

REPRINTED FROM

agency sales[®] magazine

october 2008 • vol.38, no.10

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BULLSEYE!

CSP Program Continues to Hit the Mark

EDITORIAL | JACK FOSTER

For both seasoned sales professionals as well as for those who are new to the front lines of the profession, it appears that the CSP program continues to hit the mark. Instrumental in gauging the program's success are the following comments from recent program participants.

For even the most casual visitor to a MRERF CSP course, a couple of important points are immediately evident:

- ✦ Since manufacturers' representatives only make money when they make sales, sales training is critical to their success.
- ✦ When it comes to sales training, not all reps are created equal. Some reps have been in the trenches for years, while others are veritable rookies. Often, CSP offers each of them their first real sales training experience.
- ✦ The challenges to being successful in sales cross industry borders. For instance, chances are that problems faced by MANA reps have already been faced and solved by their NEMRA, MAFSI, AIM/R or ERA peers.

CSP, which stands for **Certified Sales Professional**, is an intensive four-day sales training program aimed at improving sales skills. The program, now in its eighth year, was created as the result of an agreement between the **Manufacturers Representatives Educational Research Foundation** (MRERF), Arvada, Colorado, and the Canadian Professional Sales Association to bring the CSP sales designation — established in Canada in 1994 — to the United States.

Since 2001, 544 individuals have been certified as CSPs. Of that number, 368 are independent manufacturers' representatives and 176 are distributors.

To qualify for certification, candidates must have completed the program. There is a requirement for two years of practical work experience, and the candidate must agree to abide by the CSP Code of Ethics. All candidates must pass a written and oral examination.

Typical of the subject matter — taught by several industry-savvy instructors — addressed in the program are sessions devoted to:

- ✦ Prospecting.
- ✦ Account management.
- ✦ Developing presentation skills.
- ✦ Time management.
- ✦ Personality traits critical for sales success.

Program Exceeds Expectations

As to whether those and other subjects meet the needs of attendees, reps who attended the four-day program in Hartford, Connecticut, this year maintain their expectations were more than met.

"I've been in sales for 18 years," explains **David Dasson, CPMR**, "and I've found that it's great to take a fresh look at things that I've been doing for years. That's the advantage that the CSP course provides me."

Dasson, **Net Sales Company**, Victor, New York, adds that "CSP provides the perfect complement to CPMR. The former shows you how to work 'at' your business and the latter shows you how to work 'in' your business."

Armed with nearly two decades of experience as a rep, he notes, "The examples I've encountered at CSP are extremely accurate and reflect what I've experienced in the real world."

Michael Walsh, Coakley, Boyd and Abbett, Inc., Framingham, Massachusetts, explains that after just six months of working in inside sales, he and his company decided CSP was the perfect springboard for his career as a manufacturers' rep. "It hasn't taken me very long to decide that being a rep was in line with what I wanted to follow for a career. And, CSP is providing me with a great foundation."

Although he was just a couple of days into the program, Walsh explains how he knew that one facet of the course was going to be extremely helpful. "I can see that learning about the differences in behavioral styles is going to come in handy. It has taught me what behavioral category I fall into. More important, however, it lets me know how to categorize customers. As a result, I'll be able to customize my approach to them."

Walsh, who admits his long-term goal with his agency is outside sales, maintains that there's plenty he has already learned that he'll be able to implement right away.

Although he's not a rep, **Tom Settefrati**, sales manager for **Bradford White**, Ambler, Pennsylvania, feels CSP is ideal for him. "It covers so much of what the reps we work

“(CSP) covers so much of what the reps we work with run into. It allows me to appreciate what they do in the course of representing our line.”

with run into. It allows me to appreciate what they do in the course of representing our line. I think I’m going to be able to relate to them and work with them in a much more effective manner.” Bradford White is a manufacturer of water heaters for residential, commercial and hydronic space heating applications.

First Impressions are Lasting

Surprisingly, a few CSP attendees noted that their attendance at the CSP program was their first exposure to formal sales training.

“I’ve been a rep for 14 years, and this is my first formal sales training experience,” explains **Stephen Minichiello, Green Sales, Inc.**, Nashua, New Hampshire. “The reasons for that are twofold: first, manufacturers emphasize product training, so that’s what they’ve been pushing; and second, nothing as comprehensive as CSP has been available.”

The value he places in the program can be heard in his words when he says: “There are plenty of things I’m going to be able to act on the first day I’m back in the office. The real-life value in conducting a SWOT analysis was brought home, not to mention what we learned about the value of conducting behavioral analyses of our people and our customers.”

Troy Osborne, CFI, South Berwick, Maine, seconds Minichiello’s views when he adds that “The CSP program was more valuable than any Dale Carnegie course I’ve taken. If we had the funds, I’d recommend that all of our people take the course.”

Just as Minichiello, Osborne notes that CSP is his first formalized sales training experience. “My experience has been something along the lines of the manufacturer saying ‘Here’s a new fan, here’s what it does and what it costs. Now, go out and sell it.’ If anything, I’ve learned there’s a lot more to selling than just that approach.”

Finally, **Adam Roberts, Standard Electric Supply**, Appleton, Wisconsin, points to the value he perceives in the course. “I’ve been in outside sales for two years and never had any formal sales training. My experience here has been tremendously beneficial, and what I’ll be able to implement right away will more than pay for my expense in being here.”

A total of eight CSP sessions have been scheduled for this year, with one yet remaining (October 20-24 in Los Angeles, California). A full complement of sessions will be scheduled for 2009 including stops in Chicago, Minneapolis, Denver, Philadelphia and Phoenix. To learn more about CSP and other MRERF programs, or to see a 2009 program schedule, visit www.mrerf.org.



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