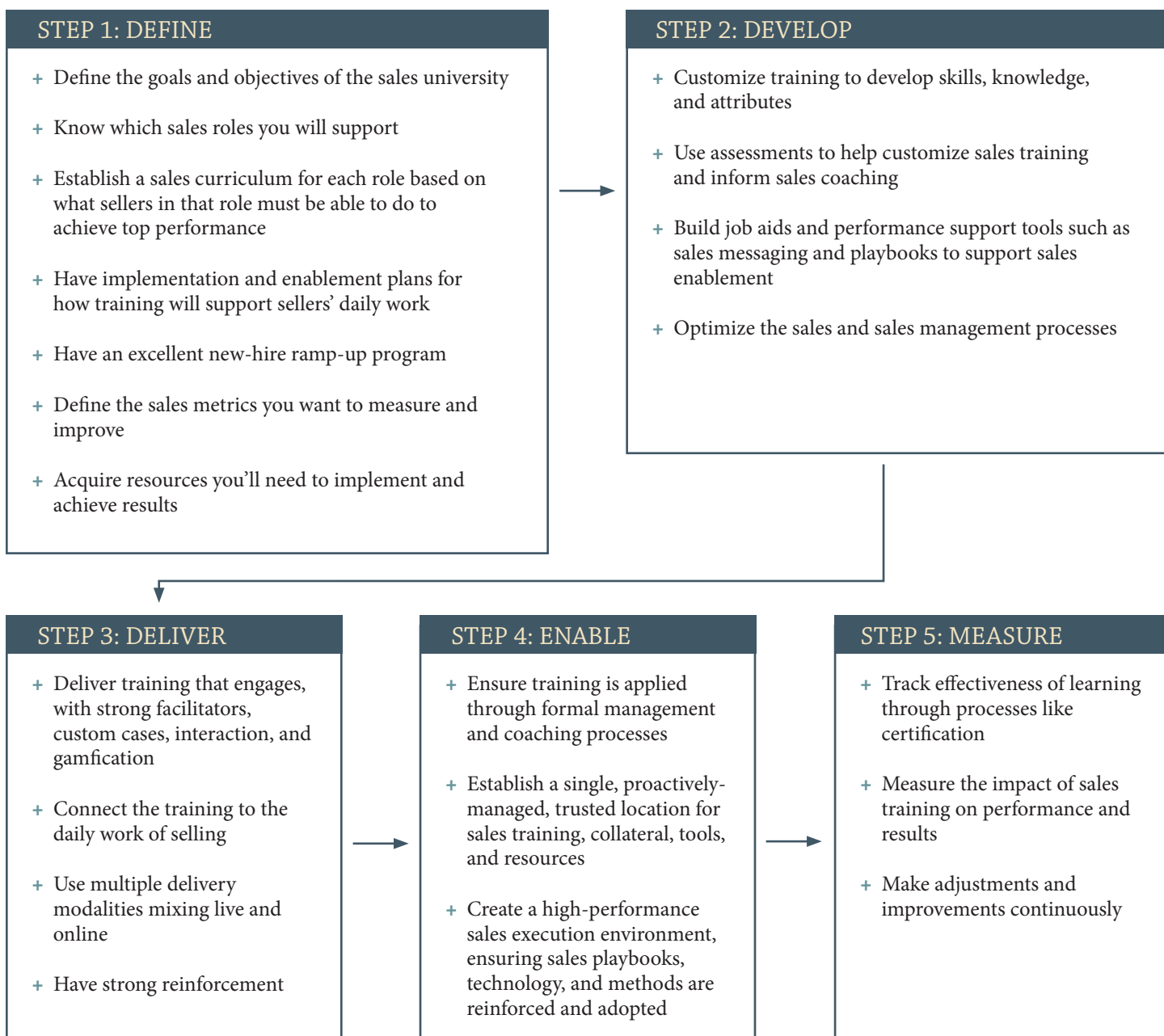


Establish a World-Class Sales University

Just a few years ago, the revolution in sales training was about blended learning and reinforcement. Now these are accepted and expected parts of the process. The new revolution is establishing world-class sales education in the form of sales universities.

Start by asking a simple question, “If we were to set up our own <Company Name> Sales University, what would that look like?” This will drive strong visions for what sales education and sales results can and should be.

In the end, the companies that create their own sales universities do so by attending to these 5 areas:



RAIN Group Can Help You Build Your Own Sales University



Companies spend thousands of dollars per seller each year on sales training, yet 85% to 90% of sales training fails to have long-term impact on results.

It's time for an entirely new way of approaching sales education; an approach that changes the way sales training is conceived, designed, and executed over the long-term.

An approach that drives real behavior change and results.

At RAIN Group, we can help you raise the bar when it comes to developing world-class sales training by helping you build your own sales university.

With Your Sales University, we work with you to develop a sales education system where we not only build sales team capability, but also design the training so that it gets applied and enables sellers to transform the way they sell.

With your sales university in place, you will:

1. Implement sales training that sticks, works, and transfers to the job
2. Reduce new hire ramp-up time
3. Get the most use adoption, and return on investment for sales education and enablement
4. Drive top performance across your sales teams over the long-term

Bring world-class sales training to your organization. Contact us to learn how we can help you build your own sales university.

THE IMPACT OF WORLD-CLASS SALES TRAINING

According to CSO Insights, at companies where sales training programs exceed expectations, sellers are more likely to:

Make quota 69.4%

Have a higher win rate for sales 54.3%

Lose fewer sales to no decision 20.5%

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UNLEASH THE SALES POTENTIAL OF YOUR TEAM WITH RAIN GROUP

RAIN Group is a sales training, assessment, and performance improvement company that helps leading organizations improve sales results. We've helped hundreds of thousands of salespeople, managers, and professionals in more than 62 countries increase their sales significantly with our RAIN SellingSM methodology.

We can help you:

IMPLEMENT SALES TRAINING THAT DELIVERS REAL RESULTS

RAIN Group's sales training system inspires real change and delivers real results that last. Our rigorous approach includes sales team evaluation, customized training programs, robust reinforcement, and coaching to help you and your team develop sales and negotiation skills, and maximize your results.

GROW YOUR KEY ACCOUNTS

At most companies, there's a huge, untapped opportunity to add more value—and thus sell more—to existing accounts. We help our clients capitalize on these revenue growth opportunities. Whether it's simply increasing cross-selling and up-selling or implementing a major strategic account management program, we can help.

IDENTIFY WHO CAN AND WILL SELL WITH GREAT SUCCESS

Our assessments measure sales attributes and skills, identifying the factors that really make a difference in sales performance. Whether you're looking to hire someone who can and will sell, or looking to improve sales performance, we'll help you build the most successful sales team.

IMPLEMENT WORLD-CLASS SALES COACHING

We coach sellers, professionals, and leaders individually and in groups to achieve the greatest and fastest increase in sales results. And we train and certify leaders and managers in our RAIN Sales Coaching system. Often, it's RAIN Sales Coaching that truly unlocks the team's potential, and keeps them motivated to produce the best results consistently.

Find out more about how RAIN Group can help you unleash the sales potential of your team by visiting RAINGroup.com or calling (508) 405-0438.

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