



Four Reasons Most Sales Training Fails

While organizations around the world are spending billions of dollars on training, most of that investment is being wasted. Here's what you can do to make sure your sales training initiatives add up to long-term results.

Have you ever observed a sales representative during a call and thought, "How can this be the same person who did so well during training? Why aren't they doing what they were taught?"

They've been through the training and learned the skills—intellectually they know what they should do—but now that they're back on the job, they've fallen into old habits and behaviors.

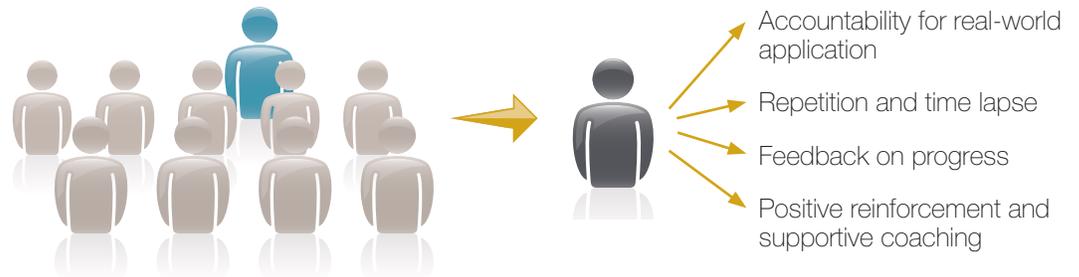
The fact is, this situation is more often the rule than the exception. Data collected by the consulting firm ES Research has shown that 85 to 90 percent of sales training fails to translate into a lasting improvement in productivity.

So what's keeping the training from moving sales professionals from knowing to doing?

Lack of Structured Follow-Up

It's common to treat training as an event instead of a process. We assume that if we teach skills in a workshop, sales representatives will remember and practice them. But study after study tells us that, without reinforcement, most people forget nearly all of what they've heard and quickly go back to old habits.

When participants leave training, there must be a structured follow-up process that ensures:



“How can this be the same person who did so well in training?”

“Why aren't they doing what they were taught?”

There also has to be commitment at all levels to the follow-up process. Many organizations start out with good intentions but gradually slide as things get busy. Reinforcement is too important—to the success of the training, the sales professional and the company—to go by the wayside.

Lack of Integration Into the Business Culture

Even if there are follow-up activities to support the training, that doesn't mean the concepts will become part of a salesperson's day-to-day business behavior. For the training and skills to turn into a way of doing business, they have to be hard-wired into the culture.

Participants must know what to do (*expectations*), how to do it (*application*) and receive feedback on their application (*coaching*). This includes integration into:

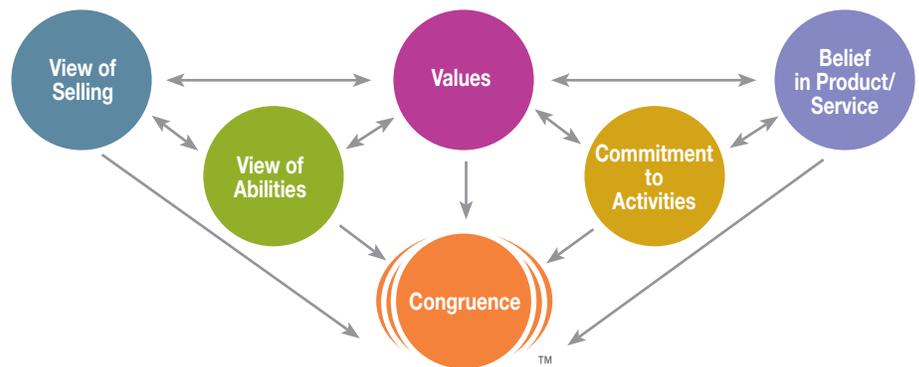


Failure to Address the Importance of Attitudes and Beliefs

Most managers agree: Attitudes and beliefs separate high achievers from the rest, particularly when it comes to sales. Yet these critical success factors are rarely acknowledged or addressed in most sales training.

Product knowledge and selling skills are both important, but **beliefs, values and a genuine desire to create value for customers are often the biggest influencers of sales success.**

Our **Sales Congruence Model** describes five key dimensions that illustrate how the sales person's beliefs and values influence sales success:



What's the level of congruence when it comes to each of your sales professionals?

When the above dimensions are in alignment, or congruence, the result is almost always high productivity and sales success.

When there are gaps (represented by the arrows between the circles), there will be conflicts that impact performance.

For example, a salesperson may have positive values but views selling as being pushy or manipulative. You might see this play out behaviorally in their unwillingness to close. If someone has a strong view of their ability to be successful but a low commitment and willingness to perform the activities required, they may let critical information fall through the cracks, jeopardizing both internal and external relationships. Any gaps that go unaddressed in training will impact the salesperson's performance, regardless of the selling skills they're being taught in the classroom.

Questions for Getting the Most From Your Sales Training Investment

1. Do salespeople understand the concepts and believe they will help them sell more?
2. Have managers been equipped with tools to support and coach their people as they practice the skills?
3. Is there integration into daily business and accountability for application?
4. Is there a long-term strategy for reinforcement?
5. Does the training reflect and support positive customer-focused attitudes, motives and values?

While all of these are important, it is typically the last point that relates most to a willingness to practice the skills, and that's what ultimately impacts long-term sales success.

Lack of Managerial Role-Modeling and Coaching

"Forget about that. Let me tell you how it's done in the real world."

Just like that, your managers can undo everything. Too many managers are sabotaging the training efforts because they don't fully understand, believe in, model and coach the skills.

Managers have to know the concepts, believe their people will benefit, and provide supportive coaching. In the best-case scenario, they should participate in the training and assume a leadership role in the follow-up process described above.

The bottom line? Alignment results in people selling more!

If you find yourself asking the question, "They know what to do, so why won't they do it?" look for clues in congruence. Salespeople who don't apply selling skills often feel they are being asked to do something that is inconsistent with their values and beliefs. That's why an essential goal of training should be to bring the five dimensions into congruence.