

10 conversations to have before buying sales training



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Pay-off: **10 things to discuss with your colleagues before wasting resources on the wrong sales training**

Investment: **7 minutes**

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You're somewhere between the hoping and planning stage to see improved sales performance from either your sales teams or client-facing consultants. You know that your people could make more impact on new and existing clients and that there's room to grow. But you'll need to lead and support them to do so.

Here are ten things to chew over and discuss with your colleagues if you want to get things right from the start:

1. Get a good defibrillator

Improved and consistent focus, thinking, action, learning and refining across your team will increase your sales and grow your business.

You can't expect them to sell if you're not prepared to sell the idea of doing so to them first! [You go first.](#)

2. Think in terms of the trajectory you're on

It's useful to consider the trajectory you and your sales team are currently on if the support they get (or lack of) *remains as it is* whilst the market shifts around them. Their success is relative to the way things currently are. But that will change. And so must they.

Consistently developing your people has a short, mid and long-term effect. It can prevent serious problems further down the line and keep your people engaged with a competitive edge. People like to be good at their jobs. You can influence and change the trajectory you are all on, and create a team who'll grow your business. Three questions worth discussing with your colleagues are:

1. What trajectory are we on if we leave them to it?
2. What new trajectory could we put them on?
3. What would need to change/what would they need to learn to enable that?

Don't be reactive. Don't let the grass grow under your feet. Don't put yourself in a position where it becomes even harder to solve the problem. Continuously invest in your sales team if you want to see continuous improvement.

Blood and oxygen must be pumped around the system. You need to create a heartbeat. And you need to jump start that heartbeat and keep it going. How are you and your colleagues prepared to do that and lead the right behaviours? How will you kick things off so that everyone buys in and agrees to help each other develop? Will leadership set the programme up gaining buy-in early, creating some excitement for the programme and setting everyone up to take the development opportunity seriously? Or will you just point them to a room where an external trainer is waiting and expect that to do it?

3. Build a system to create heroes

It's useful to consider how new people are onboarded. Do you bring them in only to find that your existing culture and attitudes of your people swallow them up? ("Here, we try to get away with what we can get away with" is a common unspoken message in many sales teams). Or do you welcome newcomers and support and train them to shine and excel *the new way*? The way you *should be developing business* ahead? Help them make their first 90 days count. They may just show your team what's possible and become heroes to your team, your business and your clients. Which could lift the whole team. It's worth shooting for. [I've written more about this here.](#)

Before training your salespeople up, it's also worth considering how you'll leverage your efforts to address the development journey for all relevant employees as they join and progress in your organisation.

Here, everyone learns. And...

4. ...Everyone lifts

To what degree do your client-facing people understand that their role is to work *on* the business as well as in the business?

By default, if they are client facing, they are not "in" the business like a hidden cog. They may need reminding of this. When engaging clients, their actions in the moment matter and they represent the business. They have a privileged role where their attitude and actions and desire to create the right impact will potentially either grow or damage business.

All client-facing people can spot opportunities to serve clients better and refer in more value. Here, everyone lifts. Here, we don't just wait to be asked by the client for help – we think steps ahead. We know where they're likely going next. And we're ready to make getting there easier for them. What if your whole team thought like that?

How well do your people do that? How could you support them better to do so? Your colleagues might have some ideas.

5. It's still a competition

Everyone competes against something. Your people competed for their role. Your business competes against your direct business competitors. And against the status quo your clients face. And against their other valid alternative options to working with you.

There are learnable tactics that increase the certainty of your business being competitive and succeeding. These tactics also happen to give your employees a competitive edge in their careers too. And, of course, they bring more value to your clients. They're worth learning.

The question is when you're not helping your people to learn and develop, which of your competition are? Because your clients are looking for those with the desired sharpened edge. They vote for those who learn and adapt to serve them better.

Do your people convince them of that?

What could you do to create a consistently competitive sharpened edge in your people? Everyone is waiting for your ideas.

6. There's lots you can do internally

It's worth considering which parts of this you could address internally, and the cost/impact of doing so. It's vital that you own and lead the development. And that you're consistent with your support. When you pull back, so do they.

You may want external input to explore how you could best set that up and carve an efficient path forwards. Ideally, you'd end up with a solution where you get the right support in for the job, and the right people doing what they do best. Leaders should be leading. Specialists specialising. Learners learning. But over time I would recommend that you build the internal capability to keep the heart beating.

It's worth considering which parts internally you'd do well. It's worth considering which parts you wouldn't do well enough to realistically improve sales performance.

7. There's lot's you probably shouldn't do internally

There's lots that can go wrong when trying to improve sales performance. If there wasn't, everyone would have it mastered. It's by no means easy.

Tackling the problem from within is an option. But from experience, I would urge you to acknowledge the full cost of doing so.

I repeat, there is a lot that can go wrong. And it can worsen the problem. Never mind failing to increase sales at all, the wrong approach to a development programme can generate the wrong behaviours and attitudes which could backfire.

The right external specialists may have the insights and learning under their belt about the pitfalls and likely challenges. This could accelerate your progress and your sales. They can help shape your decisions, bring best practices (or help you develop *even better* practices), and share what works across other industries too. They can also help with a fresh inspiring perspective to help jump-start the heartbeat and keep it beating.

It is worth using the right external support at the design or planning stage. But you must get one end of the table each. You still need to lead and own the development and work collaboratively with an external partner. Everyone lifts!

What won't work is delegating and then abdicating the responsibility to an external training company. It's cheaper. But then so is the outcome.

How could you build a learning and development approach that's realistic and sees measurable incremental improvements?

How can you get the right people doing the right things in the development programme?

How is your sales challenge at first a leadership challenge? ([I've written more about this here](#)). You move first.

8. Don't tell everyone the wrong way to do it

Whether internal, or external, make sure you don't have a trainer (who perhaps hasn't sold in years) telling your people techniques that no longer work.

And there are two key constraints here; the **telling** part and the **outdated** techniques part.

You may have heard that "telling is not selling". Well, it's not learning either. Learning must involve the learner thinking, problem-solving, and experimenting. Even "telling" the *right* techniques is unlikely to make impact.

And the wrong way to sell is the inflexible outdated way to sell that used to work way back. The right way, is the way that works for your business, and the unique individuals within, when **selling to your ideal clients**, or rather helping your ideal clients to make the right decision to do business with you.

That has to be discovered by your people through a degree of constructive 'friction' enabled by the right learning approach.

And the wrong way to do it is to tackle the wrong challenges. You need to be confident that you're identifying what your people's real issues and challenges are (they're often mindset, and to do with self-image, discomfort, belief and so on). As with sales conversations themselves, logic doesn't cut it when the challenge is emotional. A lot of internal training addresses the logic of sales. Which might make people think, but rarely makes people act.

A robust development programme requires understanding how people learn new behaviours effectively, what drives the individuals, and what needs to be done to support that.

Less teaching and telling, and more helping them acquire the behaviours.

And it requires leadership to inspire and lead these behaviours. In case you missed that.

You could have a conversation with your colleagues around how you will realistically align your learning and proposed new activity with where your people are really at?

9. Avoid just putting on 'a session'

Who goes to the gym just once expecting to build muscle?

Who puts their child on one swimming lesson only, expecting them to float when you take them on holiday?

One session is cheap, easy and shortsighted. A simple decision. We can all manage one. But you must keep the heart-beating if you want the blood pumped through the system and you want to see growth as a result. Or as the analogy implies, it could come to a fatal end.

There's all sorts that can go wrong with just one training session:

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- they misunderstand how to apply the techniques and do it all wrong – nothing was there to catch them
- they forget to apply what they learned (and what opportunities look like to apply)
- they learned it in the moment, but forget what to do when it matters
- one shot at learning (one ‘session’) doesn’t provide a chance to adjust to fit reality and genuine challenges to apply
- they don’t experience incremental shifts and compound gains
- they continue to think about sales in an unhelpful manner (“I haven’t got time” when in fact it’s discomfort or frustration making them think this)
- they think that to learn they must wait for you to put on a session
- they lose the initial spark
- they don’t feel supported enough
- they get away with whatever they can get away with
- they don’t realise that they must build the muscle over time through practice and feedback
- they give up and default to the way they naturally were before the training

Note that ongoing support does not have to be external.

External – with the right expertise – helps as you build your processes and support, much like learning to drive with dual-control. But ideally, once it’s working, you can build the internal capabilities and gradually rely on less external support. (See point 6.) You want a robust structured system that not only produces desired sales results with enough predictability but also recruits and produces high-performing salespeople who thrive, also with predictability.

Regardless, if you walk away after putting just one session on and think “I’ve now trained my team”, you’ve just walked away from a better, stronger, happier, more engaged, respected, and successful team.

Your job is to find a way to lead your team to towards that vision.

(Tip for well-intentioned “one-sessioners” amongst us: if someone ever offers to show you how to pack your own parachute before bailing out a plane, ask them to show you again a few more times, then watch you do it a few times before checking and confirming that you’ve done it right...)

10.If a job’s worth doing, it’s worth doing properly

It’s useful to take charge of this right now and explore with your colleagues the right thing to do (or at least the best thing to do given your development budget).

What have you got? What else do you need? If you would like to explore some ideas with external partners, keep it collaborative. Don’t hand it over to them. Or your team will conveniently hand over their responsibility too. Everyone owns this. Everyone lifts.

Stay involved.

Ensure your external support knows not just about ‘sales’ but how people actually *learn to sell*. There’s a difference.

And remember there is no silver bullet! Sales in business are kind of important. And you earn them. You earn them through effort and hard work. And bold decisions. And a component of that has to involve learning. The learning, set up right, points directly towards the earning.

Get in touch if you want to talk

If you want my own help, I specialise in working with [non-sales teams](#) but have done plenty over the years with full-time sales teams too. I've been lucky enough to do this for plenty of large global organisations as well as SME's and even micro businesses too. [You can reach me here](#) and I'll happily talk you through some ideas whether you are looking for external support or not.

Good luck.

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