

# Customer Service Training's Dirty Little Secret...

...It Doesn't Work.

**“Here's the problem--and the solution.”**

*By Duane Sparks, Chairman, The Sales Board, Inc.*



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Why customer service training fails

Is your company investing in training for your customer service teams? I'm talking about training intended to sharpen the skills of employees who interact with your customers but are not part of your formal sales force. They work in functions with names such as customer service, customer support, technical support, marketing, account management, client services, help desk, inside sales, and others.

In most companies, these employees have more customer contact than your traditional sales force. They provide information, solve problems, make referrals, and handle sales opportunities like up-sell and cross-sell.

The umbrella term I use to describe these employees is **Customer Relationship Professionals (CRPs)**. I say "professionals" not because most of them actually deserve that title on the basis of their skills, but simply because building customer relationships is what they do for a living—supposedly, at least.

Differentiating your company's support service can give you a strong competitive edge, so training these people seems like a perfectly sensible business practice. Hey, it must be a smart thing to do, since expert sources like TrainingIndustry.com estimate that companies will spend more money next year than ever before to train customer service people. A quick internet search on "customer service training" yields a ton of programs available.

But, I say that training your support teams with the current lot of training options is a colossal waste of money and time. I've recently completed research on the myriad options available to train customer service people (a.k.a., CRPs). My research shows that providers of training programs for CRPs are all using outdated methods that are bound to fail. My conclusion: The customer-service-training industry needs a wakeup call.

How do I know these training options are destined to fail? I know because what I see today in the customer-service-training marketplace looks exactly like what I saw when I entered the sales training market in 1990. The only difference is that the internet and other newer technologies are used more often to deliver the failed training. Let me explain.

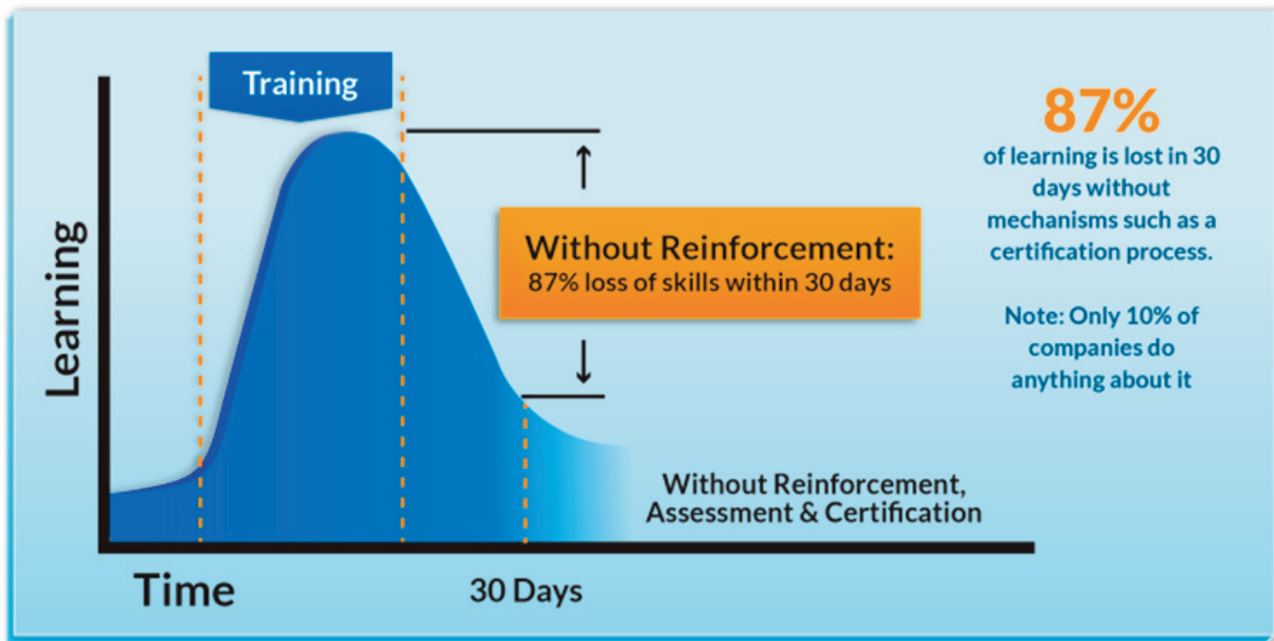
When my company, The Sales Board, Inc. joined the sales training business by launching Action Selling, we had hundreds of competitors. Each taught some sales methodology. The best used consultative selling methods. The consultative approach is based on needs-satisfaction theory, which, in simple terms, asks salespeople to first identify the customer's needs and then present the salesperson's company and products as solutions to those needs. This was (and still is) the correct approach, so some of the competitive training available in 1990 was pretty good.

The problem was that the training didn't have any glue.

Not much of what was being taught lasted past the time the student left the class. Studies showed 87% of new learning was forgotten in 30 days.<sup>14</sup>

Based on this, one can only imagine what was left in six months or a year. Zero?

***Why would any company want to waste training dollars and everyone's time doing something that has zero chance of producing a significant long-term payback?***



This appalling scenario is exactly what I see today in the customer-service-training market. It's time for this industry to wake up and smell the coffee. Why would any company want to waste training dollars and everyone's time doing something that has zero chance of producing a significant long-term payback?

### Yet you still need to do it

So the answer is to forget about training for customer relationship professionals? If only life were that simple. Giving up on training for CRPs is not an option. In light of the ever-accelerating speed of change in both knowledge and technology, we have a clear choice: We either continue to learn or we allow our skills and knowledge to become obsolete.

I can't tell you how many times I've heard, "We only hire experienced people," as if that were a solution. The idea that experience is a "living textbook" has three major pitfalls.<sup>16</sup>

1. As the world changes, our methods for dealing with situations lag the change, and old coping techniques become ineffective without us ever realizing it. So, without knowing, we continue to make the same errors time and time again.<sup>4</sup>
2. The quantity of experience isn't necessarily connected to its richness or intensity. Without a solid methodology for skills training, the same mistakes get repeated over and over.
3. In a nearly full-employment economy, hiring well-trained service reps is far more difficult. So, even if experience equaled quality, there aren't enough trained, experienced people to fill the jobs we have available.

## The bottom line?

Here's the situation as I see it:

1. Individuals, as well as the companies that employ them, must continue to learn in order to remain competitive.
2. Experience and learning are not synonymous. Even if it was, finding well-trained people to fill support positions is more difficult than ever.
3. Today's customer service training lacks the prerequisites to be a long-lasting solution. Therefore, if you want your training to pay off, you must identify a training solution with the characteristics that lead to successful transfer of the desired skills into daily use.

## WHY DOES CUSTOMER SERVICE TRAINING FAIL?

A quick look at the titles of available training options tells you that you can pretty much pick the number of tips you want to teach: *7 Secrets to Customer Service*, *15 Tips on How to Serve Customers Better*, *6 Keys to Improving Customer Service*, *the ABC Model for Customer Service*, and so on, and so on.

These tips include things like: Be punctual, say please and thank you, don't transfer calls, and give customers a consistent experience. Those are good things to do. But, to say that they add up to an effective training method is pretty far-fetched. Does anyone really think that giving any number of "tips" to CRPs is going to make a significant difference?

Everyone has experienced a great seminar. You laughed, you cheered, you took notes. But a month later, I'll bet you could barely recall the name of the speaker, much less the things you "learned." Even if CRPs can take time away from supporting customers to attend training, the workshop (or other training method) alone produces almost no change back on the job.

In an effort to avoid time away from the job and increase the efficiency of training, companies have embraced eLearning—with all its upside and downside attributes. eLearning may be an efficient method for distributing information, but it is still subject to the 87% phenomena, whereby information gained is forgotten within 30 days.

Professional trainers and educators attribute this mainly to a lack of "reinforcement" of the learning following the training event. They're partly right. But even if they were entirely right, there's more to it than that. You see, the learner's inability to recall information isn't the only reason why customer service training fails. It isn't even the primary explanation.

## The Big Three

Here are the three biggest reasons why any given training program will fail to produce lasting performance improvements:

**A. Wrong Content** – First, you have to teach the right things. Many skills, traits, and qualities contribute to successful customer interactions. For example, personality and motivation definitely have an impact on the performance of customer relationship professionals. The trouble is, you can't teach personality and motivation—and CRPs can't "learn" it! If you want lasting improvement, training has to focus on skills that can be taught, learned, mastered, and measured.

***You can't teach personality and motivation—and CRPs can't "learn" it!***

Motivation? We've all seen CRPs who work extremely hard and respond to a lot of customer inquiries. Yet in every work force, there always seems to be another employee with the same job who makes far fewer contacts but generates far greater customer loyalty (the key goal of all customer contact). Is hard work part of the formula? Absolutely. But success has more to do with the *quality* of that work.

One more thing: There might be a hundred skills that are teachable and learnable, and that contribute to CRP success. But you can't teach anyone how to do a hundred things well. You need to identify, teach, and reinforce the handful of skills that are most critical to high performance in a CRP role.

**B. Rejected by CRPs** – You've seen them—the service reps who come to a training session with the attitude that they already know it all. The body language alone speaks volumes: arms crossed, eyes rolling, virtually daring the instructor to say something that might interest them. These people were not properly prepared to come to your training. And without motivation, there can be no learning at all.

CRPs need to be sold on the need for training and the benefits it offers them. And I mean they have to be sold on the need for *this particular program*—not on the idea of training in the abstract or on learning as a swell thing.

This sale is no different from any other buying decision. The buyers (your CRPs) must see the program as a solution to needs they agree exist. If they don't recognize and agree on the need, the training will be a waste of time. The benefits of using and mastering the skills this program proposes to teach have to be perceived as far greater than the investment of time and effort required.

CRPs must have equity in what you are attempting to teach; they must have skin in the game. For example, if they have participated in developing the Best CRP Practices that your company intends to adopt, you've got a good chance that they will buy in.

**(Your CRPs) must see the program as a solution to needs they agree exist.**

**C. Ineffective Transfer** – Transfer is a term we use for learning that actually gets applied on the job. It's the only reason why a business organization, as opposed to a school or college, would want to do training in the first place.

Most people mistakenly think of transfer as a synonym for follow-up or reinforcement—things that happen after the training program is over. Sure, that's part of what needs to be done. But other factors play into the transfer process as well.

Here are the critical elements that determine whether learning will transfer from the classroom to the job:<sup>15</sup>

1. Students must be actively involved in the entire learning process.<sup>3</sup>
2. Early in the training process, students need to connect the learning to their life experiences. It has to make sense in the world they know. They need to see relevance right away.<sup>3</sup>
3. They must know that there will be follow-up activities and assessments that measure what they learned and how well they are applying the new skills in their day-to-day work. Measurement adds motivation.



4. They must be held accountable by their managers to demonstrate the use of new skills and knowledge in the field. This cements the message that management believes the learning was important.<sup>27,29</sup>
5. Managers must minimize the transfer distance by helping learners apply new skills and knowledge on the job—quickly.<sup>5,22</sup>

### Lots of talk and failed attempts

Corporate trainers and companies in the training business have hashed out these issues for decades. And companies that create their own training or buy it from training companies are certainly aware of the questionable benefits they usually get. Why, then, does the problem persist? My answer is that most training does produce an immediate result. It just doesn't last.

**Most training does produce an immediate result. It just doesn't last**

Most customer service training programs contain some useful information. Immediately following a training session, some service reps will pick up an idea, take it to the job, and score a success that they wouldn't have experienced before. Instant ROI! Terrific! But a few months later they're back to their old behaviors. It's called relapse.<sup>20</sup>

So, the relapse problem doesn't become apparent until sometime down the road. Only when you look back a year later do you realize that nothing that was taught actually stuck. Surely you should be able to expect more than a short-term blip in return for your investment of time and money in training for customer relationship professionals.

Do you recognize and agree with the dilemma as I've described it? Then suppose we talk about the solution.

## A VISION FOR EFFECTIVE CUSTOMER-RELATIONSHIP TRAINING

Let me paint a picture and then fill in the details:

Problem	Solution	Solution	Solution
Poor or Wrong Training Content	Well-Documented Communication Process	Focus on Critical CRP Skills	Custom Tailored to Your Company
Rejected by Your CRPs	Student & Manager Are Properly Prepared	Needs for Training Must be Agreed Upon	Student Involved in Best CRP Practices
Ineffective Transfer System	Implement Field Coaching Procedure	Install Systematic Reinforcement	Measure Learning & Application

Note: If ALL these capabilities are present in your CRP training methodology and you implement them properly, you'll escape the high failure rate of customer service training.

# WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

## Problem A: Wrong Content

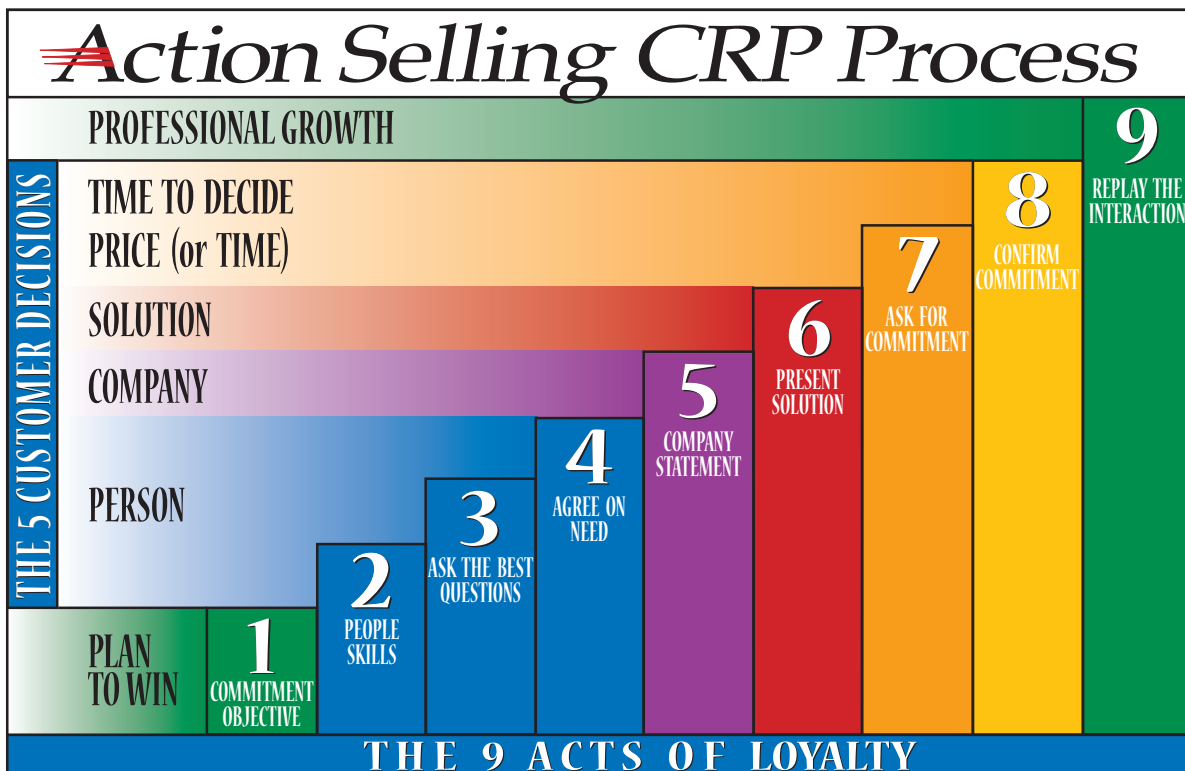
**Highly effective content** is a basic virtue claimed by everyone who ever designed a customer-service-training program. But what, exactly, makes content effective?

### **1** A well-documented and effective customer-communications process

Well-documented means that the process taught in the program derives from solid research and rings true to experienced Customer Relationship Professionals (CRPs). It has to be undisputable. If CRPs can punch holes in it, you're done.

To me, well-documented also means that the process can be *shown*—that is, expressed visually—and can be understood without a great deal of explanation. This will make it easy to teach and learn.<sup>7,30</sup>

It has to be logical. Let me give you an example. The Action Selling CRP Process, shown below, is based on the research-supported conclusion that customers facing any supplier decision actually make a series of smaller decisions—always in the same order. It is logical; therefore, that CRPs should follow a communications process that matches up with the customer's decision process.<sup>6</sup>



Any communications system can give you a series of steps to follow. That's fine until you need to diagnose why the process isn't working in a particular customer situation. Then you're stuck. On the other hand, when a system's methodology is based on the way that customers actually make decisions, you can always determine which decision is going against you and adjust your game plan from there.

Once you understand that all customer resistance stems from one or more of the customer's 5 Decisions, you always have an answer to the question, "What do I do next?" When you run into a stall or objection, you know exactly which steps need to be done better. What's more, your manager can coach you with a clear roadmap to follow.

This is why Action Selling CRP is known as the "GPS for Customer Communications." It functions as a highly reliable positioning, navigation, and timing system that can be used on a continuous basis in any customer situation, in any type of business, and with every type of customer. That's an effective customer-communications process.

## **2** Focus on critical communication skills

You can't expect people to change their behavior in 100 different ways. You have to narrow it down to the most important areas for change. And those "areas" need to be demonstrable skills—not personality traits, not inner motivation.

In 1990 we launched our mission to find the communication skills that make the most difference in performance. In 1995 we developed and validated an instrument that measures skill acquisition and skill application. By comparing measured skill improvement to measured performance change, we were able to identify the most impactful customer-communication skills. We call them The Five Critical Communication Skills. (See box.)

### **The Five Critical Communication Skills™**

#### **1. Customer/CRP Relationship:**

When CRPs understand the series and sequence of sub-decisions that customers go through when making a major decision, and skillfully match their communications process with the customer's decision-making process, success rates improve dramatically.

#### **2. Customer Interaction Planning**

What is your Commitment Objective for this conversation? That is, what do you want the customer to agree to do next? Failure to have a Commitment Objective is the most frequent mistake made by CRPs. That's followed by failure to devise a questioning plan for the conversation and failure to prepare a Positive Company Statement. Poor planning skills often result from the lack of a clearly defined communications process to follow.

#### **3. Questioning Skills**

The impact of poor questioning skills is horrendous. Eighty-six percent of CRPs ask the wrong types of questions. Questions are the most important tools in the CRP's kit. Unfortunately, the tools are either used improperly or they're rusty.

#### **4. Solution-Presentation Skills**

A lot of CRPs think that they are fantastic presenters. They can spew large quantities of data about their products and services. The problem is, customers don't want that. They want you to zero in on specific solutions based on their unique needs for your company's products or services.

#### **5. Gaining Commitment**

Most CRPs agree that this is the skill they most need to improve. The principle role of a CRP is to generate loyalty by consistently gaining commitments from the customer. If a CRP is not good at gaining commitments from customers, why is he or she on anyone's payroll? Yet research shows that 64 percent of CRPs don't ask for commitment during their customer interactions.



### 3

## Custom tailored to your company

One size does not fit all where customer service training is concerned. A basic principle of effective training is to tie the learning to organizational objectives. Which of your company's business goals can be met by improvements in your customer-communications process? Training works best when CRPs have a clear vision of how the things they learn can help them and their company accomplish desired goals.<sup>25,26</sup>

Once you have identified those business goals, determine exactly which gaps in customer-communications skills are hindering goal achievement. Those will become skill objectives for the students. When the skill objectives are set, CRPs have their marching orders for where to focus their energy during the training experience. They will see the training as a solution to agreed-upon needs.

Next, you'll need to set some training objectives. These have to do with how you will teach the critical skills you identified. Since the reporting structure of each company is different, you will need a customized plan for learning and, especially, for reinforcement and transfer. Where are CRP teams located? To whom do they report on the job? That's where the learning, practice, and reinforcement really need to happen in order to accomplish your business objectives.

Once you have your business, skill, and training objectives in alignment, all you need to do is tailor every learning activity to your customer service environment, your company strengths, and the value proposition of your products and services.

Does all of that sound daunting? Extremely worky, to say the least?

Consider how Action Selling CRP has designed its materials. We use an open-architecture method for training, reinforcing, and certifying CRPs. Every exercise uses this principle. We essentially require each student to tailor the application of skills to their own individual customer-contact situations while the exercise is being completed. Everything is customized while it is being learned.

***The principle role of a CRP is to generate loyalty by consistently gaining commitments from the customer.***

***Determine exactly which gaps in customer-communications skills are hindering goal achievement. Those will become skill objectives***

***Tailor every learning activity to your customer service environment, your company strengths, and the value proposition***

## Problem B: Rejected by your Customer Relationship Professionals

What good is a training experience if the CRPs don't buy into it? Yes, the dogs have to eat the chow.

### 1 Students and managers properly prepared

Most companies sadly underestimate the importance of preparing CRPs to receive training, as well as preparing their work environment to receive trained students.<sup>4,15</sup>

Two critical adult-learning principles come into play when you consider how to prepare your students and their managers for a training experience:

**Adult Learning Principle 1:** Students with higher pre-learning motivation demonstrate greater learning and more positive reactions to training.<sup>11</sup>

**Adult Learning Principle 2:** Trainees with more support from their supervisors enter training with a stronger belief that the content will be useful.<sup>9</sup>

So, what can you do to prepare CRPs and their managers for a training initiative?

- **Benchmark their current skills.** Use a validated assessment to determine how much knowledge they have prior to training. This exposes skill-development needs for each individual CRP. Your training can then be positioned as a solution to demonstrable skill gaps that each CRP actually has.
- **Survey their perceptions of their own skills.** A skills survey will tell you how each CRP views their current skill set. *Student surveys don't necessarily agree with what the benchmark assessment actually reveals.* This gives CRPs an opportunity to share their own perceived needs for training. Just as in a customer-contact situation, you want customers to verbalize their needs before you present a solution. Like all employees, CRPs are more willing to receive a solution when they've had input on what they need.
- **Give them plenty of information on what the training is all about.** Many trainers want to keep this a secret for reasons that are, frankly, ridiculous (an example is: They want to dazzle students with their extreme knowledge). Secondly, uncertainty and doubt about the training's content set the stage for buyer's remorse. Action Selling CRP actually requires each student to read a short book about what they are going to learn before attending the program.
- **Managers need to be trained on the skills at least as much as the students.** If you send a trained student into an untrained environment, any learning that occurred will vaporize very quickly.
- **Managers must reinforce the learning.** Your learning plan needs to provide managers with an opportunity to be integrally involved in the reinforcement process. They need lesson plans and systems to manage reinforcement in the field. Action Selling CRP provides weekly Skill Drills™ and a Learning Management System that is used in the field for structured reinforcement activities.
- **Managers need to hold their CRPs accountable for using new skills on the job.** What's more, managers need to be held accountable for the learning of their teams. If you don't have systems in place that measure the quantity and quality of activities in the field, chances are things won't get done.<sup>15,27</sup>

## 2 Needs for Training Must be Agreed Upon

Agreed upon by whom? *By both the CRPs and their managers.*

Have you ever had a customer interaction where you were so sure you knew what the customer needed that you skipped your needs assessment and went straight into the presentation of your solution? Let me guess: Even if your solution was right on the money, you missed the mark and damaged the customer relationship, either a little or a lot.

Why does that happen? Let's look at it in terms of the way your CRPs and their managers are likely to react if you try to ram a training solution down their throats like you did with that customer.

- They will reject your training for a reason that has nothing to do with its content, its quality, or its timing. If you want CRPs to buy into your training initiative, they need to be treated like customers. When you don't involve a customer in the needs-identification phase, that customer will resist you. The first decision a customer makes is whether to buy the person. In this case, that person is you. I don't care if you own the company and pay their salaries; when it comes to initiating training, you are *selling*, and if you leave them out of the needs phase, those CRPs will not buy *you*. Therefore, they won't buy the training.
- When CRPs are able to verbalize their needs, and you agree with them on what those needs are, *then* they will become open to your solution.
- The same is true with CRP managers. Their needs for tools that will allow them to be effective at transferring learning to the field must be uncovered and agreed upon. And they need to participate in the uncovering.
- Do not—do NOT—just lay it on them and expect them to swallow it. That approach doesn't work when you're trying to gain commitments on your product and service solutions. And it doesn't work when you are trying to gain a commitment for training.

## 3 Involve CRPs and managers in preparing Best CRP Practices

I guarantee that the answer to every customer-support problem known to man can be found inside the heads of your work force. It's just hard to extract without a procedure for doing it.

- If you were to ask the top-performing CRPs in your company what they do, exactly, that lets them be as successful as they are, you would get many answers. Most of them would be misleading or downright wrong. The fact is, a lot of top performers can't communicate what they do that makes them outstanding.
- Since your real primary target for CRP training usually is to take the B and C players and move them up a notch or two, you need input from the top people in order to give the average ones the best possible advice.
- But those answers are locked inside the top performers. You need a key to get them out. CRP training exercises will uncover the best skills your team is using. The sum of these exercises is the answer to the question: What do the Best of the Best actually do?

***If you try to ram a training solution down their throats they will reject your training for a reason that has nothing to do with its content, its quality, or its timing.***

Action Selling CRP has identified key exercises to perform during the training that extract the Best CRP Practices while they are being completed. As byproducts, you'll have:

- ✓ Your preferred Customer Solutions to common needs of customers
- ✓ The Best Questions to ask customers in order to:
  - Uncover needs
  - Build rapport
  - Understand customer issues and opportunities
  - Learn about the customer's personal issues
  - Reveal money issues
  - Learn the status of the competition
  - Discover the time frame for a decision
  - Uncover influences that will affect the decision
- ✓ The Best Value Needs to uncover based on your strengths
- ✓ The best way to present TFBRs (a process for presenting the features & benefits of your solution)
- ✓ The optimum Commitments to gain in every customer interaction
- ✓ Positive Company Statements to use during customer contacts
- ✓ The right way to handle stalls and objections

All of these Best CRP Practices can and should be extracted and documented, simultaneously, as the training is being delivered.

### Problem C: Ineffective Transfer System

Why would you spend a dime—or a minute of anyone's time—on CRP training if nothing is going to transfer into the field? Most training companies talk about the need for reinforcement and follow-up but never deliver a systematic method for doing it.

***A lot of top performers can't communicate what they do that makes them outstanding.***

This is by far the biggest reason why CRP training fails.

Everybody knows that transfer is the huge question mark hanging over long-term success with all types of training. However, the people who talk about it are not being honest about their ability to pull it off.

Here is what an effective transfer system looks like:<sup>23</sup>



## **1** Field Coaching Procedure

When the manager of your CRPs is left out of the equation, you are doomed to failure. And managers aren't exactly begging to be included in the training process. You've heard all the excuses: "I'm too busy already." "CRP management is only part of what I have to do." "My background isn't in training." Yet CRP managers absolutely must be held accountable for the learning of their troops. What to do?

- First, managers need at least as much training as their direct reports are going to get. I recommend that they attend an initial workshop designed for managers and key executives in the company—and then go through the same training that their CRP teams will attend.
- Managers need to be given all of the necessary tools required to be competent in a field-coaching role.<sup>6</sup> Examples include:
  - ✓ Pre- and post-customer-contact review systems that follow the CRP customer-communications process.
  - ✓ Easy-to-use online access to the reinforcement activities that their CRPs are completing. Provide 'dashboard' reports, as well as detail, so that managers can drill down and observe who is doing well and who is not.
  - ✓ Skills assessments of each member of their team as they go through the field-reinforcement phase. This should include remedial learning advice for each CRP.
  - ✓ Instructor guides that allow managers to look like rock-star trainers when they conduct reinforcement exercises in an interactive training meeting or online setting like Go-To-Meeting.
- Ultimate accountability must be present, so nobody can hide from the truth about what is or isn't being accomplished.<sup>2</sup>
  - ✓ Managers need to achieve certification on the skills, too.<sup>17</sup>
  - ✓ Each CRP's learning should to be compared and ranked against their peers.
  - ✓ Put some teeth into the requirement to certify on the skills by adding an incentive.
- Inspect the managers' work by looking at the dashboard reports on learning progress. Drill down occasionally to let managers know you are interested in outcomes. Attend one of their online reinforcement meetings.
- Speak the language yourself. Ask CRPs questions that will help you understand how often and how well they are using the skills being taught.<sup>2</sup>
- Involve top-level executives in the learning. This sends a clear message that the training is important.

***Managers need to be given all of the necessary tools required to be competent in a field-coaching role***

## 2 Install a reinforcement system

When I say “system,” I mean an automated method for conducting periodic Skill Drills. Without this, you can’t possibly ensure that learning activities are taking place in the field.<sup>24</sup>

- Timing is everything. Skill practice needs to start immediately following a learning experience. This is essential for long-term retention. I suggest starting the reinforcement the next business day following the kickoff of training.<sup>18</sup>
- Without a formal procedure for reinforcement, transfer is extremely difficult. Today, if you don’t have a web-based system that prescribes and assigns work to the student, you are way behind the curve.
- The assigned activities must be consistent with the skills that lead to mastery. Students need to know exactly what skill each exercise is helping them to learn and practice. Don’t waste their time with activities that lack a clear and specific skill-improvement objective.<sup>13,21</sup>
- Implement the agreed-to customer-decision cycle on your CRM tool. Use the specific language that was taught in the training. This allows for daily interaction by your CRP with the learning.
- Make sure your reinforcement plan includes field homework that is being done every day. This forces the concepts into routine use. That’s what you want to see.

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## 3 Measure learning and the application of the learning

Here’s the finale, the most critical ingredient of any learning plan. Remember the old management-by-objectives saying, “What gets measured gets done”? Well, in training, “What gets measured gets learned.” If you stumble here, your chance to achieve lasting results is gone.

***Measurement systems must be validated. Otherwise, participants will question or reject them.***

Only 10% of companies evaluate behavior change on the job following a training investment. Remember that most CRP training fails. Do you suppose there’s a correlation here?

- Measurement of learning should permeate the entire training process, from the preparation phase through certification.
- Measurement systems must be validated. Otherwise, participants will question or reject them. You’ll lose credibility and give students a reason to doubt what you are trying to accomplish.



- ✓ Benchmark your CRPs' skills before you start. This gives everyone a learning goal. Students will approach training quite differently than if they are given only a performance goal. They will seek to improve their abilities instead of trying to hit the performance goal with the behaviors they already use.
- ✓ Assessments that are taken immediately after a workshop are almost useless. They only measure short-term learning. That's not your goal.
- ✓ Instead, assess students approximately 90 days following the learning. This is a better measure of retention. And it gives you a better feel for what's been learned and what hasn't.
- ✓ The assessments must be prescriptive. They need to provide feedback and assign specific activities that will lead to mastery and certification on the skills.
- ✓ Each assessment must measure both knowledge gained and the demonstrated ability to apply what has been learned. Knowledge alone has little to do with transfer.
- ✓ Compare the skills assessment to the benchmark. Show everyone how they have moved their skills forward.
- ✓ Create a certification standard for CRP teams. Give them a specific goal that equates to mastery. Don't make it easy. They need to be challenged by this or it's a waste of time.
- ✓ The certification assessment must focus primarily on application of skills, not just knowledge. Certification occurs several months downstream from the launch of the training, so it's all about what has stuck and what hasn't.
- ✓ Those who fail to certify on the first try should be given a second attempt. But don't relax the standards. Provide certificates only to those who genuinely earn them.

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***Create a certification standard for CRP teams. Give them a specific goal that equates to mastery. Don't make it easy.***

## SUMMARY

I realize that this discussion makes effective CRP training sound like a daunting proposition, hard to pull off. Sorry, but it is. I've invested 28 years in the development of content and systems for student motivation and transfer. I wouldn't suggest that you try to duplicate this effort when the results are available from my company for a very affordable price.

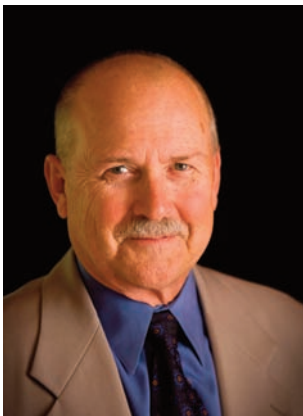
I know what other companies in the customer-service training industry are providing. Some of their content is pretty good. The problem is just this: The reason for training's incredibly high failure rate has to do with all of the factors I've described. You can't cover only one or two of the bases and expect to get long-term results.

All of us in the business world have developed certain habits, no matter if our careers span five days or 50 years. Some of those habits work against us; they're dead wrong. Changing habits is the hardest thing that a human is ever asked to do. But, when organizations approach customer service training in the way I have described, it works every time. And with Action Selling CRP, it's not that hard to do.

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