

In a recent survey, Chief Learning Officers cited sales training and product training as two of the top three areas of budgetary investment. Too often, however, product training becomes an “information dump” that fails to prepare key positions, especially sales people, for the job. This release explores common mistakes in approaches to product training and offers tips to executives on how to improve their training programs to potentially increase revenue and profitability, and avoid “leaving money on the table.”

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‘Seamless’ Product and Sales Training is Key Opportunity for Revenue Growth

Integrated Approach is Critical to Sales Success

April 12, 2004 – Atlanta, Georgia — Despite investing a significant portion of their annual learning budget on product training, many organizations still fail to equip key sales individuals with the skills and confidence needed to generate the expected revenue. Instead, organizations leave it up to new, inexperienced learners to navigate through reams of what is often technical information- and then expect those individuals to use that information effectively in making a sale.

Many organizations make similar mistakes, says Dr. Seth Leibler, CEO of The Center for Effective Performance (CEP). “What we observe most often is that organizations fail to integrate product training with their sales process. Organizations conduct sales training and product training in silos, instead of having training mirror what sales people actually will be required to do on the job— use their knowledge about product features and benefits in making the sale.”

This approach leaves employees both unprepared and unconfident in their ability to deal with customers. “The key,” says Leibler, “is to give people practice and supportive feedback in applying their product knowledge in critical sales situations.” Training should provide a sufficient amount of job-relevant practice so that learners don’t leave training until they can successfully demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge about products and services in the sales situations they will face on the job.

When learners can successfully show they are competent in the same skills the job requires, they become much more confident. “Behavioral science research

tells us that people need both skills and the self-judgment that they have the capability to perform,” Leibler adds, noting that skills alone are not enough.

Sales executives should begin by creating explicit performance expectations for sales people that articulate precise job performance requirements and the standards by which performance will be measured. Training, including product knowledge information, should be limited to only what is essential for meeting those performance requirements.

Leibler offers the following additional recommendations for developing training programs aimed at generating increased revenue:

- Integrate product knowledge into training for all key processes, including sales, help desks, or technical services
- Limit product knowledge to only what is essential for meeting very precise performance requirements
- Translate technical product documentation into language that can be readily understood by employees and customers
- Provide opportunities in training for learners to work with, touch, and experience the products themselves
- Don't try and teach every product or service in industries where products go out of date often or where there are a multitude of product/service combinations. Instead, teach the basic make up of the product/service and have learners do further work on those they will be specifically accountable for selling

Concludes Leibler, “By applying these recommendations organizations will be positioned to grow revenue and improve the return on investment for sales training and product training programs.”

About CEP

The Center for Effective Performance (CEP) is the industry leader in helping organizations turn their workforce into a competitive advantage, especially in high risk situations such as mergers, acquisitions, restructurings, downsizing and large scale system implementations. For nearly two decades, CEP has helped companies solve performance problems, develop training guaranteed to work, implement best practices, and create performance improvement strategies that translate into improved financial results. As the world's leading practitioners of Dr. Robert Mager's research-based methodology, CEP delivers world-class, proven solutions that increase profitability and shareholder value.

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