

## Why Sales Training Often Fails (And What to Do About It)

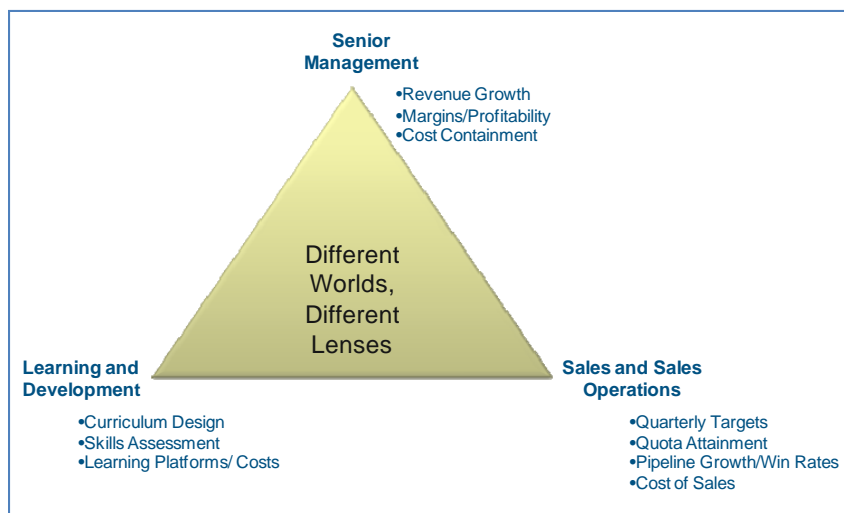
*By: Keith M. Eades, CEO and Founder of Sales Performance International*

### **Common Goal – Disjoint Execution**

After working with hundreds of global companies and nearly one million sales people over the past twenty years, it’s not surprising to see certain recurring organizational patterns. It seems obvious that a core goal of corporations is to drive revenue growth and profitability on a consistent basis. And most companies rationalize an investment in sales training as a logical contributor to that goal. The question is, do these investments (which total in the billions annually) drive the expected outcomes?

Clearly, some companies have realized improved sales effectiveness and the positive business outcomes from investment in professional development for sales people. And there is empirical evidence that human capital investment pays bottom line dividends. But in spite of estimated yearly expenditures of 4-7 billion (domestically) on sales performance training and improvement, annual research by CSO Insights tends to indicate that key sales metrics aren’t improving much, and some key measures of effectiveness are actually declining.

Some of these selling challenges may be attributable to globalized competition, more demanding customers, the rapid pace of change, and the overall economy. But in our two decades of observation, most companies struggle to “connect the dots” between key functional areas that have a stake in sales training and transformation. As depicted below, each of these groups tends to have a different “lens” and perspective driving their priorities. As a result, depending on where interest in sales training is being organizationally driven and funded can have a major impact on the approach taken (and results attained).



### **“Skilling People Up” Versus Implementing a Sales Process to Support Strategy**

In many cases, the key buying sponsors for sales training are in the learning and development area of the company. While these individuals are often highly literate in human capital development and skills improvement, they may have little appreciation for the

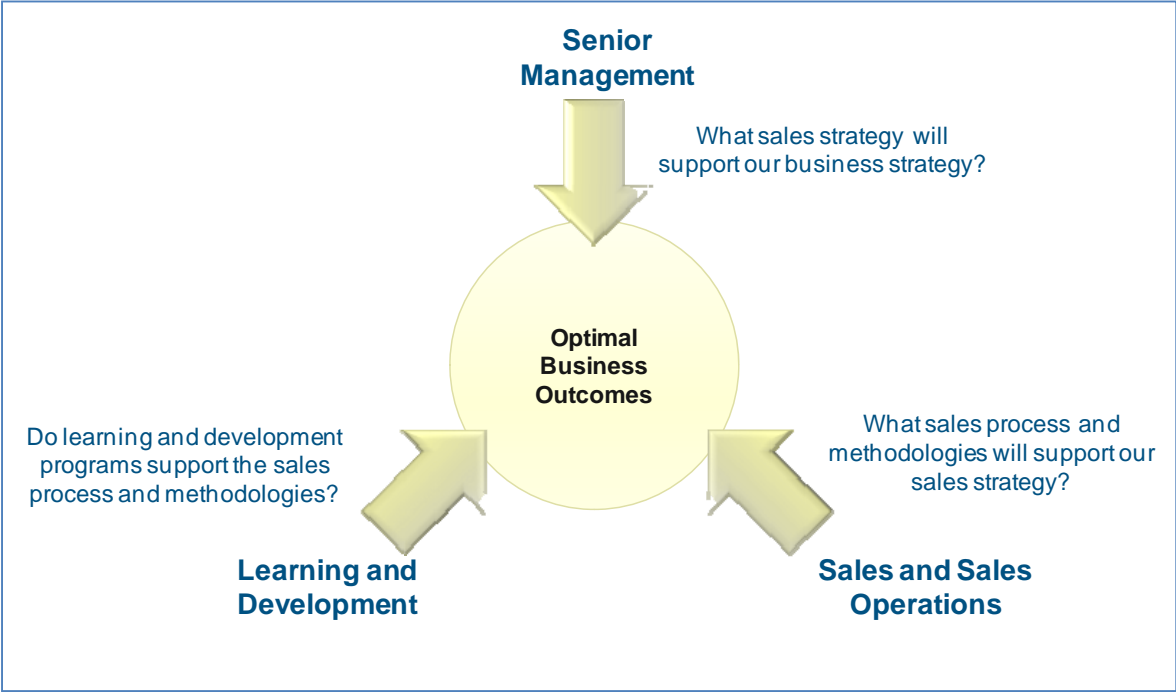
criticality of sales process, methodology integration, management disciplines, CRM integration with sales process, and many other facets of sales performance improvement. In addition, remarkably few organizations implement valid measurement programs to determine the ROI of these training initiatives.

When the sales organization drives the training initiative, they typically have experienced some specific performance problem (e.g., low quota attainment) – or they believe that there are some fundamental capabilities gaps (e.g., consultative selling ability) in their sales force. In addition, sales operations may be focused on process implementation and forecast predictability versus individual skills improvement. As a result, sales may or may not seek assistance with the learning and development organization, or have very different views of what the criteria are for vendor selection. In addition, the sales organization is typically under intense pressure to produce short term results, so they may underestimate the need for continual reinforcement and learning vehicles.

At the senior management level, general sales training may make intuitive sense, but there is often little reflection on how corporate strategy (and thus overall sales strategy) should factor into decision processes at the operational and training levels.

**A Convergent Approach**

To attain optimal business outcomes and attain measurable ROI requires a more convergent approach between the respective stakeholders in the training and improvement initiative, as depicted below.



By thinking in convergent terms, we can create a high level checklist for each of these functional areas to guide the appropriate approach to sales training (and performance improvement) that will have high correlation to desired business outcomes.

### *For Executive Leadership*

- How does business strategy relate to the desired sales model(s) and required selling approach (e.g., is the business moving from discrete products to more complex solutions?)
- Is sales process strategic, and given the same level of attention and rigor as other critical business processes? If not, why not?
- Who owns the process (and methods) of selling at the corporate level?

### *For Sales and Sales Operations*

- Do we have a well understood and repeatable sales process (driven by the sales strategy)?
- Do we have essential methods (“how-to’s”) defined for sales people to execute the process?
- Do our sales managers manage by “verifiable customer outcomes” in the sales process, and understand their correlation to core sales metrics (win rates, quota attainment, etc.)?
- Do our technology enablers (typically CRM) support the process and “teach” the sales approach while being used?

### *For Learning and Development*

- Are training initiatives aligned with the sales strategy and associated process and methods?
- Do we have defined learning paths for sales professionals based on the sales process and methods?
- Is training thought of as a continual learning experience, and are process and skills training imbedded into technology enablers?

If each of these questions can be answered coherently by your organization, there is a high probability that the investment in sales training will drive improved sales and business outcomes. If not, there is a good chance that training investments will have limited measurable ROI.

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