Creating An Internal Training Program

If Your Sales People Are Relying On A Low Price To Close The Deal... Their Training Didn't Have These Nine Steps

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No time to build a training program for your salespeople?

Here are the steps you'll need to get started – *quickly.*

The secret of getting ahead is getting started. The secret of getting started is breaking your complex, overwhelming tasks into small manageable tasks, and then starting on the first one.

~Mark Twain

Why we felt you need to know this...

One of the first things that sales and company executives ask when we meet them is, "*We need to grow our sales, what can you do for us?*" To that we always respond, "**If you'd share with us some of the processes that you have in place for the sales team to follow – we can suggest ways to help.**"

What we've found is that most of the time the issue is the same: There simply isn't a process in place for us to look at – period. The salespeople almost always seem to be autonomous from the rest of the company. There are well thought out processes in place for finance, personnel and administration – but not for sales. When we ask why building a business development process for the salespeople seemed to be pushed to the wayside, we typically got the same response:

"It's a huge undertaking and I know I should (Don't you just love that word should?) be doing something – but where would I start?"

When you look at the big picture of building a process for the sales team, they're absolutely right. Where would one start? It seems pretty scary. Training and motivating salespeople and account managers to effectively represent and sell services or products is probably one of the biggest challenges facing businesses today. Whether you hire experienced sales development professionals or novices, the need for a well thought out, structured and easy–to–follow business development process is not a luxury – but an absolute necessity.

Far too often, the process of sales training is nothing more than riding with and/or looking over someone's (usually the best salesperson's) shoulder for a week. This. as we all know, is simply never enough to pick up everything necessary to represent a company either on the phone or in the field.

Let's look at the scenario another way. What's the cost of not training your salespeople properly? Be honest – how much money is left on the table every single month because your sales team can't talk about another reason to buy from your company besides price and that wonderful "great service" line? Nobody wins when the decision to buy from you is based only on price.

Anyway, enough about what can go wrong – here's what you can do to get an effective business development training program off the ground...

So Where Do We Go From Here?

SECTION 1: STARTING OUT

It's one thing to realize the necessity of a sales training program. It's something entirely different to get one started. As with any project, you need to have a plan. How does that saying go? We don't plan to fail, we just fail to plan? Truer words were never spoken. In order to begin, you have to determine what skills and knowledge are needed to produce an effective sales professional (a model) and then you can establish criteria to include in the training program.

Section 2: THE STEPS

Below are the "9 Steps to Success" in sales training. We will discuss each one in detail:

- Scope of Training
- Assign Responsibility
- Assemble the Team
- Get the Sales Team Involved
- Check It Out
- Assess Personnel
- Bottle That Lightening!
- Monitor the Process
- Measure Results

Step 1 – Scope of Training

We've found that the most important factor in creating an effective sales training program is making sure that we're training on all of the elements necessary – not just some (what does our model call for?). You'd be surprised how many businesses overlook some of the basic criteria a good salesperson needs to know to be effective. Below, is a short list of training categories we've seen many growth – oriented companies use to continually increase revenue through their salespeople:

Company Knowledge

- Company history
- Its experience serving the marketplace
- The company's Unique Selling Proposition (USP)
- Staff directory and responsibilities
- Staff assistance — who can help with what
- All the products that the company sells and to whom

Technology

- Salesforce Automation/CRM software Word Processing, Spreadsheet, PowerPoint (or equivalent)
- Company– and/or industry–specific software
- E –mail Do's and Don'ts

> ***"A leader is someone who steps back from the entire system and tries to build a more collaborative, more innovative system that will work over the long term."***
>
> ***~Robert Reich (former US Secretary of Labor)***

Competition

- Who are they?
- Competition strengths and weaknesses
- Comparing the company vs. competition – techniques/ strategies, case studies

Selling Tools – Market Knowledge

- Pricing policy
- Knowledge of customer – professional, distributor, trade, mfg.
- Hot buttons and issues important to the customer
- Face–to–face selling scripts, personal scripts for telemarketing/e–marketing
- Building an attaché with the proper tools in it
- Presentations
- Building an effective “pitchbook” – what it does, how it works
- Using a PowerPoint presentation to close deals and not just for show
- Customizing/updating different versions for different customers/vertical markets
- Follow–up process

Proposals

- When we should write them and when we shouldn’t
- Sample proposals in binders for review
- Writing a proposal using company template

Marketing Materials

- Web–based tools and information – what it does and doesn’t have
- Printed Material – brochures, branded items, news releases, media coverage, etc.
- E –marketing templates

Terms/Conditions

- Payment policy
- Handling client–based expenses (if appropriate)
- Credit terms – net 30 days, credit cards, COD, etc.
- Policy on updating accounts
- RMAs (a.k.a. return policies)

Sales Process Equipment

- Laptop computers
- Computer projector
- PDA
- Cell phone

Reporting & Administration

- Filling out sales reports
- Reviewing reports expected from the business development team
- Meetings with business development managers

Getting “stuff” done

- Time management – (this is a biggie!)
- Organization skills

Company, Department and Individual

- Sales goals: what they are and how they’re arrived at
- Feedback system
- Company expectations

Networking: why it’s effective

- Suggested networking events
- How to maximize each event
- Preparing for the event
- Receiving a ROI from the event

Prospecting

- Prospect sources (lists, Internet, trade associations, etc.)
- Utilizing trade associations to get business
- Prospecting plan – telemarketing and/or door to door skills

Compensation

- When and how you get paid
- Emphasis on profit levels
- Understanding matrix pricing
- Understanding the job description is the compensation plan
- Focus on achievable goals –not “pie in the sky”

Step 2 – Assign Responsibility
Take each category above and determine who would be the best person to provide training on each subject. Sometimes it'll be an OEM sales rep, other times, it'll be an internal manager or an outstanding member of the sales team. Assign each category on your list of topics to the chosen manager/sales team member. This is now your training team and each member will be responsible for developing his/her portion of the training program.

Step 3 – Assemble the Team
Have a meeting with the training team and present the overall goal for training. Schedule a private one–on–one meeting with each person within three to five days to go over his or her specific training program criteria. Detail what you expect them to do and give them guidance as to what form of training is to be used (PowerPoint slides, purchased program, one to be developed internally by the training team or some combination of these). Set a drop–dead date when their training program must be complete. It's very important that each training team member understands what format the training is to take, so that when the programs are complete and delivered they' fit logically together and help salespeople work as productively as possible to increase sales.

Step 4 – Get the Sales Team Involved
It's very important to get the salespeople who will be trained involved in the process of building the training. When they have a say in that process, they're far more likely to "buy in." But make no mistake — active participation is mandatory for everyone! Have salespeople pair up with a training team member. You'll find that the salespeople who "get it" will generally be excited about helping out. Those who don't will need more one–on–one coaching.

Step 5 – Check It Out
Schedule meeting dates to review the training program with all training team members and fine–tune it as necessary. Keep in mind that each team member has put a lot of time and energy into the process, so be thoughtful if major changes are necessary.

Step 6 – Assess Personnel
If not known in advance, meet with your training team to determine which salespeople will require what training module. Or you can decide that everyone will go through all modules. Regardless of you're approach, assign someone to coordinate the dates and times for the training and then inform salespeople of the schedule as appropriate.

> ***"To will is to select a goal, determine a course of action that will bring one to that goal, and then hold to that action till the goal is reached. The key is action."***
>
> ***~Michael Hanson***

"Training salespeople and account managers to effectively represent and sell services or products is probably the biggest challenge facing distributors today."

Step 7 – Bottle That Lightening!

After existing personnel have gone through the necessary training, coordinate with human resources to develop a compressed version of the training program. This condensed version can be a great refresher course when made available in print, on CDs and/or on the company's website. It can also be an additional resource to train counter sales-people, account reps, etc. on what steps the sales team is taking to bring in additional business.

Step 8 – Monitor the Process

Monitor the process to ensure that all members of the training team are doing their job effectively. Consider auditing trainees within each module until you're confident that the training is effective. Good work habits from training only come when the skills become automatic and instinctual, like a habit.

Step 9 – Measure Results

Are your sales professionals generating better results after the training? If so – you're on the right track. If not, review how the training is being done and received so that it can be fine tuned to ensure that any holes in the program are plugged.

When all is said and done – will it be perfect? No. But is it always a work in progress? Absolutely!

Final Thoughts

Business owners and sales executives often lament that they are at a disadvantage because they don't have the capital and/or resources to train the sales staff the "right" way. To that we disagree. We have seen many small businesses grow because the people responsible for building revenue made a decision to make the training process happen and held the selves accountable to do it – period. Successful executives always found a way to make things happen. The unsuccessful ones always found a reason why it couldn't be done.

About SPIA

SPIA is a business development solutions company dedicated to giving you the tools to grow your business. While other business development companies tend to focus their training on "closing the deal," our philosophy targets filling your sales funnel.

SPIA works with companies of all sizes to help them address growth objectives, enhance business development, grow revenue and build a healthy company. If you would like to discuss whether or not we can be of any assistance to your company please contact SPIA at: 978.640.0803 or cstimmel@spiainc.com

About the Author

Craig Stimmel, CMC – Executive Vice President and Founder. Since 1971, Craig has spoken before associations, conventions, trade shows and conferences worldwide. A dynamic speaker, Craig speaking engagements are typically focused on helping audiences understand market trends, recognize new market strategies and position themselves to take advantage of new business building opportunities.

A published author, Craig writes for business & trade publications in Canada, Mexico, France, Germany, UK, Czech Republic, Russia, Turkey, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. Craig knows and understands the world of the large corporations as well as the entrepreneur.