



Stop Training Your Sales Team!

by Rex Fithian

Does this story sound familiar? You send your sales team off for high-powered sales training. They come back excited and enthusiastic about the program – they even do a few things differently. Then, before you know it, they are back to their old habits and producing the same lackluster results. This is a 20th century approach to a 21st century problem.

Change your mindset. It's not training they need – they need to develop their talent. This is more than semantics. It's an attitude that causes an organization to appropriately develop their salespeople and invest their resources where they will get the greatest return. The problem with most sales training is that it is driven by assumptions that really set the stage for disappointment.

Assumption No. 1: All sales people lack the same skills

This assumption leads sales managers to say that sales people need "closing skills" or they need to "ask better questions" or any other description of a symptom. It's what creates a "flavor of the month" approach to developing sales people. Okay, maybe there are some common problems in a sales team, but the fact is that different sales people have different skill deficiencies and they have different levels of potential to close these skill gaps.

Assumption No. 2: All sales people learn the same

Just like their personalities, people learn through different methods. In fact, in a typical sales team, simply acquiring new knowledge is different depending on the person and the skill set being taught. Classroom work has its place in the development process but most people take in new information using their preferred senses at their own pace. That's why in a classroom setting you will see some people grasp a topic or issue quicker than others. It's not that they learn slowly, it's that they learn differently.

Assumption No. 3: If the training is good enough, people will change their selling behavior

This belief has caused most sales organizations to leave the application and implementation of new skills totally to the learner. It's not just encouragement that makes a difference. The problem is that when new skills are first attempted it feels awkward and sometimes they aren't used with the greatest proficiency. So what happens? People fall back to their old, comfortable, "it got me this far" way of doing the job.

So how do we develop our sales people differently so we can benefit from sustainable improvements? Here are five components to making your sales development program effective and meaningful for everyone involved.

- 1. Identify which skills are strong and which ones are weak.** Measure the things that are important to help you know where to invest your resources. Is there a strong foundation from which to build? Is there a commitment to learn and apply new knowledge and improve existing skills? Who has the potential to really be successful in a selling role and who should be recast in a more fitting position?
- 2. Let people gain knowledge on their own.** Learning new skills is a personal experience so create the process to allow people to acquire new information at their own pace using the senses that will help them retain what they learn. Each individual will have a different range of proficiency in a variety of skills sets. Adults learn best when they can acquire new information on their own – then apply it in a collaborative setting.
- 3. Reinforce new skills with practical application.** This may be the most important step in the process. Get sales managers involved with the learning process. Establish a discipline that helps sales people understand their new skills and how to integrate them into their routine selling habits. It's reinforcing their new learning so they do make the changes necessary to produce different results.
- 4. Bring problem solving to the learning process.** There is a time to bring people together in a classroom setting. It's after they have gained new information to address any skill deficiency and have used their new skills in a "safe" coaching environment with a manager or mentor. Once they are in a collaborative setting, facilitate the learning process through case studies, selling scenarios, skills practice and other group learning activities.
- 5. Integrate skill development into career development.** Establish a career progression plan for every employee. Show what experience and skill acquisition are prerequisites to job advancement. Use the assessment tools to gain insight into which job skills need to be enhanced and include these into the development plan.

It's not important to develop your entire team – just those who are driving revenue and who demonstrate the ability to reach their full potential.

About the Author: Rex Fithian, Chief Sales Officer for RxSales, is an Accredited Expert in Consultative Selling (AECS.) and a Certified Sales Executive (CSE.) This popular sales coach and leadership counselor has experience on "both sides of the sale" and works with executives who are eager to improve their business results but face challenges with sales performance and productivity. Contact him at 972 475 2494 or at rex@rxsales.com.