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Sales Training – How to Maximize Sales by Changing Your Sales Training Focus

By Alan Rigg

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Maximizing account penetration is one of the most critical functions in sales. Why? The depth of account penetration has an enormous impact on revenues and profitability.

Think about it – if every one of your company's salespeople sold every product and service in their portfolio to every business unit, department, and division of every account, what kind of number would they produce? Something huge, right?

>From a sales management perspective, few things are more frustrating than having a bunch of "one trick ponies" on a sales team. These are salespeople that have developed a comfort level with one product or service, and that product or service makes up 80% to 100% of their sales.

I used to work for a computer distributor that had numerous salespeople that fit this mold. They would congratulate themselves for selling servers to an account, completely oblivious to the fact that the very same account was also buying storage, networking equipment, software, and professional services. The distributor's salespeople only scratched the surface of the total available opportunity in most accounts.

Here is a second huge frustration for sales managers and executives — salespeople that don't produce "traction" with new products and services.

When your company introduces a new product or service, you make a pretty sizeable investment to train your salespeople to sell the new product or service, right? Doesn't it drive you crazy when only a fraction of your salespeople actually sell the new product or service? The return on your sales training

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investment stinks, and your company never sees the revenue boost it expected to receive from the new product or service.

Why do I bring up lack of account penetration and lack of sales traction for new products and services in the same article? Because the same problem is often at the root of both issues! That problem is an excessive focus on technical details.

Many managers and salespeople believe that salespeople need to become EXPERTS in order to sell a product or service effectively. To develop this understanding, companies invest enormous amounts of time and money in exhaustive training to educate salespeople on product features and benefits, performance characteristics, industry information, pricing guidelines, promotional activities, available

collateral material, etc.

Unfortunately, when salespeople leave these training sessions, they often have no idea how to FIND or QUALIFY opportunities for the product or service they were just "trained" to sell! This leaves the salespeople frustrated, as they feel the time spent in training was wasted. Management is equally frustrated with their sales team's inability to gain traction with new products and services, and their inability to learn to sell their company's entire portfolio of products and services.

This mutual frustration results from a lack of recognition of one very important fact:

When a salesperson identifies a qualified opportunity, there is usually no shortage of knowledgeable resources that can assist the salesperson with converting the opportunity into a sale.

These resources may include technical or other specialists from the salesperson's own company, or similar resources that are employed by suppliers or channel partners.

If salespeople have access to product/service experts, why should they spend time learning technical details? Instead, why don't they laser-focus their learning on how to find and qualify opportunities?

Your company can facilitate this kind of focused learning by redesigning product and service training curriculums to address the following topics:

- * Product/Solution/Service Overview: What does the product or service do (in plain English)?
- * Differentiation: What are a few KEY differences between this product or service and competitive products or services?
- * Business Problems: What business problems does the product or service solve?
- * Qualifying Questions: What questions should salespeople ask to determine whether a prospect or customer has the business problems that the product or service can solve, and to QUANTIFY the impact of these business problems?

* Expert Resources: What expert resources are available to help salespeople manage technical details?

If your salespeople have access to product/service experts, you can turn them into prospecting and qualifying machines by focusing your company's product/service training curriculums on how to find and qualify opportunities. This strategy will help your organization maximize account penetration and jump-start sales for new products and services.

Sales performance expert Alan Rigg is the author of *How to Beat the 80/20 Rule in Selling: Why Most Salespeople Don't Perform and What to Do About It*. His company, 80/20 Sales Performance, helps business owners, executives, and managers DOUBLE sales by implementing The Right Formula™ for building top-performing sales teams. For more information and more FREE sales and sales management tips, visit

<http://www.8020salesperformance.com>

Why Sales Training Fails

By Nigel Thompson

Summary: Sales organisations of all types spend a huge amount on training their sales people each year. Research shows, however, that most training has little impact in the long term. Here we look at what needs to be done to make sure training works – and the new generation of training approaches.

If you've ever wondered why your sales teams struggle to consistently achieve sales targets despite investment in sales training, development and management, you're not alone.

Despite their best efforts most organisations are failing to achieve their full potential from sales training due to four main reasons;

1. Most sales training has at best a short-term effect on performance because of a failure to consistently implement, apply and reinforce what is learnt.
2. Sales managers (often top sales achievers themselves) lack a proven methodology to be truly effective at getting top performance from their sales team.
3. Salespeople often find it difficult to maintain the correct balance between prospecting, presenting, negotiating, closing and client nurturing which can lead to sales 'feast and famine' and lost opportunities.
4. Sales leaders and managers find it hard to run sales meetings and sales training sessions that are relevant, motivational, and impactful for both highly experienced and inexperienced salespeople at the same time.

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So how do sales leaders address these critical issues of skill and knowledge if 'traditional' sales training approaches simply can't offer the level of flexibility and interaction needed to embed learning? The answer lies in designing and providing a new generation of development toolkits which sales managers can use with their teams. These toolkits can give the manager total flexibility to address the specific development needs of his or her team based on the situation at the time. In addition, they should provide the opportunity for a high degree of team interaction as well as best practice learning materials which can be delivered in a fun, energetic and bite sized fashion.

Global oil giant, Shell, amongst others, is at the forefront of using such systems to empower their field sales managers using a new system called 'The Sales Activator®'. The creators of The Sales Activator® say it has been specifically designed to address the critical shortcomings of 'traditional' sales training. It's a self contained system which gives the sales manager the tools, framework and learning content to take charge of their sales team's development on an ongoing basis.

Commenting on Shell's experience of using The Sales Activator® to overcome the weaknesses of sales training, Elza Muller – Learning and Development Manager at Shell – says; "People learn without realising and get the added benefit of learning from additional input from delegates who have years of experience. It can be done as and when there is a team meeting – no extra resource is required. The coaching role can be shared across teams, within teams spreading the skill of coaching [and] the business manager is present dealing with the system and context issues around training."

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