



Top Line Consulting

Author: William Bierbower PE

When all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail! We have all heard that before and it equally relates to sales training. The Benchmark Company is a strong advocate of *FOCUSED* sales training but we have also seen very good, very high priced sales training fail. The purpose of this white paper is to identify when and how to get the most out of sales training.

Many of us sales professionals were exposed to "The Dale Carnegie Sales Course" early in our career. This is a great place for someone new to sales to go learn the basics. Attention, Interest, Conviction, Desire and Close - Ureka, there is a *process* associated with sales. This type of training is very good for an *individual* just beginning their sales career. This is *not* very good to try to apply to an entire sales organization.

Many of us were next exposed to a "sales methodology" and the most popular are Solution Selling, Strategic Selling, SPIN Selling, The Complex Sale, Selling to VITO and their variations. These *ALL* came out of a lot of research done by the Xerox Corporation many years ago. They *ALL* have been very effective in some organizations and failed miserably in many others. They have also all made the instructors and offering companies significant revenue.

Why the failures? Because often times these are pitched to the Senior Management and Sales VP's of companies as a cure all for unmotivated salespeople, declining sales or marketshare, inability to predict revenue, long ramp up time for new salespeople and a host of other typical ills of a sales organization. The key is that good sales training can *assist* in improving these areas but more often than not, there are other factors that must be addressed first. KORF GROUP LLC Group calls these Optimization Inhibitors (OI) which are the factors that keep a sales person or sales organization from leading their market.

As an example, the author was the Implementation Manager of a Solution Selling rollout to the sales force of a \$50M/yr. technology company. We had just gotten a new VP-Sales who was able to convince our President that we needed to "move our sales organization to the next level". Everybody was absolutely correct and had the best of intentions, but it failed. We spent

well over \$200,000 training our sales and marketing organizations a great sales methodology. Certainly value was derived, but in all measurable terms it failed.

The reason it failed was there were many other larger issues it could in no way address. The new VP-Sales was an outsider brought in to fix problems insiders did not feel existed, and there was great resentment in the sales organization. There were factions inside the organization that would make sure anything he did failed, purely because he was an outsider. There were many Optimization Inhibitors (OI's) that were undermining the potential success of this training and sales in general. The sales organization had been so heavily burdened with paper work and trying to support unhappy customers of a unreliable new product launch that what they really needed was support and more selling time. A new compensation plan had been rolled out that was positioned poorly to the sales organization and received poorly. There were many product and technology issues that had to be handled by the sales people because support was overwhelmed. There were key products that were being turned over to an alternate sales channel which infuriated the sales force. In summary, there were items that had to somehow be addressed either prior to or in conjunction with the sales training to make it successful.

What does all this mean? There is a time and place for sales training in almost every sales organization. The key is that it becomes part of a complete evaluation of how a sales organization is operating today, where improvements can be made and strategic prioritization of making improvements to the sales organization. This becomes a financials based business decision based on where impact can be the greatest.

Sales training is most successful when it is done as part of a sales improvement process. Many of the items that are addressed prior to training identify where the key needs are. All the major sales methodologies are 3-4 day courses. There is always 1-2 days of "fluff" in these or information presented that is not entirely applicable to the audience. The reason for this is the same course is given to all companies in all industries when their products, markets, customer buying cycles and many other aspects of the sales are entirely different.

The answer to ensure success is to identify the top 3-5 main topics that should be included in the training, configure materials specific to the company, the buyer, the competition, the market, etc. and present this in a one-half to two day format. These can be updated on a regular basis and

allows the sales force to be continually "course-corrected" to meet constant market change. The sales force is often the best place to look for both what is needed and the content that needs to be delivered. Historically, they have rarely been involved in sales training until they show up for the class.

When done in conjunction with implementing other Sales Enhancers's (SE's), sales training can be part of an exciting approach which results in happier, richer salespeople producing more revenue, happy customers and smiling shareholders.

When all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail! We have all heard that before and it equally relates to sales training. The Benchmark Company is a strong advocate of *FOCUSED* sales training but we have also seen very good, very high priced sales training fail. The purpose of this white paper is to identify when and how to get the most out of sales training.

Many of us sales professionals were exposed to "The Dale Carnegie Sales Course" early in our career. This is a great place for someone new to sales to go learn the basics. Attention, Interest, Conviction, Desire and Close - Ureka, there is a *process* associated with sales. This type of training is very good for an *individual* just beginning their sales career. This is *not* very good to try to apply to an entire sales organization.

Many of us were next exposed to a "sales methodology" and the most popular are Solution Selling, Strategic Selling, SPIN Selling, The Complex Sale, Selling to VITO and their variations. These *ALL* came out of a lot of research done by the Xerox Corporation many years ago. They *ALL* have been very effective in some organizations and failed miserably in many others. They have also all made the instructors and offering companies significant revenue.

Why the failures? Because often times these are pitched to the Senior Management and Sales VP's of companies as a cure all for unmotivated salespeople, declining sales or marketshare, inability to predict revenue, long ramp up time for new salespeople and a host of other typical ills of a sales organization. The key is that good sales training can *assist* in improving these areas but more often than not, there are other factors that must be addressed first. KORF GROUP LLC Group calls these Optimization Inhibitors (OI) which are the factors that keep a sales person or sales organization from leading their market.

As an example, the author was the Implementation Manager of a Solution Selling rollout to the sales force of a \$50M/yr. technology company. We had just gotten a new VP-Sales who was able to convince our President that we needed to "move our sales organization to the next level". Everybody was absolutely correct and had the best of intentions, but it failed. We spent well over \$200,000 training our sales and marketing organizations a great sales methodology. Certainly value was derived, but in all measurable terms it failed.

The reason it failed was there were many other larger issues it could in no way address. The new VP-Sales was an outsider brought in to fix problems insiders did not feel existed, and there was great resentment in the sales organization. There were factions inside the organization that would make sure anything he did failed, purely because he was an outsider. There were many Optimization Inhibitors (OI's) that were undermining the potential success of this training and sales in general. The sales organization had been so heavily burdened with paper work and trying to support unhappy customers of a unreliable new product launch that what they really needed was support and more selling time. A new compensation plan had been rolled out that was positioned poorly to the sales organization and received poorly. There were many product and technology issues that had to be handled by the sales people because support was overwhelmed. There were key products that were being turned over to an alternate sales channel which infuriated the sales force. In summary, there were items that had to somehow be addressed either prior to or in conjunction with the sales training to make it successful.

What does all this mean? There is a time and place for sales training in almost every sales organization. The key is that it becomes part of a complete evaluation of how a sales organization is operating today, where improvements can be made and strategic prioritization of making improvements to the sales organization. This becomes a financials based business decision based on where impact can be the greatest.

Sales training is most successful when it is done as part of a sales improvement process. Many of the items that are addressed prior to training identify where the key needs are. All the major sales methodologies are 3-4 day courses. There is always 1-2 days of "fluff" in these or information presented that is not entirely applicable to the audience. The reason for this is the same course is given to all companies in all industries when their products, markets, customer buying cycles and many other aspects of the sales are entirely different.

The answer to ensure success is to identify the top 3-5 main topics that should be included in the training, configure materials specific to the company, the buyer, the competition, the market, etc. and present this in a one-half to two day format. These can be updated on a regular basis and allows the sales force to be continually "course-corrected" to meet constant market change. The sales force is often the best place to look for both what is needed and the content that needs to be delivered. Historically, they have rarely been involved in sales training until they show up for the class.

When done in conjunction with implementing other Sales Enhancers's (SE's), sales training can be part of an exciting approach which results in happier, richer salespeople producing more revenue, happy customers and smiling shareholders.