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Sales Training Doesn't Work – And What To Do About It

For some time now I've known that sales training doesn't work for most organizations long-term. While sales training can help some salespeople temporarily, senior sales leaders and senior executives must recognize that behavioral change - not sales training - is the key to superior, sustainable sales performance.

While thousands of training companies offer sales training programs for cold-calling, prospecting, planning account strategies, sales call planning, presenting to clients and negotiating, there isn't one sales training program I'm aware of that will, by itself, change a salesperson's behavior. And if you don't change a salesperson's behavior, what is learned from sales training won't last long-term.

So, what is it that changes selling behaviors? The academic answer may be complex, but for us regular folks it's pretty simple – salespeople, like anyone, will change their behavior when they perceive that there is something substantial in it for them to make a change.

Changing behavior is a process, and like all processes it must be managed. Behavior isn't changed in the same way you flip on a light switch. Salespeople almost never raise their hands to request sales training from their managers, and it's difficult to convince most salespeople that they need to change their selling behaviors. After all, their “natural” sales talent has gotten them this far!

An effective prescription for changing selling behaviors will include a consensus among senior managers of the relevance of the sales training to the most important strategic objectives of the business. Senior managers are much more likely to encourage and support a sales training initiative that promises to positively impact critical strategic objectives than sales training that delivers entertainment, and little else, to the sales team.

The next step, and this one is absolutely critical, is to communicate to the sales managers and the sales team the direct connection between the sales training and the strategic objectives of the business. Now, perhaps for the first time, the sales team can see the potential impact of their activities on important business objectives, instead of seeing only their effect on the quarter's top line number and in their commission checks.

Once the sales team understands their role in helping the company achieve strategic business objectives, they must clearly see how changing their selling behaviors will help

them directly impact those objectives and how they will personally benefit from the change. Money is always an important factor, but so is personal development and growth.

The failure of sales training costs companies billions of dollars annually and wastes everyone's time. It doesn't have to be that way. When sales training is an integral part of a well thought out plan for changing behaviors to meet strategic objectives, the sales training can deliver desired results. Positive behavioral change benefits the company, customers, managers and sales professionals.

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