

Why Sales Training Succeeds . . . Or Fails

By Ron Willingham

Organizations around the world spend billions of dollars on sales training—most of which is wasted. A harsh statement? No, you'll soon see why most so called "sales training" can't get results. If you assume that the purpose of sales training is to equip salespeople to increase their sales, then most fails.

Most sales training is delivered in one, two, or three day seminars, where people are only taught sales skills. The assumption is that if we teach people sales skills they'll (a) hear it, (b) remember it, and (c) practice it.

But, guess what? After 21 days of attending this training, people forget around 95% of everything they heard. No new habits are developed. No new unconscious beliefs are formed. Nothing causes old, fixed habits to be broken or changed. Little, if any, sales increases result.

Not only do most sales training programs not increase sales, they actually cause lower sales. This happens because of two reasons:

1. They only teach information, and no new behaviors are formed. So, salespeople revert to the same old comfortable behaviors.
2. They actually create mental and emotional conflicts between salespeople's values of their view of their own possibilities.

A *cognitive dissonance*, or emotional conflict, is triggered when people are taught sales skills that they either don't believe they can do or don't feel comfortable doing.

So, again, billions are wasted on ineffective sales training.

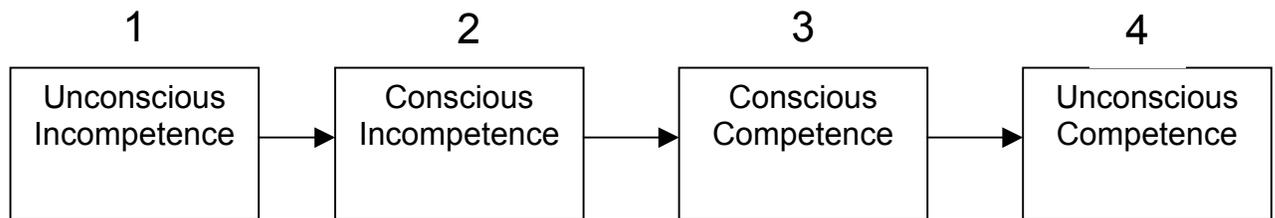
This brings up the logical question: *What must happen in training and development processes to cause people to increase their actual sales?*

TRAINING MUST CAUSE BEHAVIOR CHANGE

The ability to sell isn't the result of knowledge, rather it's a matter of internal beliefs that then drive unconscious behaviors. When selling, people revert back to old comfortable habits. Usually these are *product-focused* or *transaction-focused* behaviors.

If training isn't designed to help people develop unconscious *customer-focused* behaviors, they won't reach their true potential in sales production.

According to research now commonly known as the Johari Window, we must move salespeople through different levels of competence. Notice the following model.



Level 1: Unconscious Incompetence is not knowing what we don't know.

Level 2: Conscious Incompetence is knowing what we don't know.

Level 3: Conscious Competence is knowing what to do, but having to think through it as we do it.

Level 4: Unconscious Competence is being able to perform professional skills without having to consciously think about them.

Salespeople who sell the most and who have the highest customer loyalty, share the following qualities:

1. They understand what customer needs-focused selling is.

2. They value it as the best way to succeed.
3. They have practiced and polished their skills until they perform customer-focused selling skills as natural unconscious behaviors.

HOW TRAINING CAUSES BEHAVIOR CHANGE

To help salespeople develop unconscious competence in their selling, several training dynamics must be done.

1. Teach salespeople what successful customer-focused skills are.
2. Break these skills down into single actions and have salespeople practice them for a week in real life selling situations.
3. Have them report on their practice each week.
4. Reward and reinforce them for their successful practice each week.
5. Create an open environment where they can listen to how their peers practiced the ideas.
6. Continue this process over several weeks in order to build new inner beliefs that translate into new habits.

We call this “real play”—practicing appropriate skills in *real life situations*, not artificial “role play”.

Training that doesn’t have built-in follow-up over a several week period can’t cause behavior change, nor can it help salespeople develop strong, appropriate selling habits.

Sales success isn't an issue of just *intellectually* knowing skills, rather it's developing these skills through practice, reporting on that practice in real life selling situations, and being reinforced for successes. After 21 days of practicing an action, new habits or behavior develop.

A COGNITIVE DISSONANCE IS TRIGGERED BY TRADITIONAL SALES TRAINING

In the opening of this paper, I mentioned the term *cognitive dissonance*. This term was coined by Dr. Leon Festinger of Stanford University. It means that when people are asked to do a behavior that conflicts with their values or their unconscious beliefs about what they're capable of doing, a *dissonance*, or *conflict*, is triggered at their deep emotional levels.

When this *dissonance* happens it causes stress and fear. This causes people to emotionally shut down.

Much of the sales training that organizations offer causes emotional conflicts. Here are some examples that cause these conflicts:

- Being told that selling is convincing people to buy.
- Playing negotiation games, and using tricks.
- Having little concern about customers' actual needs.
- Telling half-truths just to get a sale.
- Not really caring about giving value to customers.

Most product-focused, or transaction-focused, selling creates conflicts within salespeople, because its purpose isn't to identify and fill customers' needs,

but to simply make a sale. This can create internal problems the human spirit which is nurtured by giving value to customers.

INTEGRITY SELLING® IS A PROCESS THAT HELPS PEOPLE SUCCEED

Integrity Selling® is a process that salespeople feel good about, because it helps them sell the way customers want to buy. This emotionally frees them up so they can sell more. They feel good about selling this way, and customers feel good about it too.

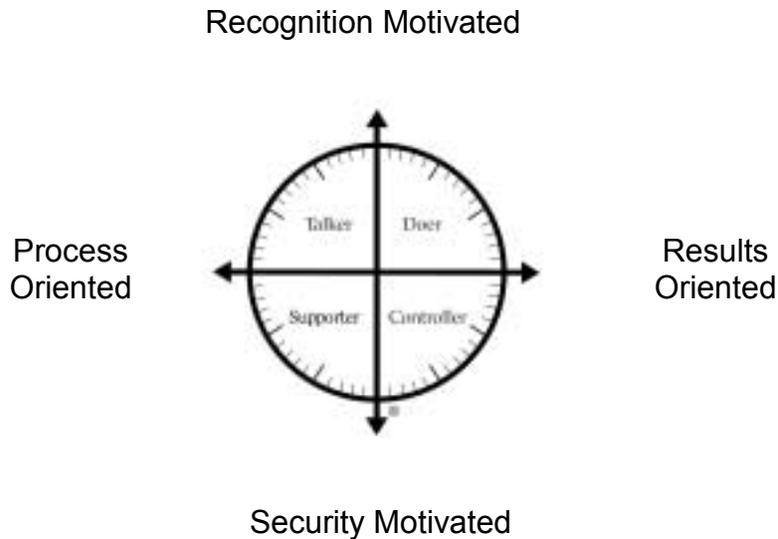
A SIX-STEP CUSTOMER NEEDS-FOCUSED SYSTEM

People learn a six-step customer needs-focused sales system. The steps are:

1. Approach . . . to gain trust and rapport.
2. Interview . . . to identify and understand customers' needs.
3. Demonstrate . . . to show how needs can be filled.
4. Val-I-date . . . to prove your claims and heighten trust.
5. Negotiate . . . to resolve problems in a win-win way.
6. Close. . . to ask for a decision or the next step.

A UNIQUE BEHAVIOR STYLE LANGUAGE

Salespeople learn that not everyone thinks, makes decisions, or views the world in the same ways. They learn the following model, and more importantly, they develop the skills of unconsciously adapting their own styles to those of other people.



Once people learn this, and practice it, their sales quickly go up.

A ONE YEAR CURRICULUM

The Integrity Selling[®] curriculum is:

1. An initial six-hour seminar to learn a six-step customer focused sales system.
2. A pre-assessment Sales Skills Inventory.
3. An eight-week follow-up to help participants develop unconscious habits of practicing the six-step system.
4. A post-assessment Sales Skills Inventory.
5. Monthly advanced sales meetings for reinforcement.
6. An annual review process.
7. Ongoing manager's coaching.

Our objective is to teach people appropriate customer needs-focused sales skills, and then to help them convert what they learn into unconscious behaviors.

RESULTS, RESULTS, RESULTS

When results count, you can depend on Integrity Selling[®] to bring them. With courses offered around the globe, here is a sampling of some of the results we hear about:

- Trade New Zealand increased their trade \$500 million after training their people in 35 nations.
- Infinite Energy increased their customer base from fourteen thousand to over fifty thousand in fifteen months.
- Paul Reviere, a multi-million dollar producer with ERA, increased his sales twenty-six percent.

Yes—results, results, results.

Integrity Selling[®] . . . When you really want results.

To find out more about how we might help your organization increase your sales and customer loyalty, please call us or visit our web site.

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