



Using Your Sales Briefing Meetings to Build your Sales Team's Sales Skills

One of the first questions we ask new clients is “how much time each month, do you and your sales team spend studying the sales process and learning cutting edge sales skills?”

When you are busy, it can be easy to overlook the importance of continual investment in sales skills, your own and your sales team. In our experience, having a mechanism in place to regularly build sales skills is one of the essential components of organizational sales capability.

My absolute favourite is the weekly sales briefing (fortnightly if you need to, monthly if you must) where the focus is on the sales process itself (rather than on product or results). For sure, you can use this opportunity to (briefly) look at the figures, praise significant achievement, and communicate urgent news. Please leave it at that. There are any number of mechanisms for disseminating sales figures, product and promotional information, and this should absolutely not be one of them.

The primary purpose of a sales briefing is to get a sales team to talk about the sales process, what worked, what didn't, what was learned, what still needs to be learned. Once sellers regard sales as a process, then it becomes natural to examine how the process works, how to improve it, how to understand and learn from failures.

Short, regular learning sessions are a very effective mechanism for passing on skills of this nature. If you can arrange your briefings in your team's regular working space, half an hour max, with the phones on answerphone, it can be easy to generate involvement and participation. The person leading the meeting should adopt a facilitative style, building a framework of curiosity and enquiry; it should be fun! Sharing experience from all team members creates involvement and allows everyone to learn from the more experienced sellers.

This works really well with small teams of up to twelve. In a small business you can include members of staff from other functions, customer service, accounts, even production; this has the effect of spreading a sales culture throughout your business. In effective sales organizations, everyone knows they have a role to play in achieving success, from upselling in customer service, to lead generation from service engineers.

We suggest that the facilitator has, not a formal agenda, more a list of headings so that everything gets covered. Starting with the (brief) review of the big figures and significant results, and then move into (say) a fifteen-minute slot focusing on a particular part of the sales process. It's a great help if you have your process mapped/drawn where everyone can see it.

One week you could look at opening skills, building rapport, questioning, increasing buyers motivation, state transfer, trial closing, yes-sets, handling objections, closing, upselling; it's a long list. You can target the attention on areas that you perceive your team would most benefit from working on.

Examples of specific sales skills that a team can benefit from improving include:

- Six ways to build an intimate understanding of a buyers decision-making criteria.
- How to generating a “buying-state”
- Building a “yes-set”.
- How to increase buyer’s motivation.
- Precision presenting using a buyers decision-making criteria.
- Trial closing.
- Five ways of handling price objections
- Eight ways to close a sale

It can be a very long list, and you can tailor the subject to the areas you think your team would benefit from most. If you are having regular performance reviews with sellers, you will be learning about which areas they feel they need most help with, directly from them.

When you chose, and if when your sellers are ready for it, you can rotate responsibility for leading this slot through the whole sales team, so each seller gets to do some research and practice their own facilitation skills. It’s challenging, though hugely effective, if your sellers can lead an area that they perceive may be their weakest area and so outside their comfort zone.

If you can encourage impromptu role-play, then you are really building a great learning environment. It’s normal for staff to be shy, so it’s up to the facilitator to lead the way and show the team how get comfortable with learning on the hoof.

You can support your learning culture by providing learning materials, books, so that everyone can swot up on particular sales skills. Two favourites would include Brian Tracy “The Psychology of Selling” and Tom Hopkinson “How to Master the Art of Selling”. Encourage your sellers to learn on their own time (reading on the tube, over a lunchtime sandwich) so that they can develop their own professionalism, not to mention their results.

In our experience, having a mechanism in place to regularly build sales skills is one of the essential components of organizational sales capability. If you do not have such a mechanism already in place, you are certainly missing an opportunity to improve your sales.