

CHANGE YOUR TRAINING MIND-SET

Three secret strategies to putting training to work where it will count the most

by Linda Richardson

Sales managers expect a lot from sales training. They want to keep the team current with the newest skills, to change sales behavior to meet new market needs, and to ensure that the sales process causes revenue and profit to grow apace. Accomplishing all these multiple goals at the same time requires strategic thinking, and below are the “secrets” to how sales managers should allocate their training resources to create maximum results - regardless of what sales training firm they actually employ.

Secret #1 **Research, then prioritize, your needs.**

Every sales group has a unique set of needs. For some it may be selling a broader solution, calling on a different market or decision maker, dealing with more senior-level clients, negotiating with procurement professionals, repositioning how they are perceived, or providing a fundamental block-and-tackle sales program. If a sales manager is not sure what the priorities are, then they can use a combination of methods to help make the determination:

- Review the business objectives to ensure the training that is in place – or that is being chosen or developed fully – supports the current business objectives.
- Look at results to identify where performance is off. “Hey, you bought an expensive CRM system... so go ahead and use it!”

- Observe salespeople in action. There’s nothing like seeing for yourself how the team is performing.
- Get feedback from clients. You may get an earful, but what you learn will be enormously useful.
- Ask and listen to salespeople. They’re the ones who really know what’s working and what’s not.
- Find and use a behavioral skill diagnostic tool to create awareness of strengths and weaknesses.

Secret #2 **Hire a training firm that can meet your business objectives.**

Skills training must be customized to incorporate the entire profile of what your firm needs to accomplish: strategy, markets, solutions, challenges and opportunities, and tools. The training must be highly customized to your business and your audience so that every minute of training reflects what salespeople need to be doing with your firm’s clients. As a general rule, sales training should bring the strategy, sales process, skills, knowledge, and tools together. Ideally, sales training should be interactive, with coaching and feedback and a “learn by doing” methodology. Sales training should also have a solid reinforcement plan (with tools to do the reinforcing), manageable pre-course work (so that the training classroom time can be used for application and feedback), and alternate training methodologies including e-learning. Finally, the training firm itself should have a proven track record of achieving ROI for its clients, as well as sufficient personnel to meet your

As Seen in the
June 2007 edition of:



time frame and rollout needs.

Secret #3 **Make line managers responsible for training success.**

Managers should actively participate in the sales training, either through a manager briefing or through actually participating in the full program, so that they can reinforce the training through coaching and role modeling. When managers participate in the training with their reporting team, the role of the manager should be as a coach working with the trainer. Acting as a coach forces the manager to grasp the concepts, skills, language, and tools that will be necessary for post-training coaching and feedback. (To make this effective, line managers must sometimes receive additional training on how to be good coaches and how to give useful feedback.) Most important, make sure that there’s a way to measure the result of the post-training coaching, so that the line managers can assess how they’re doing. Typical measurement methods include benchmarking before-and-after training performance and setting criteria, such as cross-selling goals, increased number of referrals, and higher closing ratios.

