

Part Four: Training to Sell

Are you onboarding your salespeople correctly?

by: Derek Shebby, Modern Sales Training

Editor's Note: This is the fourth of a five-part series. The first three parts, "Part One: Train to Outcomes," "Part Two: The First 90 Days" and "Part Three: Product Training," appear in the September, October and November 2021 issues of Office Technology.



There are no born salespeople. Not anymore. Twenty-plus years ago, things were different. You could be born a smooth talker — one of those people who could “sell sawdust to a lumber mill.” Those people born with the gift of gab did pretty well for a living. However, some took it too far, which created bad stereotypes for the rest of the profession. Salespeople became looked at as persuasive, convincing, deceiving, conning, slimy and would say anything to get you to buy their products or services.

What changed? Are smooth talkers not born anymore? Of course they are. What changed is the way consumers buy products and services. With the invention of the internet came the birth of “the educated buyer.” Now a buyer has an idea of how much products should cost before engaging with a salesperson. He (or she) researches his options beforehand and even benefits from the feedback of other buyers through “social proof,” found in online reviews. Because of these changes, it is practically impossible to be persuaded by a smooth-talking salesperson in today’s world.

Although the world’s buying habits have changed quite a bit over the years, the ways we train our salespeople have not. Most companies still operate with the thought that salespeople just need to know products in order to sell them. The system teaches them to be product experts and then points them in the direction of customers and they take care of the rest with their natural persuasive abilities. The result of this system is an endless loop of turnover and poor company culture.

Consumers today demand higher-caliber salespeople working with them. They want consultants who can help prescribe the right solutions and navigate through challenges they could face in the future. These types of people are not born; they are trained and developed. They understand the

sales fundamentals and the process of selling business to business. Deep down, your salespeople do not want to be considered slimy or persuasive. They want to keep their integrity as sales professionals. By learning “how to sell,” they really end up learning how to believe in themselves.

In the fourth part of this five-part series, we will explore what the outcomes of teaching your salespeople “how to sell” should yield your dealership, as well as the four fundamental sales areas all salespeople must never stop working on in order to be top performers in the future.

Learning How to Sell in the Industry

Every day there are new online software-as-a-service (SaaS) startups being funded by investors throwing millions of dollars their way to almost guarantee success. They are first to market. The innovation speaks for itself. The startup’s goal is simple: Get the word out to its prospective client base. It is new and exciting. Who wouldn’t want to check it out?

The sales skills required here are basic. Many times, there are employees, like sales development reps (SDRs), whose job is to set up these demos. That is it. They make calls and qualify contacts. Then there are other salespeople who take the baton to the next part of the sales process. They may need to learn a few more skills, like basic relationship building during demos and proposal writing. Often, they are not even the ones giving demos. That is a sales engineer’s job. All of these roles end up having incomplete skill levels around the whole sales cycle.

This is not the way the office technology industry works. It has been around for more than 90 years. The sales process is established and the technology is considered a commodity in a highly competitive market. Can we take the same approach with our salespeople as these brand-new SaaS startups? Absolutely not.

Our salespeople need to understand the whole sales cycle and they need to be proficient in the sales skills needed during every step. They need to master skills that include:

planning for an effective week, prospecting, running great appointments, doing demos, presenting proposals, closing and ongoing customer account management. There is a lot to learn and most of this does not involve needing to be a product expert. Many of us acquired these skills through trial and error inside of our first five-plus years doing the job. Can we afford to wait that long for our salespeople to figure it out, as we did? Not a chance.

Even if you follow the sales onboarding process in this series of articles, you should still expect your salespeople to take time to be properly developed. However, we should still have outcomes we should expect early on in their training. We must pause and ask ourselves, “What should they be able to do when it comes to learning how to sell?”

In the first 90 days, here is my recommendation for what they should be proficient in:

- (1) They should be able to know how to plan for effective days and weeks.
- (2) They should be able to set a net-new appointment in person and over the phone.
- (3) They should be able to prepare for and run a structured first appointment.
- (4) They should be able to create a proposal for a prospect and ask for the order.

Is that asking for too much? I do not think so. After all, you or your sales manager will be coaching them throughout the weeks anyway. You will be on the appointments with them. You will be there making sure they do not say the wrong things during proposal presentations. You will be there to make sure deals come in. You should be there to coach them along the way. I would consider these basic skills someone should be hammering on in your reps’ early days. We need them out there doing the job. We need them prospecting. We need them to meet with customers. We need them to know how to create proposals for customers. Although these tasks are not the entire job, they are milestones along the way. Most importantly, they need to know these skills in order to build their confidence to believe in themselves and their futures as sales professionals.

It is our job to make sure we lay out the structure of sales development so they can meet and exceed these outcomes. To do this, I recommend planning out sales training during their onboarding to cover these sales fundamentals: messaging, filling the funnel, running appointments and building value.

Getting Your Message Right

Our salespeople do not want to be slimy or pushy. They want their customers to look at them differently — with respect,

Our salespeople do not want to be slimy or pushy. They want their customers to look at them differently — with respect, as they would a consultant.

as they would a consultant. They can achieve this goal by making sure they use the right messages with the right clients at the right times.

To have the right messages, they need to understand their prospects. They need to know what challenges prospects could be facing in their industries. They need to know what daily problems prospects are living with at their companies. They need to clearly understand how their products

and services can solve or address the problems and challenges of their target prospects. With a clear understanding, they can learn how to create tailored messaging statements — or value propositions — that are needed to connect the dots between the prospects’ problems and your company’s solutions.

These value propositions are the benefit statements we will ultimately use to set appointments while prospecting, create interest in other products or services during appointments, and even create urgency in a sale. All of this, combined with an understanding of why some customers buy and others do not (sales psychology), will lead to them focusing on customers and how they could possibly help their businesses.

Filling the Funnel

Our salespeople can become overwhelmed with fear when it comes to prospecting. They can become so terrified they will not even get out of their cars to cold call business parks or pick up their phones to make dials. Objections can make them freeze with terror. This all comes from a lack of sales fundamentals and mindset training.

There is so much more to prospecting than cold calling. There is planning for effective prospecting days and weeks. This means segmenting a territory for the right routes and using one’s time wisely to get the most out of the golden hours.

There is qualifying the right opportunities, but asking the right questions and recording the best information inside of the CRM database. This means collecting information that may not help this month, but will help in the years to come.

There is the understanding of the sales process and how to keep the sales funnel fresh with prospects. It is not just filling the funnel — it is managing it so there is a deal that comes out in the end. It is understanding how every part of the prospecting process is a numbers game and one step closer to a win. The reason most salespeople fail is a lack of prospects in their funnels.

Running Effective Appointments

Appointments are where the rubber meets the road for our salespeople. They work so hard to get meetings set with current or net-new clients that they cannot afford to mess

them up. I am sad to say that the overwhelming majority of salespeople and sales leaders tend to wing it during meetings with prospects. By winging it, they are showing up to the appointment cold, with little to no preparation or strategy.

Salespeople need to see appointments as sacred meetings where they are expected to bring value, represent themselves and the company well, and leave customers wanting more. This is easier said than done.

Running an effective appointment could take a long time to prepare for. Preparation should include creating calculated questions to qualify an opportunity or lead to a new opportunity; putting together visual aids that reinforce the message; and role-playing the appointment with a manager beforehand. Running effective appointments should never be a trial-and-error process. There is no rule for how much time one should take to prepare for a great appointment.

There are only two real outcomes of an appointment — someone either has a prospect or he does not. It is debatable which is more important: prospecting to get the appointment or actually running the appointment. They are both critical to the deal and the confidence of the salesperson.

This process does not just apply to teaching salespeople how to run effective net-new appointments; the same is true for current-customer account reviews.

Building Value During the Sale

Learning how to build value and differentiation are critical for salespeople in a competitive market like the office technology industry. Building value throughout the sales process is an art. There are moments and opportunities of differentiation throughout and we must capitalize on them all. The rule of the game is simple: The one who provides the most value wins the deal.

The proposal is a summary of the value that is provided during the sales cycle. I regularly ask to inspect the proposals sales reps and sales managers in this industry are presenting and I am rarely surprised. They are almost always awful. I feel for the customers on the receiving end and I can empathize when they ask for the lowest price. How are they supposed to determine the right choice for their businesses?

The proposal says a lot about a company and if a salesperson is, in fact, the consultant he thinks he is. Here is an easy way to figure it out. Look at a salesperson's most recent proposal and ask this question: "Is the proposal about the customer or is it more about the salesperson?"

As salespeople see their progress, you will see their confidence skyrocket and they will start believing in themselves.

Stacking value in one's favor is a practice that all top sales performers have in common. They understand this fundamental truth of sales: Always take advantage of opportunities that demonstrate why the customer should choose them versus other vendors. This must be taught, revisited and reinforced every time it occurs with our salespeople to encourage the right activity and behavior.

Summary: Train a Higher-Caliber Salesperson

Your customers demand a higher-caliber salesperson. The days are gone when you could hire born salespeople who just needed to understand the products and they could take it from there. Those smooth-talking salespeople who are only out for themselves have given the profession a bad name and our customers are too smart for them. With the introduction of the internet, our customers have become educated buyers and are now looking for technology consultants. The good news is, your salespeople also want to become those types of sales professionals. The bad news is, you have to train them.

Training a salesperson how to sell does not have to be a difficult task. It just requires structure around how to train to the sales fundamentals. Keep it simple by keeping their progress realistic with outcomes that logically follow their developmental process. Do this by focusing your onboarding sales training around the four key sales fundamentals I have addressed in this article.

As salespeople see their progress, you will see their confidence skyrocket and they will start believing in themselves. They will see themselves becoming those future technology consultants that any customer would be proud to meet with.

In the final article in this series, we will close out our onboarding journey with part five, "Clearing The Way," and go in-depth on what is needed in order to create learning paths that inspire salespeople to continue to grow and develop inside of your dealership for many years to come. ■

Derek Shebby, founder of Modern Sales Training, spent 17 years as a top sales executive and sales director with Xerox Corp. During his tenure at Mr. Copy, he was a 13-time Sales President's Club Award winner, and coached hundreds of salespeople and sales leaders to excellence. He now spends his time helping dealerships across the nation increase revenues and profits through his copier/MFP sales training program, online sales courses and workshops. He can be reached at derek@modernsalestraining.com and has exclusive sales trainings for BTA members at www.modernsalestraining.com/BTA. Visit www.modernsalestraining.com.

