

# Sales Obsolescence

*Don't just train, certify people.*



by Duane Sparks

**Y**OU NEED A SALES PROCESS that fosters continuous growth; otherwise, your salespeople tend to hit a plateau or slide into obsolescence.

Seven factors determine whether learning produces personal growth, skills are used on the job, and lasting changes occur in behavior:

**1. Train managers, not just salespeople.** Sales managers will either reinforce or hinder behavior changes.

**2. Foster experimentation and creativity in training.**

When salespeople have fun, they learn fast and well and are likely to translate the learning into lasting behavior changes.

**3. Treat salespeople as peers.** Respect their opinions. Learn as much from them as they learn from you.

**4. Use self-directed learning,** where salespeople take responsibility for their own learning and have all needed resources available to them.

**5. Measure their pre-training skill level.** Challenge salespeople to go just beyond their present ability and to share their knowledge.

**6. Create involvement** through interaction, exercises, role-plays, games.

**7. Include feedback**—assessments, observations, job-performance ratings, and certification—to know what's been learned and what is yet to be learned.



## Training Experienced Salespeople

In sales training, use four elements:

**1. Motivation.** If the salesperson doesn't recognize a need or benefit for change, training efforts will be in vain. Ask "What's in it for me if I learn to do things this way?" What gets measured gets learned. A certification process boosts motivation to learn new skills, practice them, and use them on the job.

**2. Reinforcement.** Create awareness of why certain behaviors must change. Reinforcement after training helps prevent relapses into old behavior, especially when that follow-up comes from

the manager. When the boss expects that the new behavior will be used on the job and holds the salesperson accountable, learning is more likely to transfer into practice.

**3. Retention.** Evaluate training's effectiveness on the basis of creating behavior change.

Know what the salespeople

learned and applied on the job.

**4. Transference.** Apply information to work activities. Involve salespeople in the learning process, provide follow-up activities and assessment, and require them to demonstrate their skills in the field. Management support and reinforcement on the job facilitate the transfer of new skills.

You need a complete, systematic process to help salespeople learn new skills, apply them, and measure the results. Start teaching the right skills and providing a framework. **SSE**

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**ACTION: Avoid sales obsolescence.**