

## Exploding Sales Competency Myths

By Janet Gregory

Sales competence is not a myth but it could be if sales training, sales enablement and sales development are not included in the sales plan. Every professional pursuit advances with experience and continued education. Some professions require it - like attorneys, CPA, pilots and others. Some professions can only advance with a specific combination of experience and education – like the trades, musicians, engineers and others. Great sales professionals also require a combination of experience and continued education, so sales management needs to avoid getting trapped by the long standing myths of sales competency.

The three myths of sales competency:

**Myth #1:** Companies can “buy” accomplished sales talent when they hire.

**Myth #2:** “Past performance is the best predictor of future performance.”

**Myth #3:** The company is hitting its revenue goals, so our sales people have gotta be good!

### **Myth #1: Companies can “buy” accomplished sales talent when they hire.**

Yes, you can “buy” experienced sales talent when you hire but the experience is *their* experience not *your* experience. There may not be a direct translation, even in the same industry. When you hire an experienced sales person they come with a foundation of knowledge that must be reshaped for *your* company and expanded to include *your* sales process and approach.

A good sales person is selling you in the interview process. The first sale they make for your company is selling you on their talents and capabilities. When they join the company you do get the benefits of their past sales success but go in with your eyes open, as you also get all their bad habits and short cuts.

Apply both formal and informal sales training and sales development through sales education, buddy selling and team selling. To achieve the best results, deliver and reinforce learning over the first six to twelve months after a new sales person joins the team; this will ensure that you get the best of their best and leave their bad habits behind.

### **Myth #2: “Past performance is the best predictor of future performance.”**

You can turn “maybe yes, maybe no” into definitely yes with the right sales development programs. There are multiple interpretations of the important concept that “past performance is the best predictor of future performance.” In Myth #1 we addressed the behavioral interviewing interpretation of hiring experienced sales talent. There are three other interpretations worth exploring.

- *Best practices.* Identifying, learning and reinforcing best practices helps a sales person and a sales team perform at their best and be most efficient. Best practices are a look into the rear view mirror at what has worked for the company in the past. Best practices are learned and must be taught. Some people can learn from observing role models but most people miss the point ... they see a top performer but don't translate top performer actions into skills and best practices that they too can acquire. Help them, train them and support them in learning best practices. That way best practice can become the best predictor of future performance.
- *Career development.* Top performers in one area of the company often move into sales roles as part of their career development. Sales engineers, customer support, marketing and others look to apply their experience to a career in sales. The companies and individuals both see this as a great opportunity. And, it is a great opportunity if the career change also includes the right training and development so that their existing talents can be directed in the right way. Sales engineers need to learn sales development and closing techniques. Customer support needs to learn prospecting and qualifying methods. Help them add the needed skills so that past performance with the company can be a predictor of future sales performance.
- *New sales approach.* When the company targets new customer segment or introduces new products or changes sales methodology it is assumed that the current sales team will naturally pick it up and run with it. Well, they may run with it but could head in the wrong direction. Change can be comfortable and natural when it is accompanied with preparation, guidance and coaching. Change requires both UN-learning old ways of doing thing and learning new approaches. New best practices need to be identified and personal success strategies need to be created. Companion change with both official and casual learning to help your accomplished sales team's past performance transition into future performance.

### **Myth #3: The company is hitting its revenue goals, so our sales people have gotta be good!**

Hit the revenue goals and top management is happy, sales management is happy and sales people are happy. So, what's wrong with this picture? Nothing is *wrong* but it could also be that not everything is right. Could sales be even better?

*Are your sales people as efficient and effective as they could be?* There can be a lot of wasted time on administrative or overhead tasks in sales. You have a lot of great marketing materials and sales tools available that may not be utilized in the best manner. A sales and marketing assessment can help optimize sales efficiency and effectiveness. Want to know what an assessment is, check out these two articles: [Sales is more than just making the numbers](#) and [Do you have a clear picture of your marketing team's performance?](#) You can reduce wasted time spent on administrative and overhead task just by observing behavior and asking the right questions. One of the biggest encumbrances to sales is using the wrong marketing materials and sales tools at the wrong time (this is a big pet peeve). Every piece of collateral and every sales tool should be targeted to a specific audience at a specific stage in the sales process. Sales people need to know this so that they can advance the sale appropriately and communicate what the customer needs to know at the right time. This drives right to the heart of sales enablement, applying best practices and personal success strategies to all sales tools and materials.

*Are your sales people order takers?* Dipping back into the ancient history of the Dot-com era of the '90s lots of high performing sales people were nothing more than highly paid order takers. Making a sale

today is more challenging. But could sales success be improved by adding other selling skills? Many customer orders can be expanded through upselling to enhanced packaged, expanded services or longer contract periods. Customer orders can also be enlarged with cross-selling of complementary products and services that the customer may not be aware of – new features, service contracts, add-ons, etc. Timing is critical to successful upselling and cross-selling so training combined with role-playing and qualifying skills is important.

### To create an exceptional sales training program, what's next?

- Identify and put company best practices to work for individual success, team performance and resource utilization.
- Put sales training, sales development and sales enablement back on the priority list. Provide some budget, visibility and accountability.
- Use both formal and informal approaches to maximize learning and development. Learning is not an event; it is a process and a journey that takes time and continual fortification.
- Combine efforts with DIY and external resources. Leverage sales management, your internal training & development organization, formal sales training programs (there are lots of good ones, [ask me](#) and I can you with a selection) and external consultants (like [KickStart Alliance](#), shameless plug)
- Include knowledge acquisition with discovery and application for a good educational approach. Put all three to work in your environment.



Wishing you ever improving sales success!

---

*Janet Gregory is a veteran sales executive and co-founder of KickStart Alliance. For assistance with sales strategy, sales planning, training, sales enablement, compensation or any aspect of sales operations, contact [Janet](#). Janet leads the sales readiness practice at KickStart Alliance. For help in aligning sales & marketing for results contact any member of the [KickStart Alliance team](#).*