

New Hire Sales Training: It's Important, It's Underemphasized, It's Different

By Richard Ruff and Janet Spierer

A short quiz for sales leaders - How much has the buying process changed in your market in the last five years? Question two - Have you taken a serious look at updating your new hire sales training to keep up with the changes? (Here we are talking about sales skills training not product or welcome-to-the-company training.)

If you are like the sales leaders in many companies, the answer to the first question varies somewhere between: "It has been breath taking" to "A fair amount."

There is more variability in the responses to the second question. The range sounds something like: "We have taken a pretty serious look at new hire training because it's a big deal" to "We have been busy with other priorities plus the budgets have been cut so we have postponed...."

If your response to the change question is like most, but your answer to the second question is essentially "not much," then it is worthwhile to pause. Great new hire sales training can make a difference on some of those bottom-line problems that have been the focus of attention. The larger the number of new hires onboarded, the greater the impact.

The good news is in the last several years there have been some good things happening in new hire sales training. In the past, new hire sales training has often just been a shorter or simplified version of the sales skill training for the existing sales force. Emerging work suggests sales training for new hires should be specifically designed for new hires. Although the same sales process should be introduced, "what is taught" and "how it is taught" needs to be designed for the unique challenges facing new hires. Four design ideas that have proven to be particularly effective for new hire sales training are:

Expert Video Messaging. Top performers in the existing sales force possess a wealth of experience and insight of tremendous value to new hires. Therefore, for various topics throughout the program, pre-recorded video snippets of different members of the sales force can be used to deliver suggestions and best practices to the class.

These videos can be used to address standard topics like: How to open a call, closing, objection handling, and asking questions. They can also be used to focus on topics uniquely important for new hires: How do you get started in your territory, how do you establish credibility, or if I was starting again, what is one thing I would do differently?

Excellence Modeling. When it comes to new hires, it is very important to show excellence, rather than just talk about it. Therefore for new hire training programs, "scripts" can be developed for selected skill sets that demonstrate what excellence looks and sounds like.

For example, scripts can be particularly effective for getting across the trap of jumping in too soon and doing a "Product Dump" - vs. employing active listening and questioning skills to uncover and explore the customer problem and then presenting your solution. "Bad" and "Good" scripts can be reviewed and discussed to enable

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the participants to view the interaction from the customer's perspective and to clearly see the difference between effective and ineffective behavior.

Scenario Analysis. In new hire programs, more pervasive use can be made of real-world scenario exercises. Take the topic Establishing Credibility: real-world scenarios related to challenges for establishing credibility can be presented and the participants asked to develop approaches for addressing the challenges.

The idea is to be more prescriptive - so, one series of exercises might be: play a pre-recorded video snippet providing some best practices about establishing credibility, discuss the best practices on the video, and then immediately get the participants to apply those ideas to customized real-world scenarios about establishing credibility.

Use of Sales Simulations. Sales simulations are often used as a component in programs for the existing sales team. Frequently the simulation is "the most highly" rated part of the program.

A sales simulation can also be a very effective component to incorporate into a new hire program. The caveat is the template used to design the simulation needs to be different. It needs to be simpler: less detailed product knowledge, different customer contacts, and easier sales challenges. Plus, more time needs to be allotted for planning and feedback. One template that works well is a "week-in-the-life" construct. A series of typical situations are presented that a new hire is likely to encounter during a week in their new life; they are then asked to plan and execute sales calls that handle these situations.

Providing new hire sales people a great kick start can go a long way in providing initial confidence and even some early wins. All too often new hire sales training is an area that receives less than the appropriate priority. But the results of great new hire sales training can show up in revenue figures, in turnover numbers, and in some cases in ways not imagined.

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About the Authors

For more than 30 years Dr. Richard Ruff and Janet Spierer - co-founders of Sales Horizons - have worked with the Fortune 1000 to design and develop sales training programs that make a difference. By working with market leaders - such as UPS, Canon USA, Smith & Nephew, Boston Scientific, Xerox, Covidien, Owens & Minor - we have learned that today's standard for a great sales force significantly differs from yesterday's picture. Sales Horizons offers companies a new generation of proven sales training programs designed with Fortune 1000 companies... that you can deliver, modify, and brand to your organization. And the one-time license fee is compatible with today's economic realities. To learn more about how Sales Horizons helps companies achieve sales success, visit our web site at <http://www.saleshorizons.com/>. Our visit or blog at <http://www.salestrainingconnection.com/>.

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