

Five Strategies to Ensure ROI on Sales Training Dollars

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Is it time to drive your sales team through the training car wash again?

Do you ever wonder why only 20% of your sales people use the sales training methodology you invested so carefully in? The successful use of sales process and the implementation of sales training are so much bigger than the two day training “event”. Worse, the sales training is given as a “reward” at National Sales meetings for deserving sales forces who now view training as “flavor of the month”. Yet, thousands of companies spend millions of dollars a year on training without considering that the actions taken after the event are more important than the training itself in assuring return on investment.

1. What organizations that get a return on their training dollar know is that *top-down commitment* is necessary to ensure the success of any training initiative. Clearly stated Executive Vision and Commitment focuses the sales organization on the “what” and “why” objectives and develops their understanding that the sales methodology is part of the “how” of the execution of the strategy. To be successful, the sales process implementation must be “owned” by the sales management team. The purpose of external sales training consultants should be to build the organizations internal capabilities to ultimate independence from the consultant.

Important, as well, is that the actions of the executive team match the stated goals. One of our largest clients couldn't understand why they were unable to get traction on a global customer satisfaction and retention objective. What became clear after further examination was that the sales people were being harassed for monthly sales numbers by a sales management team that was compensated solely on revenue and not on customer satisfaction and retention.

2. Most of the high-performing sales organizations that we work with are implementing *Sales Best Practice Teams* to help install sales process. These teams assist in validating any strategic training initiatives for cultural appropriateness and they also help to develop the implementation and reinforcement plan. These teams consist of cross-functional team members who are measured on organizational sales performance. Many silos have fallen down by using these teams for product pre-launch and messaging initiatives.

3. Training for key account management excellence requires that the sales people are focusing on the *Right Accounts*, that the *Right People* are assigned to these accounts and that the organization focuses the correct assets and resources based on expected return on investment from the account. All of these decisions need to be made well in advance of any training initiative.

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4. Often, sales vice-presidents that contact us want to measure revenue increases as a result of the implementation of sales processes and methodology. Although admirable, it is very difficult to find a direct correlation between the revenue increase and sales training. What is known is that there is a direct relationship between *positive sales behaviors* and the correct actions. Correct actions impact close rates and revenue. For example, one of our associates helped her client to measure the number of coaches in sales opportunities that they won. What the client found was that with no coach, they won ten percent of sales, with one coach they won 30% and with two coaches they won 75%. Obviously the focus for the managers became coaching their people on developing two or more coaches in each of their accounts. The focus now in successful sales organizations is on measuring behavior, because these behaviors are coachable and produce the measurable outcomes the client desires. It is for this reason, that a solid implementation and reinforcement plan with sales manager accountability is essential for return on sales training investment.

Frequently the focus of sales manager coaching is on the “plan” or the “planning process”. A good planning process is only half of the battle. Good sales coaches know that their focus needs to be on the execution of the action plan. By focusing on how effectively the plan was executed, the sales manager can coach to the gap in performance related to skills, process and behaviors. In addition, consideration needs to be given to the technology infrastructure that is in place or not in place to support the internal and external communication regarding the account and the plan.

Many terrific ideas and strategies result from these planning sessions. Sales Best Practices teams can collect and disseminate these ideas to the entire sales organization. This ensures constant innovation and collaboration. A study recently released from the McMaster University in Hamilton indicates that one of the reasons employees stated for leaving their organization in exit interviews is that they felt they no longer were not able to contribute or provide as much value as they would have liked. An environment of innovation and best practices encourages constant improvement and innovation.

5. The final and most important component is communication. Decisions must be made about how we will communicate key wins, key loses and key learnings. Executive management must demonstrate their continuous commitment by using the “common language” learned during the training, by participating in strategy sessions, and by encouraging an environment of best practices and collaboration.

To ensure maximum return on your sales training dollars, don’t take a “butts in seats” event based approach. Ensure that some of your sales training budget is allocated to implementation and reinforcement, measure the managers to make them accountable for the success of the program and ensure that the technology and communication strategies and processes will support the methodology for the foreseeable future.

To receive a visual of the Sales Excellence Model described briefly in this article, please email pam@teambuilders-int.com and mention the Sales ROI offer.

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