The Essential Guide to Effective Sales Training

Your resource for developing and training a sales team that gets results.
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We’ve spent thousands of days training and coaching sales teams and observing them on sales calls. In The Essential Guide to Effective Sales Training, we’ve compiled our experience to provide guidance on:

- Training effective sales people
- Sales messaging
- Sales process
- Why practice coaching matters
- The five coaching hats
- Simulation based coaching
- Coaching the coaches
Training Effective Sales People

It's not enough to simply “manage” a sales team and expect them to continually exceed goals and quotas. To have a truly effective sales team that exceeds goals and increases revenue, you must put in the time to “develop” them.

After years of research and testing, we’ve discovered a few irrefutable truths to developing effective sales people.

Those truths include:

- Although 1-3 day live sales trainings are great for launching a sales process or approach, it takes a lot more than that to develop the skills and confidence needed for top performers.

- Salespeople inevitably revert back to the sales approach they are comfortable with. They are also reluctant to try new sales techniques that feel awkward for fear of what may happen on a call or visit with a prospect.

- The most common mistakes on sales calls are salespeople talking too much, not asking enough relevant questions, and failing to listen.

- Sales results are driven by skills and habits. To improve average salespeople, their skills and habits must change.

- Most sales managers don’t have the time or training to do the kind of skills development practice coaching most salespeople need in order to change and improve their selling skills.

- Selling is a verbal skill that develops much the way our physical muscles do. It requires good demonstrations, practice and repetition to get better at the verbal elements of selling.

- Top performers do a lot of things differently than average salespeople. They are better at sales messaging, the consultative sales process, and they know how and when to be more assertive. They also manage their time better and have more drive to succeed.
Practice and Repetition Work

We’ve found that weekly practice and repetition with a skilled practice coach is the absolute best way to quickly improve the skills and habits of average salespeople. Practice and repetition build confidence and fluency with new skills which will cause the salesperson to USE these new skills on live calls, under pressure.

Target Areas for Training

What are the most important areas to focus on when developing new skills and confidence?

The best place to start is with sales messaging, sales process, and territory and pipeline management.
Sales Messaging

Successful sales messaging includes:

- Being able to communicate a powerful, concise and tailored value proposition, competitive advantages and differentiating factors
- Knowing the 5-10 most important questions to get a full understanding of how to help the prospect
- How to position the tougher, more assertive questions in a way that reduces the anxiety and makes it easier for the prospect to engage and answer honestly
- Having fantastic answers to the 5-10 questions most prospects have on their mind before they decide to do business with you
- Knowing how to communicate a simple but effective agenda for a sales call
- How to give an effective introduction of oneself and team members to prospects
- How to explain products and services in a way that really stands out and differentiates them from the competition
- How to craft and communicate great customer success stories to recommend bigger and bolder next steps

Just as it takes time to get into shape when we start going to the gym, it takes time with regular practice to develop these verbal muscles.

After a reasonable level of sales fluency is achieved in these areas, then the next area to focus on is the sales process. It is virtually IMPOSSIBLE to practice the sales process in a meaningful way with a salesperson that does not have command of basic sales messaging. This is a big mistake many sales training programs make. Often, training starts with the assumption that the sales team has verbal mastery of sales messaging and this is usually not the case. After rigorous and repeated practice on sales messaging, then training on sales process will yield better results.
Sales Process

Top performers, often called the “challengers,” are able to blend both consultative selling and more assertive approaches to generate better outcomes. When we talk about the sales process, we’re talking about everything that happens from pre-call planning all the way through follow-up including:

- Planning
- Opening the call
- Asking good questions
- Presenting a solution
- Influencing all stakeholders involved in the decision
- Overcoming resistance and objections

The Sales Process Cycle:

1. Pre-call Planning
2. Build Rapport & Trust
3. Discover Needs/Questions
4. Tailor Your Solutions to Those Needs
5. Overcome Objections & Close
6. Follow-up

Finally, once the sales team has strong sales messaging and process skills, then it’s time to move on to area #3 which is territory and pipeline management.

Territory and Pipeline Management

A lot of sales training today is STARTING with territory and pipeline management which is a big mistake. This type of analytic, planning-based training is not going to move the needle with salespeople that have not achieved a high level of fluency with their messaging and process.

Only once sales messaging and process have been mastered, should sales training start to focus on territory and pipeline management.
According to our research, the vast majority of top sales executives said poor sales coaching was the biggest issue. How is it possible that so much effort, energy, and training has been put into helping sales managers become better coaches and it continues to be the weakness executives stress about the most? There are two distinct reasons for this:

Although an organization wants more sales coaching, the administrative load simply doesn’t allow time for sales coaching. Often, sales executives fail to understand or address this critical issue.

There is a serious misunderstanding of what sales coaching is. Very few sales managers understand what skills development coaching is and why it’s so important.

Sales executives can help sales managers by focusing on reducing the administrative workload and reporting that eats up their time—time that could be focused on sales coaching.
Gain a Clear Understanding of the Five Coaching “Hats”

There are five distinctly different types of sales coaching, each involving distinct roles or “hats” the coach should wear. A general approach to sales coaching simply isn’t enough.

**These five areas include:**

- Advisor-Counselor Coaching
- Skills Development Coaching
- Pipeline Management Coaching
- Performance Metrics Coaching
- Tactical Deal Specific Coaching

Of these five roles, skills development coaching is the most neglected, yet this is the type of coaching that has the most immediate and lasting impact on sales results. This is the coaching hat to wear when “teaching them how to fish.”
Emphasize Skills Development Coaching

After a football game, it’s essential to review the tape of the game, analyze what went right and wrong, set goals for improvement and then GET TO PRACTICE. It's the “get to practice” element that’s often missing in how sales managers interact with their sales teams.

Build a Simulation-Based Coaching Platform

When you have sales fluency, plus strong demonstrations of the right sales process, then a simulation-based coaching platform is the next step in building a powerful practice culture.

Similar to well-thought-through role playing, simulations give salespeople a realistic selling challenge they can master and practice with until they absolutely nail it. Afterwards, more difficult simulations are introduced that continue to stretch and develop their skills.

Coach the Sales Coaches

Practice coaching takes time, repetition, and real dedication. There is no easy way to become a great practice sales coach, just as there’s no easy way to become a great personal trainer or gymnastics coach. However, like it’s athletic counterpart, becoming a master sales coach is worth the effort. Sales managers need drills and practice exercises to constantly work and test the team’s ability to verbalize this critical information.

Get expert sales knowledge.

The sales training techniques learned at SalesGym will help your team level up their verbal sales skills and close more deals. Contact us today to learn more about our training programs.

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