

THE DEMISE OF SALES TRAINING IS AT HAND

By Conrad Elnes

Sales training, as we know it, is on its deathbed. In search of higher revenues, greater gross margins, increased market share, higher closing ratios and improved customer retention, companies have spent billions of dollars for sales and customer service training, often without achieving a satisfactory, long-term return on their investment. In-house and out-sourced training have been used; “hotel seminars” have blossomed, manager-delivered programs and vendor-sponsored product training are common. Companies have tried e-learning, virtual classrooms, blended learning, CRM solutions and video and web conferencing. And what has been the result? Consider the results your sales team has produced. Have you ever wished for something better? If so, you are among the majority. We must improve our training paradigm in order to improve our training results.

Articles in professional journals often decry the long-term value of sales training, but very few praise it. Research shows us why. For example, during in-depth interviews with 80,000 Business-To-Business customers over 14 years, the Chally Group identified seven sales competencies that are essential for world class performance, and startlingly only one percent (1%) of salespeople fully utilized the competencies. Compounding the situation, sales competence is 39% responsible for a buyer’s decision of selecting a supplier.¹

Sales training, as we currently know it, must die and be reconstituted to prove it can make a long-term positive difference in the bottom line. Fortunately, the basic tools are at hand, but the philosophy and content must change dramatically.

Let’s consider a metaphor for “sales training” - purchasing an automobile will serve nicely. A vehicle consists mainly of three essential components; an engine, a drive train and a chassis. Options such as satellite radio, a GPS system, a moon roof or leather seats customize the vehicle to your needs. Nobody would buy only an engine or a drive train or a chassis and expect it to perform as an entire vehicle. Nor would anyone buy a Ford engine, a Chevy drive train and a Dodge chassis and try to mate them into anything drivable. When you invest in a vehicle, you want to own a Unified Transportation Solution tailored to your needs.

Likewise, companies that invest in training are wise to avoid piece-meal programs. Rather, they should invest in a Unified Selling Solution (USS) customized to meet their needs. The three essential components of a USS - in addition to product knowledge - include *tactical* sales skills, sales *strategies* and *customer service* skills. Options such as advanced listening skills, prospecting, motivation and financial analysis round out the competencies that provide the

¹ Achieve Sales Excellence, Howard Stevens (Platinum Press)

required customization. When a USS is fully implemented, all customer-facing employees will be guided by a set of principles and practices necessary to attract and retain customers.

The most prevalent forms of sales training, tactical skills and product knowledge, will never provide the world class competencies companies desire for their sales staff. Nor will a smattering of programs from a variety of sources integrate to form a common language, philosophy and culture for your sales and service team. Sales training, as we all know it, must give way to a Unified Selling Solution, customized for each company and prescriptively for individual sales people. As a thought leader in your company, you will add great value by initiating a discussion about the competitive advantages your company will enjoy when it becomes a market leader in adopting a USS.

We will be pleased to assist you by providing a descriptive outline of our model Unified Selling Solution, including customization options. We'll deliver it to you via e-mail at no cost, no obligation. Just submit your contact information to me.

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Although it may require a year or more to create and fully implement a Unified Solution for your company, you will enjoy numerous benefits. Among them are:

- Increased market share and revenue achieved by acquiring and retaining more customers.
- A common language and philosophy of sales and service for your entire organization.
- The facilitation of team selling to take advantage of such opportunities.
- A permanent, positive effect on the public's perception of your brand.

By comparison, the results of achieving these goals make the effort seem miniscule!

Since 1988, Conrad Elnes has employed his Master of Arts Degree in training and his highly successful sales experience to design and deliver customized sales and service training. His book, *Inside Secrets Of Outstanding Salespeople* (Prentice-Hall), was based on nine studies of high-performance salespeople. His on-going analysis of sales research assures clients of the newest, most actionable and effective training solutions available.

In 2008, Training Industry, Inc. included STI International® along with 19 others, in its list of the Top Sales Training Companies, and Conrad was selected for inclusion in *Who's Who Of Sales Thought Leaders*.

