

You Get The Training You Buy

Not the one someone is trying to sell

 By Tibor Shanto

I have read a number of pieces over the last little while that seem to put sales training in a questionable light. No doubt like any business there are bad practises and bad practitioners, but I think some of the statements are a bit too general, self-serving, and frankly smell more like opinionated assumptions than considered thought or experience. I would offer up that in some, not many, cases the people buying the training are as much, if not more, at fault for the results as those ultimately delivering the training.

Let's start from the unsafe assumption that all parties have the same goal in mind, sustained behavioural change that leads to consistent improved execution and by extension, improved sales and margins. However, this is not always what I encounter when meeting people looking to leverage what I do.

To be fair some people in my industry offer implausible promises. You should always run the other way when someone talks to you about silver bullets or hidden secrets. However, the fact that they can get away with it, and survive, suggests that there is a willing market for it too. There is no escaping the fact that buyers of sales training are people too, and as a result have the same vulnerabilities as any other buyers, just because you are good at selling does not mean you are good at buying. As a result many are not fully prepared for buying sales training or for the training they have bought. Even when the seller/trainer tells them they are going about it the wrong way and are not likely to achieve their stated goal, which often is not clear, or meaningful.

Three common challenges are:

- Being reactionary rather than proactive
- Unrealistic expectations
- Creatures of habit

Reactionary Purchases

While not always the case, for many organizations, sales training is often reactionary rather than being planned in advance. Being reactionary cuts in both good and bad times. Just like when sales are slow, the first thing to get cut, the first reaction, is training. After all, they are not doing as well as needed, it's only logical that we don't help them. This is why proactive organization will always do better, because they have a plan, and work that plan rather than blowing with the wind.

Another form of being reactionary is the driver behind the training. I have had a number of instances where buyers of training told me that one of their KPIs, deliverables, for the year is training, and they are looking to see how they can fulfill that objective rather than how they help the objectives of the sales team. Training needs to be tied to and aligned with team and organizational objectives, and given enough time for change to take hold, and benefits to be realized. This leads us to the next point.

Unrealistic Expectations

Training is not like an instant coffee, just add water, and presto. Proper training requires not only planning well in advance, but needs to be also supported and reinforced in a structured way for some time in order to take hold and actually deliver change. Many organizations and leaders lack the patience for the program to take hold in the right

way. Add that to the above, training being reactionary, not proactive or planned, and chances for success diminish further. As soon as headwind is encountered, some find it easier to bail on a program, and find the next instant cure, than to develop the discipline needed to properly see the process through. This is why those organizations, who take a long term view, get out ahead, and allow themselves the opportunity to win.

Many expect to alter systemic issues overnight, and lack the vision or patience, usually both, to do it right. I recently read an article about Phil Jackson's Triangle Offence, and whether it still works in today's National Basketball Association (NBA). One reason cited for its potential failure was that it could take more time to take hold and deliver results than owners are willing to wait. It is often the second season before teams see results, but owners, like VPs of sales, lack the patience, or vision.

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Creatures of Habit

We are all creatures of habit. How they make decisions in one critical area is no different than their decision process for other critical purchases. No one ever got fired for buying IBM, but there were so many better offerings out there, but that's not where the party was, not where the safety in numbers were, the alternate does not always allow for "me too". That "me tooism", "my image", "my brand", "my ability to be like others like me", is a human factor a few will escape, think 80/20. So I ask you, "When was the last time you saw a buyer of sales training drive a Scion, despite the fact that Consumer's Report rated it the most reliable vehicle."

Training is an integral part of any strategic success, especially long term continuous success. While it is easy to blame one party for all the disappointments, it take two parties, and often it is a simple fact that you get the training you buy, not the one someone was trying to sell. **TEL**



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