

The Missing Piece in Sales Training

If the purpose of sales training is to share information, then using a classroom setting or on-line learning is the right forum. However, seeing, reading, and taking notes is passive learning and will not achieve sales competence. Add to this the generic nature of most courses, makes it difficult for a salesperson to relate the course to their selling environment. This often results in rejection of the content and old sales habits continue.

Small changes can make a difference.

Whether using an internal company resource such as learning and development or an external provider, sales training needs to be tailored so there is greater acceptance, and an openness to adopt the new behaviours. A competency-based structure with specific assessment criteria is essential and a variety of learning methods used to meet individual needs. With clearly articulated assessment criteria for each session, a salesperson will know what to expect in advance. This can help to reduce or eliminate the mental search for *'what comes next?'*

Once the structured classroom learning is completed, and a salesperson is rated competent according to the criteria, the real learning begins. To qualify - it does not mean a salesperson is an expert in sales. Learning how to ride a push bike when we were young, took time, on-going practice, patience and confidence to ride the bike competently in a range of situations. Developing sales competence requires the same level of commitment and determination.

Include field sales coaching

The next phase is crucial and depends on the structure of the sales function whether predominately business development or account management or a combination of both. The day is planned by the salesperson and accompanied by a sales coach who also needs to be a competent salesperson. The reason is they will need to be able to demonstrate specific sales skills in relation to the sales call objective/s and the skills to be developed. Prior to the sales call, sales interview protocols are discussed to ensure the right environment is created for the client. Throughout the day the sales coach's role can be passive, so they do not get involvement in the sales process. When the sales coach demonstrates a skill in accordance with the objective/s, it becomes a powerful learning experience for the salesperson. This is because they have witnessed how the skill is applied and the outcome in a live sales situation. The experience is totally different from a role play and most often will motivate the salesperson to want to try it for themselves. The opportunity is the next sales call.

Behaviours that defeat effective sales coaching

1. Ego. This is when sales coaching is about the sales coach. They get involved in parts of the sales process to show the client their knowledge or expertise. The client in most instances will begin to relate to the sales coach and not the salesperson. This muddies the learning environment.

2. Taking over when it appears the sale is lost. It is tempting to save the sale, but sales coaching is about transferring skills and saving the sale is counterproductive. The emotional pain of losing the sale and the lesson/s learnt will be etched in their memory and the mistake will not be duplicated – ever. To quote Benjamin Franklin, *'Those things that hurt, instruct.'*

The missing piece in sales training is a skilled sales coach working in a structured manner with the salesperson. Field sales coaching has the potential to provide a strategic advantage for the organisation resulting in increased sales and profitability.



Kurt's expertise is in improving the sales effectiveness of his clients' businesses by generating more sales and in profitable manner. He has guided companies to increase sales 10-56%. Clients range from small to multinational companies in Australia, the Middle East, Asia, and Europe.

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