

80/20 *Sales Performance*

SPECIAL REPORT:

Why Most Sales Training Programs Fail

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This special report is an excerpt from the book, ***How to Beat the 80/20 Rule in Sales Team Performance: A Step-By-Step Guide to Building and Managing Top-Performing Sales Teams***, by Alan Rigg. For more information, visit:

<http://www.8020sales.com/products.html#books>

Introduction

One clear priority when working with new salespeople is **training** them to sell your company's products and services. One desirable outcome of such training is for the salespeople to become productive **quickly**. Unfortunately, many sales training programs fail miserably at accomplishing this goal!

What constitutes failure in a sales training program? A training program is considered a failure if the salespeople that complete the program are **unable to integrate the concepts taught during the program into their day-to-day selling activities**. This definition applies equally well to all types of sales training, whether it is sales skills training, product or service training, or something else.

Sales training failures are frustrating for both employers and salespeople. Employers are frustrated because they don't earn the **returns** they expect from their training investments. Salespeople are frustrated because they feel the **time** spent attending training was **wasted**.

Why do sales training programs fail? Some fail because the content is poorly designed, or because the trainer does a poor job of delivering the content. However, valid, well-designed training programs also fail. This special report explores **four reasons why well-designed sales training programs fail**.

Reason #1: Training the Wrong Students

How can a sales training program be effective if the attendees lack the **talents** required for sales success? Trying to train people that lack critical talents is a little like trying to use a brick to absorb water. Over long periods of time, the brick may actually absorb a little water. However, it won't absorb anywhere near as much water as a **sponge**.

Before you invest in training your salespeople, you should consider **assessing** them to determine whether each salesperson has the talents required for sales success. Salespeople that **do** have the necessary talents are much more likely to absorb the training content and **apply it effectively in the field**.

For more information on highly effective and specialized sales assessment tests, visit <http://www.MySalesTest.com>.

Reason #2: “One Size Fits All” Training Curriculums

Many sales training curriculums provide the same content at the same pace to all training attendees. There are two primary challenges with this approach:

1. Individual salespeople have different training **needs**
2. Individuals learn at different **rates**

Different Training Needs

To better understand the first challenge, different training needs, consider the following example:

Two salespeople, Beth and Bill, work for the same company. Beth is reluctant to ask for orders. Bill is sensitive to rejection, which limits his prospecting effectiveness. If both of these salespeople complete the same sales skills training course, how much improvement in sales performance should their company expect to see?

The answer is little or none. Why? Because Beth and Bill have completely different training needs that will not be addressed by basic sales skills training!

Beth would benefit the most from attending an assertiveness training class. She also needs coaching to help her recognize that failing to ask for orders denies her customers valuable solutions to costly business problems.

Bill needs to learn to not take rejection personally. He could also benefit from training that teaches positive thinking and other motivational techniques.

Unfortunately, unless each salesperson's **unique** training needs are identified, and **targeted** training is supplied to address each individual's **specific** needs, there isn't much reason to expect their sales performance to improve.

Different Learning Rates

To better understand the impact of different learning rates, consider this example. How quickly can you fill a **one-gallon bucket** versus a **one-gallon milk jug**? Both vessels have the same one-gallon capacity. However, because

the milk jug has a much smaller opening, you are forced to fill it at a much slower rate.

Now, apply this concept to a training situation. If people learn at different rates, but they are trained in the same class (where the content is delivered at one pace), what is likely to happen? There are several possibilities:

1. The teaching pace may satisfy the **faster** learners, but the **slower** learners won't be able to keep up. They will become frustrated and have a negative training experience.
2. The teaching pace may satisfy the **slower** learners, but be too slow for the **faster** learners. They will become bored and have a negative training experience.
3. The teaching pace may be too fast for the **slower** learners and too slow for the **faster** learners. Both groups will become frustrated and have a negative training experience!

This doesn't mean you can't train all of your salespeople at the same time. You certainly can – but you may want to consider offering voluntary “extra” training sessions whenever you schedule a sales training. This will enable slower learners to have an opportunity to spend more time with the training content and ask additional questions.

Reason #3: Excessive Focus on Technical Details

Many managers believe salespeople need to have a thorough technical understanding of a product or service in order to sell it effectively. To help salespeople develop this understanding, companies invest considerable resources in **exhaustive training** that addresses:

- Features and benefits
- Performance characteristics
- Industry information
- Pricing guidelines
- Promotional activities
- Available collateral material
- Other product/service details

Unfortunately, when salespeople leave these training sessions, they usually have no idea how to **identify** or **qualify** opportunities for the product or service they were just “trained” to sell! This leaves the salespeople frustrated, as they feel the time spent in training was wasted. Management is equally frustrated with their sales team’s inability to gain traction with **new** products and services, as well as their inability to learn to sell their company’s **entire portfolio** of products and services.

This mutual frustration results from a lack of recognition of one very important fact:

When a salesperson identifies a qualified opportunity, there is usually **no shortage of knowledgeable resources** that can assist the salesperson with converting the opportunity into a sale!

These resources may include technical specialists or product experts from the salesperson’s own company, or similar resources employed by suppliers, channel partners, etc.

If a salesperson has access to internal and/or external product/service experts, why should they invest time learning **technical details**? Instead, why don’t they **laser-focus** their learning on the activities in the sales cycle that **only they can do**? This type of training could address the following topics:

- **Overview:** What does the product or service do? (in plain English)
- **Differentiation:** What are a few key differences between this particular product or service and competitive products or services?
- **Business Problems:** What business problems does the product or service solve?
- **Qualifying Questions:** What questions should a salesperson ask to determine whether a prospect or customer has the business problems the product or service can solve, and, if they do, to quantify the impact of these business problems?
- **Available Support Resources:** What expert resources are available to help the salesperson manage other steps of the sales cycle?

If your company has a large portfolio of products and services, you can help your salespeople "**get dangerous quickly**" with the **entire** portfolio by providing this information in a **standardized format**. The standardized format will enable your salespeople to **rapidly** familiarize themselves with **multiple** products and services. Plus, these documents can serve as handy "cheat sheets" for your salespeople to use in the field.

The Get Dangerous Quickly™ Story

Where did the concept of Get Dangerous Quickly™ documents come from? They were an outgrowth from a project I did a number of years ago. Here is the story:

A computer distributor hired me to help them build a software "specialist" sales team. The distributor had more than 100 "generalist" salespeople, but these salespeople were doing a poor job of selling software. The distributor's management felt a team of software sales specialists could help accelerate software sales.

This was a very interesting project for several reasons. First, the distributor had **sixteen** software products in its portfolio. Second, they couldn't afford to hire experienced software salespeople. Instead, they needed to hire good consultative salespeople and train them to sell all sixteen software products. Oh, and we needed to write a business plan, get a budget approved, hire six salespeople, train them to sell sixteen software products, and have them working in different locations around the U.S. ...within 90 days.

Sound impossible? It sure seemed that way at first glance; but, when I talked to the software manufacturers, I came to an important realization. All of the software manufacturers were almost desperately eager for incremental opportunities! If the new software salespeople could identify qualified opportunities, the software manufacturers were delighted to provide product experts to help with technical and detailed qualification, product demonstrations, evaluations, etc. So, all the new software salespeople really needed to learn was how to **find** and **qualify** opportunities.

I knew there was no way we could make the new salespeople experts in sixteen software products within any reasonable time frame. But, we **could** make them experts in the **business problems** the software products addressed. And, we could provide them with "cheat sheets" to use in the field to determine whether prospects had those **specific** business problems, and if they did, to **quantify the impact** of the business problems.

There was just one challenge. The software manufacturers' marketing departments were all accustomed to delivering the kind of exhaustive technical training that causes many sales training programs to fail. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get them to understand the kind of abbreviated, highly targeted training I wanted the salespeople to receive. I even roughed out a sample training tool (the very first Get Dangerous Quickly™ document) and sent it to each software manufacturer.

Despite repeated conversations and lots of good-faith efforts, the software manufacturers just never "got it". So, I created the necessary training tools and delivered most of the training myself.

What were the results? The six software salespeople helped the distributor's other salespeople **double** software sales during their **first six months** on the job!

This project taught me a very important lesson. Salespeople **don't** need to be **experts** in specific products or services to sell them successfully. They **do** need to be experts in the **business problems** the products or services can solve, how to **find** and **qualify** opportunities, and how to **manage expert resources**.

Over the years I have continued to refine the Get Dangerous Quickly™ approach to product and service training. It has proven to be singularly effective for helping salespeople learn to sell **entire portfolios** of products and services and **gain rapid traction** with **new** products and services.

If you would like to examine a sample Get Dangerous Quickly™ document, you can download one from the following page on the 80/20 Sales Performance website:

http://www.8020sales.com/gdq_sample.html

If you would like to discuss the possibility of receiving assistance with developing customized Get Dangerous Quickly™ documents for your sales team, please call (866) 531-3917 or send an e-mail to <mailto:questions@8020sales.com>.

Reason #4: Lack of Reinforcement Training

When companies invest in sales training, the desired outcome is often a change in their salespeople's **behavior**. In other words, they want their salespeople to do something in a different way than they did it previously. Unfortunately, most companies drastically **underestimate** the amount of **time** and **effort** that must be invested to accomplish behavioral change!

Sitting in a class for a couple of hours or days is a good way to **expose** salespeople to new concepts. However, new concepts feel strange and uncomfortable, and most salespeople lack confidence in their ability to execute the new concepts properly in the field. Plus, they worry that attempting to use the new concepts with real, live prospects or customers will cost them sales and hard-won credibility. So, most salespeople **abandon** the new concepts and continue to rely on behaviors that are more comfortable.

If you want to change your salespeople's behavior, your company's management team (from top executives to individual sales managers) must make a different level of **commitment** to training. The concepts taught during training classes must be **repeated** and **reinforced** on a regular and consistent basis. It also helps if you provide your salespeople with **a non-threatening environment** where they can practice new skills until they become **second nature**. It is only at this level of competence that salespeople become willing (and even eager) to use new skills in the field!

Summary

How can you maximize the return your company receives from investments in sales training? By carefully considering each of the following questions as you plan training events:

1. Do all of the training participants have the **talents** required to achieve sales success?
2. Have you taken each individual's own learning **needs** and learning **rate** into account?
3. Will the training help salespeople **find** and **qualify** opportunities, or is it overly focused on technical details?

4. How will the training concepts be **repeated** and **reinforced** until they become **second nature** to your salespeople?

About the Author

Sales performance expert Alan Rigg is the author of ***How to Beat the 80/20 Rule in Sales Team Performance*** and the companion book, ***How to Beat the 80/20 Rule in Selling***. His 80/20 Selling System™ helps business owners, executives, and managers end the frustration of 80/20 sales team performance, where 20% of salespeople produce 80% of sales.

For more information about his highly effective sales training programs designed to create **lasting behavioral change**, visit:

http://www.8020sales.com/seminars_workshops.html