

4 Seldom Considered Reasons Sales/Customer Service Training Fails

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Regardless of what your business sells, training to maximize performance in sales and customer service should be an important piece of your success plan. Unfortunately, countless companies waste vast amounts of time and dollars on training that doesn't produce the desired gains and ultimately fails.

There are a variety of reasons why sales/customer service training initiatives fail. Topics like matching the program to the business and needs of the participants is certainly high on the list when considering outside training resources but there are several other seldom considered factors that directly affect whether or not a sales/customer service training program will achieve a successful outcome.

1) Not Setting The Stage

Typically the engagement planning for sales/customer service training is with ownership and key management behind closed doors and away from the company personnel that the training is intended for. That's perfectly acceptable as company training should be a managerial decision. However, once an engagement has been planned, ownership and/or key management should prepare personnel so they are properly positioned to most effectively receive the training.

Unfortunately, this step is often missed altogether. I have personally conducted programs (and am aware of many more) where I (or another trainer) arrived for the first day of training with a new organization and *no one* knows why they're there. Participants haven't been told anything other than to "show up". While skilled trainers can overcome this and create clarity for a successful commencement, obviously this is not the most conducive environment for learning.

Like a Broadway play, the stage should be properly set before the show begins. However, unlike a Broadway play, creating a positive learning environment need not be a major production. It could be as simple as an email announcement and/or company newsletter like this actual client piece:

"We are excited and proud to announce our new relationship with Steve Ferrante of Sale Away LLC! Steve is the CEO of Sale Away LLC. and Tire Review Magazine contributing "Selling Smart" editor. Steve provides his highly-acclaimed "Pinnacle Performance" sales, customer service and leadership training, speaking and professional development services to success-driven businesses throughout North America. We have engaged Steve to provide training to all of our sales and customer support personnel and are extraordinarily confident that with his proven expertise and resources we can achieve new levels of success in 2014 and beyond! Our first sessions with Steve will begin on..."

Introduced this way, confusion is eliminated as company personnel know what to expect, and everyone is prepared to enter training with the proper positive mindset.

2) Disengagement

Training is only as good as the trainer providing it. For training to effectively produce meaningful (and sustainable) gains, the employees must first be engaged with the trainer. Many otherwise good programs fail because the attendees were not really engaged, became bored and tuned out long before any real gains were made.

This is the reason the first element in [Sale Away's Pinnacle Performance Credo](#) is ENGAGE.

Any business considering an investment in training should make the “who” will be conducting the program a priority. Often companies sweat the *what* and *where* details of training and give relatively little consideration to the importance of *who* will be conducting their program.

Sometimes companies will appoint an existing employee to conduct training. Many times this presents a significant challenge as this person is already perceived, for better or worse, as something else in the company. Typically, the tasked individual is a sales or customer service manager and, although they may be outstanding in that role, training is almost always not their primary purpose or skill-set. Their well-intentioned efforts naturally don't carry the weight or have the desired impact with employees as a reputable training authority from outside of the company would.

With respect to training engagement, I advise all of my prospective clients to not commit to a series of trainings until after the initial in-house training is complete. While this sounds counter-intuitive for a training company (like mine) to recommend, this *proof in the pudding* method has never let me (or my clients) down.

If you cannot see, feel and experience employee engagement with the trainer on the first training that's a clear warning sign you're heading down the wrong path and quite likely doomed to fail. In a nutshell; engagement first then everything else second.

3) Inconsistency

All too often sales/customer service training is treated as an event. A business conducts an in-house training and, assuming it was good, participants get energized with new insight, techniques and tools. Then, with no real follow-up program in place, participants fizz out and return (at varying speeds) to the same level of performance they were at prior to training. Training research has revealed that, without ongoing reinforcement, 90% of what is learned is forgotten within 60-90 days.

Like physical fitness, it doesn't matter how good your workout at the gym is *today*. If you don't continue to exercise on a consistent basis, you will never truly get in shape and stay that way.

Part of the problem is many managers adopt a *been-there done-that* attitude when it comes to sales/customer service training. It sounds simplistic but *training works with consistent training*.

The science of training confirms that true ownership of learning is created with consistent exposure and application of the skills over time. World-class sales and customer service companies recognize this and

typically engage their employees in 100 or more hours of training in their first year with ongoing training in the years ahead.

At, [Sale Away](#) we create consistency by combining in-house sales/customer service training with our exclusive online development/maintenance program. Visit [Your Teams Training Portal](#) for details.

4) Wandering Off The Path

This reason goes hand-in-hand with inconsistency but deserves separate acknowledgment. Like the proverbial kid in the backseat saying “are we there yet”, many business owners and managers view training as a destination with the goal of *getting there*.

Training should be viewed not as a destination – but rather an evolution. All too often, businesses will engage in a *flavor of the month* type of training, never fully developing any one area before moving in a different direction.

Imagine this: You play for a professional football team, let’s assume the New England Patriots under head coach Bob Belichick. Do you practice regularly? Of course. Do you practice *at* the game? Of course not, you practice *for* the game. What do you think the odds are that one day at practice coach Belichick will say something like this: “Hey guys, many of you have been training and practicing these same plays now for years. I think we all got it... no need to practice that anymore. Let’s play basketball today.”

Odds of that happening are exactly zero yet many sales managers do it regularly. They switch things up, fumble the ball and ultimately miss the end zone.

This lack of focus directly correlates to reason # 2, disengagement, with many participating employees not trusting the business will stay the course and see *any* program through to fruition. If management demonstrates they are not fully committed to stay the course (with a successful program) then they shouldn’t expect their employees to be fully committed as they continue to introduce new initiatives to the mix.

Proper training is an ongoing process of continuous professional development. Just like a professional sports team, your sales/customer service team must regularly practice and work on their game through a disciplined and committed training program if they are to consistently win in (and for) your business.

Make a Great Day!

Steve

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