



Snatching Inertia From The Jaws Of Change

What makes change, particularly in sales organisations, so hard? For one thing managers grossly underestimate the difficulty that is involved in changing a sales force. The actions they take are generally too small and too piecemeal to bring about meaningful improvement. We've seen it often enough. Sales organisations simply don't recognise the stubbornness of old habits and entrenched ways of thinking.

What impact does attending a training program have on change? A study conducted a number of years ago found that within one month of leaving a sales training program salespeople had lost 87% of the new skills they had learned during the training program. If salespeople are returned to the same environment (same metrics, same rewards, same supervision) as before then training, no matter how excellent it is, has no lasting impact.

It takes longer than you think

Everyone wants the quick fix. Sales are down this month - must do a training program. In fact the best time for change is in the good times. As a general rule efficiency can be built more quickly than effectiveness. It's a faster job to build efficiency e.g. increase call rates, decrease expenses than it is to build the levels of skills and effectiveness needed for selling today. As a general rule – it takes about two years of concerted effort to start to see change. So no instant results – no instant gratification.

You can't improve salespeople without improving sales management

One of the most common mistakes companies make in efforts to improve sales performance is to focus exclusively on salespeople. Experience has shown that sales managers are even more critical for creating durable performance change. Really proficient sales supervision can do wonders to improve the skills, strategies and competencies of average salespeople. Conversely, mediocre supervision can put a big dent in the effectiveness of quite good salespeople.

Sales managers are the primary performance coach, which is a crucially important role. They must be leaders and coaches rather than administrators and organisers. They must be able to coach their staff in the structured consultative selling process and be able to lead by example as many of the skills need to be continually reinforced on the job.



Why is coaching so important?

Studies of high performing sales teams consistently shows that systematic high quality coaching is a critical element in performance. However, many supervisors don't like to coach and their people aren't exactly enthusiastic either. Why then should coaching be given so much importance?

Skills acquired through training alone evaporate fast. The role of coaching is to provide the reinforcement needed to maintain and enhance skills. This is not to suggest that training is unimportant. In fact, a well designed combination of training and coaching is by far the most effective and economical way to develop skills and see a change in sales performance.

Change levers

Creating major or sustainable improvements in sales performance requires a systematic change effort. Its success rests on the active involvement and leadership of top management, not just on management within the sales function. In particular changing the sales force will require actions in line with the following change levers:

- Clear vision of how to create value for customers through the sales process;
- Organisation structured to focus on customers and providing added value for them;
- Training programs to improve skills and develop strategies for sales, support staff and management;
- Rewards and performance measurement systems that encourage and reinforce change.



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