

The Sales Training You're Probably Missing

Companies invest enormous amounts of time and money to turn their salespeople into expert 'sellers.' However, selling is only one side of a transaction. The other side is, of course, buying. While knowing how to sell is a critical ability, knowing how your customers buy is equally important. If you are not allocating resources toward understanding your target buyers – how and why they buy – then you are not providing your salespeople with all of the tools that they need to succeed.

Top performing sales organizations will usually provide extensive training in any of 4 traditional areas:

- *Skills* – Engaging prospects, handling objections, etc.
- *Process* – Tracking a pipeline, managing time, etc.
- *Products* – Features, function, and benefits
- *Technology* – Sales force automation software

Without question, mastery in these areas will improve sales force performance. But there is something ironic about them: They are all focused on the salesperson and the sales organization. None of them is directly relevant to the customer.

I have never heard a prospect say, "Wow, that salesperson sure knows how to track his pipeline" or "She must have some really hot Siebel software back at her office." However, I have heard many potential buyers say, "She really does not understand my business" or "That was a nice presentation, but the product can not really help me." Customers are not interested in your company's processes, technology, or sales model. They are concerned exclusively with solving their own problems.

Therefore, companies should become experts on their customers' businesses, not just their own. In addition to building a sales force of prolific sellers, an organization should educate its salespeople on the targeted buyers. When the ability to sell is coupled with a deep understanding of the prospect, the salesperson will encounter a very receptive audience. Vital customer information includes:

- *Needs* – The problems that the prospect needs solved
- *Buying Behavior* – Their buying process (i.e., who are the users, influencers, buyers)
- *Messaging* – The value propositions that resonate with each buyer type
- *Environment* – Key competitors, industry trends, etc.

Armed with this knowledge, adroit sellers can then tailor their behavior and messages to meet a buyer's expectations.

Obtaining such customer information takes some effort, but it is time well spent. The best source of data is primary customer research, which should be performed by internal staff or consultants to ensure objective responses and to keep your salespeople focused on selling activities. Additionally, the sales force should have access to good secondary research tools in order to find detailed information on specific prospects as needed.

Equipped with both the ability to sell *and* a clear understanding of the buyer, the confidence and productivity of your sales force will improve remarkably. Additionally, prospects will breathe a sigh of relief to encounter knowledgeable and engaging salespeople. While good selling capabilities establish a foundation for your sales force, excellent customer knowledge distinguishes you with your potential customers.