

Why Sales Training Fails

Sales trainers will often tout the big reasons that you should and will profit by conducting sales training. It's true that it increases your sales force's effectiveness on many levels and good sales training can take a marginal sales team and turn them into a phenomenal one. The problem? Usually these gains are short-lived.

Does this mean you should forgo sales training? No. What it means is that you should be aware of the number one reason sales training in any industry, but particularly in insurance and related fields, is often ineffective for the long run.

That reason? Habit.

Sales people, like anyone else, are creatures of habit. The things they learned to do at the outset of their careers - the way they approach, cold call, wine and dine, and close - are the things they will fall back on habitually. Sure, sales training can temporarily change these habits and improve on technique with new ideas, but eventually the sales person (and team) will become comfortable or hit a small setback and when that happens, they'll go back to their old, familiar ways.

There is comfort in ritual and habit, after all. It's a part of human nature. For this reason, sales training should not be a one-off thing. It should be a regular event that builds and reinforces new habits to replace the old ones.

While it's true that habits generally die hard, putting new ones in their place is easy. If sales training is repeated often enough, the short-term benefits of the training will become long-term benefits that truly last. Imagine a sales team that is twice as effective tomorrow, but that continues to be twice as effective next year and the year after.

What's more, though, is that these changes can't be forced. Your team needs to be motivated to change. There are many ways to do this. The obvious one, of course, is to throw money at them. Giving economic incentives works and can work well, but it's not the only option. The best one, however, is to motivate them as a team through team reinforcement. This is usually

done by finding the one person on the team who genuinely wants to change without needing extra incentive to do so - this is usually the lowest performer or newest member, but it could be anyone. You will know who that is. Then you give that person the tools (training) to improve and watch it happen. They'll shed the old habits and add the new ones themselves - and quickly. The improvement will be obvious and as the person gets more excited about that, the team itself will become excited and thus

motivated.

This is one of many approaches, but it's one that many small companies use to advantage. It's cheaper, though not as easy, as just increasing economic incentives or short-lived bonuses. It also tends to be much longer-lasting.

At the same time, you may have to evaluate your team in another way. You may have to find the demotivators - the people who sabotage motivation - and remove them from the team. This is not usually talked about with sales training professionals, but they all know about it. In every crowd, there's going to be one or two people that are "downers." Most of the time, a good sales trainer can turn them around (given time), but sometimes, well, removing them is the only way to remedy the situation and save the team.

Paying for training and sending your sales team is a good start, but it will fail if you don't also address the other issues surrounding it. The primary thing to realize is that sales training needs to be reinforced and repeated. Then repeated again. New techniques must be made into new habits.

