



A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO SALES SUCCESS: Sales Training vs. Sales Planning and Development

By Mike Ferrell



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Many sales organizations have spent countless millions of dollars putting on programs to train their sales teams. And certainly many sales training companies and individuals have made countless millions providing these programs. These programs go back to the early days of sales training, which were primarily geared toward motivation and then into the technical side of sales training with the programs developed by Xerox and IBM. And then tweaked or changed into programs developed for other specific industries. Programs then evolved into what I call the intellectual side of selling, which sprung from books like *Conceptual Selling* and *Strategic Selling*. Sales trainers and motivational speakers have been a constant in the sales business since Dale Carnegie and companies have engaged these folks with the hope that they could help their sales teams find that magic bullet that would take them to the next level.

THE FOCUS OF SALES TRAINING

Sales training has primarily been focused on 4 core areas:

- Selling Skills
- Product Training
- Industry Training
- Company-Specific Training

According to the American Society of Training and Development (ASTD) this training accounts for virtually 95% of all sales training done in organizations. Selling skills accounts for one third of that training with product training a close second. The interesting part of this training is that the most popular approach used in delivering this training is the classroom approach and the least popular was coaching and in-field support.

In another study it was reported that U.S. businesses spend \$15 billion per year on sales training and an average of \$2000 per sales person, however most of those sales people find the training ineffective or less than useful. One of the primary reasons they found it ineffective is that it didn't get top down support from higher-level management and it wasn't carried forward into the field and implemented within their

sales plans. And most of the training is a reactive approach to competitive markets and is focused on the transaction.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH: The Sales Development and Planning Model

Sales development and planning looks at the entire process of selling and focuses on the key areas that are critical to the success of the sales person. Once we have identified the areas that are holding them back we then use a very specific process of creating a strategic action plan that will focus on those areas and break them into bite sized pieces that can be easily implemented. And then we will take it “into the field” and help them execute the plan through a coaching process.

The six areas of critical focus are:

- Maximizing Productivity
- Personal Branding and Marketing
- Understanding and Executing the Sales Process
- Uncovering Opportunities and Growing Your Sales
- Delivering Exceptional Service
- Building and Keeping Relationships

These six areas represent 25 years of study and working with thousands of sales people to determine what areas impact their sales and how they impact their sales. These areas differ from standard sales training in that they are strategic; they focus on executing what they have learned in the sales training they have already received. And they are highly customizable, meaning that every sales person has things they do better or worse, by identifying the areas that they are struggling with we can assist them in creating a plan that will be their plan, not some cookie cutter approach that everyone has. By taking sales people through a series of exercises we can help them pinpoint the issues that are holding them back and then we can go to work on building a plan that will help them strengthen those areas. We may find that part of their issues may be that they need to go back through some part of the sales training process and that’s where this approach dovetails into the programs companies have already implemented.

THE BUSINESS PLANNING FUNNEL

Once we have helped the sales person identify the issues they are “dealing with” we then create a highly focused strategic sales action plan that will help them execute on those issues. The Business Planning Funnel is a process I’ve developed over 25 years of working with sales people and organizations to help them create plans that can easily be

executed. I write in detail about this approach in my book, *Ultimate Breakthrough Planning: The Business Funnel Approach*.

The key to the business funnel is the simplicity; we start with the overall issues and then break them down into strategies. The strategy may be one of the six areas or it might be more specific. Once we have the strategies then we break those down again into the tactics and tools under each strategy. This is the “how” they are going to make each strategy happen. An example may be the overall strategy is creating opportunities with existing clients, then the tools and tactics or “how” may be a marketing strategy or needs analysis meetings. Once we have a few tactics and tools defined under each strategy we then break those tactics and tools into the specific tasks and timelines for each tool. Here is where the rubber hits the road; this is the weekly to do list of the items that need to happen for each tool to be implemented.

GOALS vs. MILESTONES

Most salespeople and sales managers create plans that focus on sales goals, whether its dollars in sales, commissions, revenue, profits or whatever the measuring stick is the plans are focused on those goals. The problem with this approach is that the minute it becomes evident that the goal is either not going to be reached or exceeded the goal becomes irrelevant. It is one of the primary reasons that over 70% of salespeople never hit their goals.



That being said I think it's still important to set goals, however if we change the focus from the goal, to what I call key milestones or the actions or activities that need to happen on a daily basis, and create a goals statement that assumes they have already achieved that goal, we can have dramatic results. I have seen triple digit increases in sales

using this approach and my average client that executes the plan for two consecutive six-month periods grows their sales 27%.

LENGTH OF PLAN

The rate of change in business today is amazing, with technology, the Internet, and the general business environment you must be positioned to stay ahead of change. Because of this speed of business I believe that to create any more than a six-month plan makes no sense. I believe that we're better off to create a six-month plan, execute it, and focus on the strategies in that plan and measure it and then determine what the next six-month plan should be.

In summary sales training is a vital part of the success of a sales organization however the piece that many companies are missing is the execution on that training. By focusing on sales planning and development we've created a process that will help the sales person develop a highly customizable plan that is "their" plan not the company's and that can help sales people take it into "the field" and achieve the results they, their managers and their companies are looking for. In addition this approach is a great accountability tool for management.

ABOUT MIKE FERRELL

Mike Ferrell is President and CEO of The Pinecrest Group, Minneapolis, MN, he is also the author of the award winning book, *Ultimate Breakthrough Planning: The Business Funnel Approach*. He is also the co-collaborator of *What Are You Dealing With?*[®] (www.whatareyoudealingwith.com) Mike has spent the last 25 years working with businesses and sales organizations helping them achieve outstanding results. Mike has worked with small companies as well as large multi-national corporations and has spoke to numerous business and trade associations. Mike is based in Minneapolis, MN. Mike can be reached at mferrell@thepinecrestgroup.com