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# Sales Training That Sticks

by CHUCK MACHE

## Why are sales training programs so often unsuccessful?

**T**he typical company spends tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars to put its entire sales force through the latest, hottest sales training program touted to increase its bottom line numbers. But, just as with all the previous sales training efforts, only a small percentage of participants embrace the new skills taught. For everyone else, the status quo reigns, and the bottom line doesn't move one bit. What went wrong, and how can it be done right?

Getting to the next level in selling requires a careful evaluation of your sales executives' true intentions.

Many executives, and even the sales trainers themselves believe that sales training is a one-size-fits-all proposition. They couldn't

be more wrong! Your sales executives or representatives cannot improve unless they are absolutely honest about who they are, what their intentions and motivations are, how good they are and what their strengths and weaknesses are. Only then can behavior be modified. Not all reps have the same intentions or motivations and, therefore, are not equally prepared for training. That's why standard training programs work for only a small minority, while leaving the majority of the audience unmoved.

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### Step 1 — Determine and Evaluate the Makeup of Your Organization's Sales Team

The first step to sales training success is to determine and evaluate the makeup of your organiza-

tion's sales team. The four types of sales professionals are:

- **Performers** — They are the natural-born top producers. They have big egos and are emotional, intuitive, passionate, competitive, extroverted and impatient. Performers don't learn in training sessions, they learn by doing.
- **Professionals** — They also are top producers, but they are even-tempered, analytical, logical and quietly competitive. They are internally passionate and patient and have a very controlled ego. They thrive in the classroom setting.
- **Caretakers** — They are those who are stuck in a comfort zone. They are passive-aggressive, don't like change and don't like to attempt anything difficult. Although they show signs of brilliance, they are inconsistent or mediocre producers. The good news is that they are sleeping Performers or Professionals, depending upon their personalities.
- **Searchers** — These sales representatives get into sales because they perceive it to be easy, but then they don't do what it takes to be successful because it is too painful for them. Victims of poor hiring decisions, they soon realize

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they really dislike sales. Searchers do not belong in sales positions.

This eye-opening exercise gives both rep and manager a basis for future discussion in a one-on-one meeting. Even in a private session, reaching an agreement can be challenging, but one thing is certain — productivity never lies. If someone is in the top tier or is showing consistent upward sales, he or she is most likely a Performer or a Professional. If not, the rep belongs in one of the other two categories.

The remaining steps of the breakthrough model focus on developing customized training based on identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the individual and then getting personal commitments to change from all those willing to do so.

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### Step 2 — Identify What Makes a Superstar Salesperson

What does the perfect sales executive or representative do? What are their characteristics? What are their strengths? What are the most important qualities that they possess?

While most sales training is focused on product knowledge, get specific to your industry and seek items such as solid work ethic, superb presentation skills, and the ability to build relationships. Define passion and goal setting. Here's a tip: Let the sales team build the perfect rep.

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### Step 3 — Evaluate Each Salesperson's Skills and Behaviors Against the Best, Identified Practices

Have the sales reps rank them-

selves and each other on a scale of one to five (from weak to strong) against the "perfect rep." Then, have their manager rank each one in the same manner. Finally, synthesize the scores and come to an agreement on each rep's ranking in each category. Gaining agreement may have to come in an individual meeting between manager and rep.

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### Step 4 — Customize the Path to Breakthrough Achievement

Once every rep's strengths and weaknesses have been identified and rated according to the ideal, it becomes possible to customize each sales executive's path to breakthrough. Train individuals in their weak areas, and leverage their strengths to help in the effort. Schedule ongoing training sessions that range from 15 minutes to one hour each, depending upon topic and individual needs. Make sure ongoing and consistent weekly or monthly follow-up takes place. It is critical for successful transformation.

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### Step 5 — Get a Commitment to Change

It can be difficult to get everyone on board, but if the first four steps are completed correctly, the percentage of committed salespeople skyrockets. Unless they are motivated to improve performance, no amount of training will succeed. Some people are simply not interested in changing, but these first four steps can break even the hard cases.

When motivation and commitment are strong, a Caretaker can become a Performer or a

Professional depending on their personality. Professionals can begin to take more risks in their selling game, thus opening up new opportunities. Performers can learn to balance their emotions and spend more time in the selling zone.

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### Invest In Success

Pure and simple, traditional sales training programs fail because most participants don't embrace them. Lacking any motivation to improve, they only go through the motions of the program because they have been told to do so. Next time before spending your money on sales training, make sure the sales force is prepared to train and that the dots are connected through the five steps of the Breakthrough Model. □



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

*Chuck Mache, president of Chuck Mache Communications, has more than 25 years of experience in selling, managing, building and leading sales organizations*

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