

## Sales Sustainability™ – “Why Experience doesn’t Produce Exceptional Sales Performance (Exper)

>> **Why doesn’t experience produce exceptional sales performance?** Most sales managers claim they only hire experienced sales people. If experience was the solution, and we only hire experienced sales people, why don’t we see exceptional performance everywhere?

**Most of us cannot explain why experienced sales people do not meet our expectations.** Yet experience continues to be a core requirement in our selection process. Why? Often it is because sales managers believe a set of personality traits is equivalent to skills. Few organizations take the time to document the exact skills required to be successful selling in their industry or their organization. They assume that experience is a direct measure of achieving the required skills. This may prove to be a poor assumption.

Many sales organizations refuse to recognize that selling is the result of skills developed through specific methods and activities. Change should signal sales people to adapt both their sales program and methods to new realities. It also has the effect of reducing the value of previous methods and activities. So experience can be effectively eliminated by changes in markets, customers, technology, methods, and suppliers. Now, if we hire experienced sales people they often employ the same methods used in the past and if the organization doesn’t have a defined sales methodology, success is questionable. Old methods (experience) can be ineffective and the organization will not recognize this until long after the salespeople are hired.

***Ten years of experience can be the same as one year of experience repeated several times.*** We initially often confuse experience, learning ability, and skills in the sales profession. Performance based sales organizations develop a sales program that incorporates training in specific methods to prevent sales force obsolescence. When a sales person is hired the sales program is explained, the methods are outlined, and a training process is implemented. Training ensures that the experienced sales person immediately begins learning the accepted methods. It also promotes a consistent process inside the entire organization. A consistent process provides for near equivalent experience across the entire sales team.

***The sales environment can be managed to ensure that experience is based***

***upon proven methods and will develop specific sales skills.*** How? Actively implement a training process which clearly communicates the skills required to be successful. Consistently support the process by establishing an environment of creativity, accountability, learning and change management. Support constructive peer level evaluation of individual sales activities. This allows the sales manager to actively foster a learning based organization where experience gained during sales activities enhances the skills of everyone.

***Sales skill enhancement requires a current assessment of abilities and the clear expectation of future assessments.*** Why? The purpose of training is to change behavior. *We do this by enhancing the current abilities of our sales team and establishing that post training performance will be evaluated.* If we do not know current capabilities we cannot measure performance improvement and returns from our training investment.

***Our objective is to implement behaviors, challenge our sales people, and improve the skills of our team.*** This maximizes the return from our investment in training resources and tailors training to the specific requirements of each organization. The sales manager must actively coach salespeople following training to positively reinforce the desired behavior. This often includes role playing and exercises to reduce the initial reservations of the sales staff.

***How do you effectively train experienced sales personnel?*** We motivate our staff by increasing the perception that rewards will come to those that desire to learn. Provide rewards for those that change their behavior according to the training. Organizations that train can also fail because they don't have the resources or discipline to follow through on training programs. Sales managers must clearly communicate that everyone will be evaluated within a defined time frame. Performance reviews can be based upon the post training assessment during sales calls. If sales people expect evaluations and are rewarded, they positively change their behaviors.

***Exceptional sales performance can be the result of retaining skills and implementing methods from training.*** However, without follow up assessments as much as 80% of training is not retained after 30 days. Sales people need to believe that the training is important to their performance in the organization. If they do not believe that the skills and methods are being employed they will not change their behavior according to the training program. As managers we often limit the effectiveness of training by not establishing a clear time frame for assessing the new skills in each sales person. Follow up assessments clearly

establish the importance of new methods and desired skills to individual sales people.

***Training presents desirable behaviors and methods to induce more effective capabilities in our sales force.*** Transferring these behaviors and skills is a critical but often neglected part of the process. Salespeople assimilate training when they believe they will be evaluated. Why? Because evaluation implies that accountability is expected once we provide sufficient time to directly connect the methods and skills into daily activities. This is why it is a good idea to immediately begin coaching the team during their workday and providing examples of how the training can be applied. This process reduces the time to implement the training and directly shows everyone it is important to the organization and their individual success.

***So why do organizations attempt to manage activities without training sales people?*** They just expect experienced sales people to intuitively understand their process or use whatever process has worked for the salesperson in the past. What results do they usually achieve? Inconsistent sales performance accompanied by plenty of explanations and excuses. The organization may actually believe that experience ensures uniformity of process but it doesn't. Why? Because experience and learning vary between sales people and sales organizations. *Training establishes role clarity but past sales experience often does not...*

***So after these examples, “why doesn’t experience produce exceptional sales performance?”*** Because we achieve superior performance not through experience but by defining how, what, where, and why we sell. Once we define it, we communicate it, and we reinforce it with our sales team. Then we train and manage our sales force with complete alignment and role clarity. Through this learning process our sales people understand their role and why key activities and methods add value to the overall sales program. *Because our sales force is informed, trained, aligned, and experienced they produce superior results as a team, according to the expectations of the sales plan. In short, we train to produce the “right” experience.*