



SalesGym³⁶⁰
Expect more

THE TOP 12 REASONS SALES TRAINING FAILS - AND HOW TO PREVENT THEM!

COACHING THE
GOOD TO BE GREAT,
AND THE BEST TO
BE BETTER

THE TOP 12 REASONS SALES TRAINING FAILS - AND HOW TO PREVENT THEM!

BY FAILING
TO PREPARE,
YOU ARE
PREPARING
TO FAIL

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



Just like top athlete's train-insane to stay ahead of the competition, the same is true for top sales teams.

SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT IS AN ESSENTIAL PRE-REQUISITE TO SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Whilst this is true across virtually every sales team everywhere, it is particularly pertinent with sales teams who sell in to the IT marketplace, as the role of internal IT teams is changing - they are no longer there to simply provide and maintain their organisation's core infrastructure and IT systems, they're now expected to innovate new ways of working to deliver against the strategic priorities of their business.

IT TEAMS ARE TODAY OPERATING IN A
“BUSINESS FIRST, IT SECOND” WORLD

To stay ahead of the competition IT sales teams must therefore develop a “**Business FIRST, sales second**” capability. They must be business savvy and have the attitude, behaviours and skills necessary to connect with their influencers; understand their priorities; surface relevant solutions and control the sales process – they need to be sales athletes – and it is for this reason organisations are choosing to partner with specialist third party training providers.

Whilst any investment in people development should be applauded, unfortunately most of it will prove to be a waste of money as it won't deliver the necessary behaviour change needed.

This paper outlines the top 12 reasons why sales training fails and provides practical ideas and insights to help ensure any investment provides the return you need.

The top 12 reasons are broken down into 3 important categories:

TRAINING CONTENT | SALES MANAGEMENT | MARKETING TEAMS

TRAINING CONTENT-RELATED REASONS

#1 TOO MUCH EMPHASIS ON SKILLS TRAINING AND NOT ENOUGH ON BEHAVIOURS

There are plenty of sales training companies selling courses that will help your sellers navigate the buying and selling cycle. They're great at helping your teams identify their customer's problems and priorities, and will introduce them to the **features, advantages and benefits** of your value proposition. They will instil the need to "sell the sizzle not the sausage" or similar analogies such as, "sell the grass, not the seeds", and "sell the problem your product solves, not the product" – there are plenty of such examples which also bring about thoughts of David Brent in The Office.

The challenge with relying solely on programmes that are skills-orientated, is that having the right sales skills is only part of what is needed for salespeople to be sales champions.

Just like a top performing athlete will find ways of optimising their diet, developing a positive-mental-attitude and fine-tuning their training regime, the same multi-faceted approach is required by top salespeople. In addition to tuning their sales skills, top salespeople also need to develop the **right behaviours** and **mental strength** needed to successfully undertake every aspect of their role. They also need to be fit and healthy, and of a growth mind-set, so they're able to continue to develop, improve and find new ways of serving their customers.

Therefore, to ensure any investment in sales training is worthwhile, it is important to check whether the shortlisted programmes are purely skills-based, or if they go further to address the wider and equally as important aspects of professional development.

"A WELL-CONSTRUCTED LEARNING JOURNEY IS A PLANNED SERIES OF RESOURCES, INTERVENTIONS, CHALLENGES AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS THAT TAKE 'THE LEARNER' (WHICH CAN BE THE INDIVIDUAL OR THE ORGANISATION) FROM WHERE THEY ARE NOW, OVER A PERIOD, TO WHERE THEY WANT TO BE TO BECOME A 'MASTER'."

SOURCE: LEARNING BAR, "WHY THE LINE MANAGER IS INTEGRAL TO THE LEARNING JOURNEY", 2017

TRAINING CONTENT-RELATED REASONS

#2 THE TRAINING DELIVERY STYLE IS NOT CONDUCIVE TO HOW ADULTS LEARN

Whilst fun at the time, relying solely on largely-theoretical, multi-day, back-to-back training courses, will not deliver lasting behaviour change. This was first discovered by *Hermann Ebbinghaus* in 1885, his research led to what is now commonly referred to as “**The Forgetting Curve**” and “**The Learning Curve**”. This research hypothesizes the decline of memory retention overtime and shows that without ongoing learning interventions we forget around 80% of what we have learned in a classroom after 30 days – this research is still of sound logic today.

A better approach therefore is to rely less on classroom-training and have a blend of learning interventions and resources. Some learning interventions can of course still be covered in a classroom (so long as they are short, focused, relevant (i.e. not too theoretical) and no more than a day long), but ideally you want the overall interventions and resources to be delivered in a variety of different formats, such as via:

- 1-hour remote WebEx sessions;
- Half-day simulations;
- 1-2-1 mentoring; and
- App/Mobile-based content (which can either be **structured** via eLearning sessions or Micro-Learning; or **unstructured** via live feeds from relevant sources and/or access to relevant whitepapers, utilities (such as a Gross Margin calculator), or other refresher-orientated learning materials.

For lasting behaviour change and better business results, the learning period therefore needs to extend over several weeks or months and should not be confined to a short-sharp week-long classroom-based course.

When choosing an appropriate training partner it is important to check WHAT is covered, as well as HOW it is covered, and more importantly, how the learnings are embedded for the best chance of delivering real behaviour change that improves business results.

#3 THE TOOLS ARE IMPRACTICAL

In order to embed the learnings from a sales training course it is necessary to introduce tools, i.e. assets and resources that can be used to help encourage new ways of working. The most common of these is the Account Plan. Account Plans come in all shapes and sizes, unfortunately however most of these are completely impractical to use. They’re too big and admin heavy, and as such, are used reluctantly, if at all. Therefore, not only does the tool itself often end up as shelf-ware, but the time spent on the training course teaching it is invariably wasted.

A better approach is to ensure the initial sales training course does indeed include an Account Plan and other tools for that matter, but that any tools should be reviewed by the Sales Management team prior to the course and tweaked as necessary to ensure they fit within the organisation’s current or planned operating model.

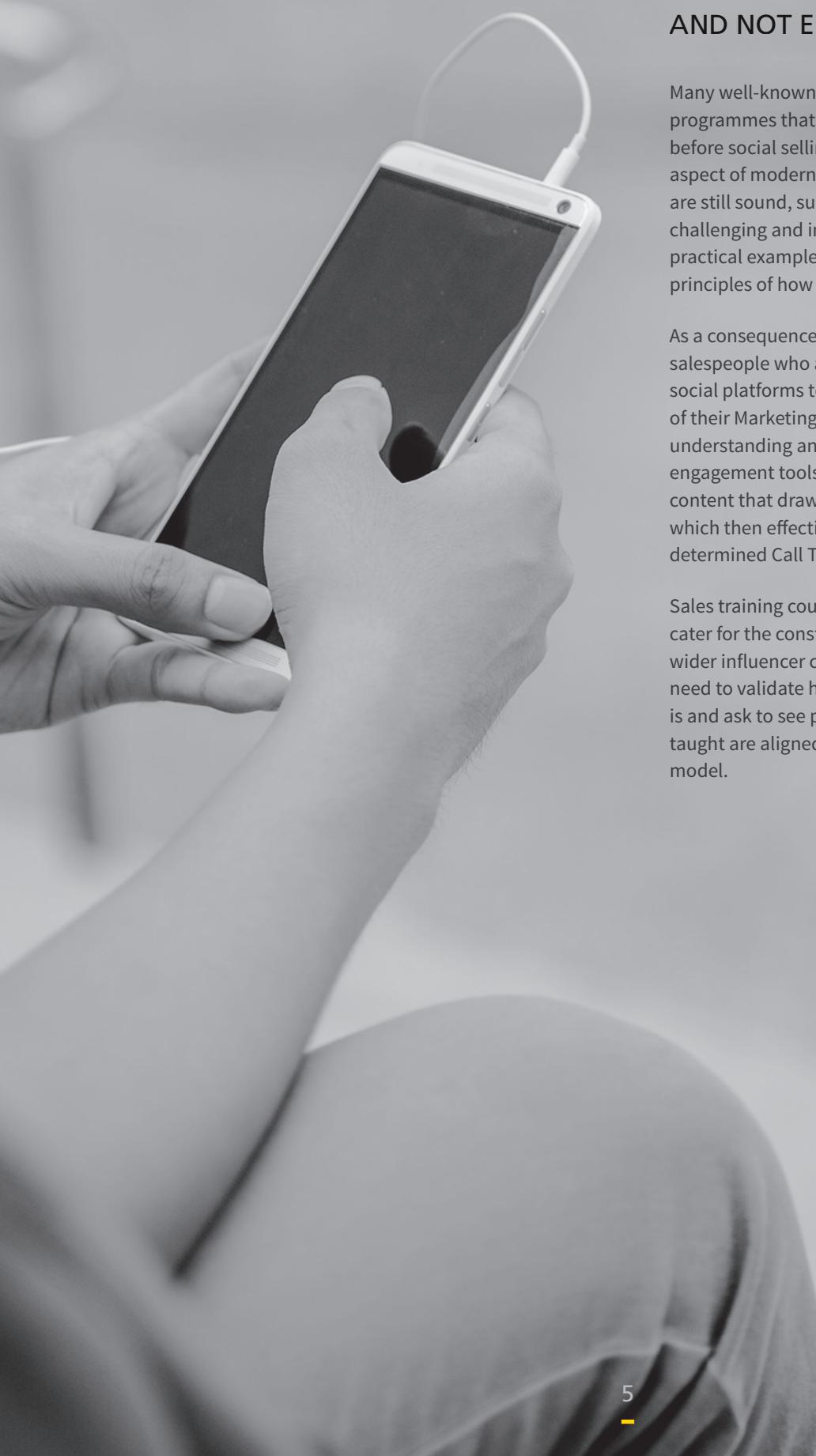
The key skills-orientated tools that should be pre-approved, as they vary from organisation to organisation (and training company to training company) are:

- The Qualification model;
- The Account Plan;
- The Presentation & Communication framework; and
- The Forecasting model.

In addition to these “skills-orientated” tools, the management tools should also be reviewed, in particular, the Sales Management Coaching framework. G.R.O.W. (see #7 below) is the most common of these, amongst others, so if an alternative coaching model is currently in place, it’s essential the appointed training company understands what this is and how it can be incorporated into their programme.

TRAINING CONTENT-RELATED REASONS

#4 THERE IS TOO MUCH EMPHASIS ON TRADITIONAL SALES METHODS AND NOT ENOUGH ON SOCIAL SELLING



Many well-known sales training courses are based on programmes that were developed several years ago – before social selling was widely accepted as an important aspect of modern-day sales life. Many of their principles are still sound, such as the importance of being relevant, challenging and insightful, but they don't include sufficient practical examples or material that aligns to the founding principles of how people now sell (and buy, for that matter).

As a consequence, there is a growing community of salespeople who are happy to use LinkedIn and other B2B social platforms to broadcast and amplify the messages of their Marketing department, but few of them have the understanding and capability to use these as effective engagement tools – i.e. they lack the capability to post content that draws potential buyers into a conversation and which then effectively motivates them to execute a pre-determined Call To Action (CTA).

Sales training courses should be constantly refreshed to cater for the constantly changing habits of the buyer and wider influencer communities. Sales Management teams need to validate how old the content of the training courses is and ask to see practical examples to ensure the methods taught are aligned with their current or planned operating model.

SALES MANAGEMENT-RELATED REASONS

#5 SALES MANAGEMENT TEAMS ARE UNAWARE OF WHAT IS BEING TAUGHT

More often than not, and for understandable reasons, Sales Managers do not attend the same sales training courses as their team members, and they shouldn't need to as the role of a Sales Manager is very different to that of a salesperson.

However, what then occurs is an environment where the Sales Manager, who prior to becoming a Sales Manager invariably had a successful career in sales, tries to coach their team on the ideas and models that they were taught, which can cause problems as they may differ to what's being taught to their team via today's training programmes.

Consequently, **there is a disconnect** between Sales Managers and their salespeople, and the path of least resistance is for the team to ignore much of what they have just been taught and instead go along with the old-fashioned ideas and ideals of their Sales Manager.

To avoid this unnecessary conflict, it is important the Sales Management team are given a thorough overview of the content of the training course(s) and are taught how they can embed it. In practical terms the overview will consist of a 30-minute walk-through of all the pertinent content, in addition to being given a range of resources and guidance notes that are designed to help the Manager embed the content within the day-to-day working environment – see point #6.

#6 SALES MANAGEMENT TEAMS ARE NOT TAUGHT TO EMBED THE LEARNINGS

As detailed in point #2 above, successful sales training needs "a blend of learning interventions and resources." The Sales Management function is therefore absolutely key to the embedding process, in fact, if the Sales Management function is not engaged or supportive of embedding the learnings the programme will fail, as the learnings need to be surfaced and revisited on a regular basis between Sales Managers and their teams.

In practice this is done by using coaching **guides** and **templated simulations**. The coaching guides need to contain all of the pertinent information the sales team have been taught, with a series of guidance notes which explain to the Manager how they can embed it. The templated simulations are designed to make it easy for the Manager to run ad-hoc 15-minute training sessions on the key models, themes and ideas taught during the programme as a means of reminding their sales teams about them and reinforcing the learnings. The simulations need to be engaging and use language that's consistent with that used during the structured learning interventions.

The impact of the coaching guide and templated simulations will be more lasting behaviour change that can be built on with other complementary activities, such as formal performance reviews, account reviews, and the development of a competency framework. Over time they will help change the DNA of the working operando of the sales team and drive improvements to business performance.

SALES MANAGEMENT-RELATED REASONS

#7 SALES MANAGEMENT TEAMS ARE INFREQUENTLY TRAINED TO MANAGE

Understanding how to embed the learnings from the training course(s) as outlined in #6 above is an essential element of long term sales success, however, learning how to use a coaching guide and run templated simulations is not sufficient alone to develop a top performing Sales Management function.

Sales Managers also need to understand how to better Manage their teams. There are several effective coaching and goal-setting frameworks, such as:

- **G.R.O.W.** (which stands for “Establish the **GOAL**”, “Examine the **REALITY**”, “Explore the **OPTIONS**”, and “Establish the **WILL**”);
- **S.M.A.R.T.** (which stands for **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealistic, and **T**ime-bound); and
- **70:20:10** by Charles Jennings, which is another highly respected Learning and Development framework.

When each of the above is properly explained and taught to Managers they will be more able to play an effective supporting role, and thereby generate better results from their team. It makes little sense investing in sales training for front line salespeople, without giving the Sales Management team adequate training too. Without the latter, the impact of the former will be quickly diminished.

“ONLY 13% OF COMPANIES SAY THEY DO AN EXCELLENT JOB DEVELOPING LEADERS AT ALL LEVELS.”

SOURCE: DELOITTE UNIVERSITY PRESS, “LEADERS AT ALL LEVELS”, 2014



SALES MANAGEMENT-RELATED REASONS

#8 COMMISSION PLANS ARE OUT OF KILTER WITH THE NEEDS OF THE BUSINESS

It doesn't matter how good a sales training course is, if the commission plan contradicts it the training will be fruitless.

If, for example, the training courses encourage salespeople to research their prospects and build long term lasting customer relationships, but the commission plan rewards short term quick wins, then the investment in training will be wasted as the teachings will not have had sufficient time to work. Another example could be if salespeople are trained on the benefits of behaving collaboratively so they share ideas, but this approach is undermined by a completely incompatible commission plan.

Organisations need to give greater thought to their commission plans to ensure they are compatible with the needs of the business and don't undermine or contradict any of the training content or simulations, otherwise the training will be counter-productive.

As has already been stated in #1 above, top performing salespeople need to develop the right skills and behaviours and have the right mind-set and attitude necessary for them to win profitable business that forges lasting customer relationships. Assuming a third-party training company is engaged to help develop salespeople in all of these areas, it would make sense to have a commission plan that's aligned with this multi-faceted way of thinking.

In practical terms, this could mean designing a commission plan with 2-3 components. 50% of the total available commission could be based on the financial performance of the individual, 40% could be based on the individual's adherence to the organisation's behaviours, and 10% on team performance – this more balanced plan will not only drive a strong individual and team performance, it will also encourage all team members to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the values and expected behaviours of the organisation.

#9 THERE IS NO DEFINED OR REPEATABLE SALES PROCESS

Investing in Sales Training is all about ensuring sales teams have a consistent approach to selling and serving their customers. The challenge however is that few sales teams have a consistent sales process that underpins the training which results in salespeople operating in different ways - for example, some may involve colleagues in the sales process and some may not, some may forecast at a particular stage, and others may not, some may write their proposals in one way, and some in another. This sporadic approach makes it hard for Sales Management teams to identify areas of inefficiency and improvement.

To help counter this, Sales Managers need to understand more about the contents of the sales training courses, then work to embed key elements of these into their sales process, particularly those that are operationally-focused. When a clear sales process is defined it makes hiring and on-boarding new salespeople much easier and reduces the time-to-value period – which will not only benefit the hiring manager (and organisation), but will also motivate the new salesperson as they will perform at a faster pace and will be less likely to leave.

MARKETING-RELATED REASONS

#10 THE VALUE PROPOSITION ISN'T VERY GOOD

Providing the sales training is of a high standard and the learnings from it are embedded, sales training alone cannot maximise the revenue of a company - that requires a lot more work, particularly with regards to the customer value-proposition.

A compelling and engaging value-proposition can materially impact the length of the sales cycle and the win ratios. The opposite, of course, is true. A poor or average value proposition can make it very hard for even the best of salespeople to perform to their potential.

In the absence of a compelling value proposition, price (or the wider commercial agreement) is often the only lever the salesperson has at their disposal to help win the sale.

There are some very good companies who specialise in value-proposition-design, one being Boost Performance (www.boost-performance.co.uk), and most will state that the test of a good value proposition is whether it is easy to sell and easy to buy.

#11 THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IS INCONSISTENT AND HAMPERING SALES

Just like a poor value proposition (as outlined in #10 above) can lead to a substandard sales performance (even after an organisation has invested in sales training), the same is true with the wider Customer Experience (CX).

CX is a huge topic that touches every aspect of an organisation. As such, if the CX is inconsistent (i.e. if it can't be written down, monitored or managed), the customer may get a very different experience from one salesperson to the next. Some salespeople will own the resolution of a customer's problem or query, and some won't. Some salespeople will share and amplify marketing messages, and some won't - the list is endless.

As such, organisations that invest in sales training need to give due thought to the overarching CX as it may transpire that additional training is required to help improve general customer service levels throughout the business. Once again a multi-faceted bonus and commission plan can be designed to help foster a more consistent approach to CX excellence.

#12 SALES AND MARKETING TEAMS ARE NOT ALIGNED

In many organisations Marketing teams work hard to generate leads, only for Sales teams to not follow them up. This "us and them" culture can create unnecessary barriers which stifle collaboration, creativity and innovation.

If for example, during a sales training course, salespeople are taught why and how to establish trust with their customers, the logic and learning should be shared with their Marketing team, so they too can play apart in the trust-establishing process. The same is true with knowledge-management as many training courses teach salespeople the importance of why and how to share "just enough" information so their customers remain fully engaged. This information and learning is relevant to every Marketing department and could help improve communications.

A practical way of ensuring Marketing teams are benefiting from any investment in sales training is to have the sales training company run shortened courses, or perhaps Lunch & Learn sessions, both for the Marketing department and the wider business. The more the whole Organisation is aware of the key learnings, the more the whole organisation will embrace them and be more productive in working together to achieve common goals.

The other practical ways to better cement the Sales and Marketing teams together is through the formation of a Sales process (as detailed in #9 above) and by the appointment of a Sales and Marketing Director. If not managed correctly, the presence of a Sales Director AND a Marketing Director can encourage an "us and them" culture.

SUMMARY

In summary, sales training should not be seen as a quick fix to a more complex problem. Whilst it is “easy” to outsource the job of improving a no-longer fit-for-purpose sales methodology to a third-party training provider, the partnership will only deliver results if the Sales Management function are fully engaged with the training programme, so that they understand the core elements being taught and are given the time and resources necessary to embed the learnings.

CHECK LIST

Before investing in sales training, Sales Managers and Leadership teams should check the following:

- ✓ Does the sales training provider have a programme that develops the SKILLS, BEHAVIOURS, and ATTITUDE required of the salespeople?
- ✓ Does the delivery and structure of the programme adhere to current Learning and Development best practices?
- ✓ Does the training programme include all the necessary (and practical) tools and resources needed to help the salespeople operate differently?
- ✓ Has the training content been refreshed recently to take account of modern day buying and selling practices, such as the effective use of social media?
- ✓ Is the training provider prepared to invest sufficient time explaining the programme to the Sales Management function?
- ✓ Does the training programme include sufficient and effective resources and elements that will enable Sales Managers to take on the role of “lead-coach”, so that they have the will and capability to help embed the learning?
- ✓ Is the commission plan in harmony with, and complementary to, the training programme?
- ✓ Is there a sufficient sales process in place to enhance the learnings?
- ✓ Is the value-proposition helping or hindering the sales performance?
- ✓ Is the Customer Experience helping or hindering the sales performance?
- ✓ Are the Sales and Marketing teams aligned?

THIS IS A SALESGYM 360 PUBLICATION

ABOUT SALESGYM 360

SalesGym 360 improves the performance of sales teams through specialist consultancy and their proprietary 9-station Training Circuit programme. The Training Circuit adheres to the very latest Learning and Development best-practices, and improves the skills, behaviours and mind-set of salespeople and Sales Managers. The Training Circuit includes a range of complementary tools, resources and Apps, each designed to maximise long lasting behaviour change and business performance.

CASE STUDY 1: ROB

Rob is a Sales Director and has four Sales Managers who report into him. His Sales Managers each have between five and seven frontline salespeople that report into them. Rob was tasked with looking at ways of increasing his sales number by 10%. As his team's win ratio had fallen over the past two years, he and his Sales Managers decided to send the team on a sales training programme. They met with three providers and chose the one who allowed 15 people on a course, as this meant they would only need to pay for two sessions. The provider also agreed to cut the duration from four days to three as another cost saving gesture.

While the frontline salespeople were on the course Rob and his Sales Managers helped with customer meetings. The following month Rob and his Sales Managers asked a member of the sales team to spend 5-10 minutes summarising what they had learned from the course to the wider team. After that, the course was not mentioned again. Rob's figures didn't improve and the sales training provider was singled out as the primary cause.

CASE STUDY 2: LINDA

Linda was a successful Sales Director with a team of two Sales Managers reporting into her (and a team of 12 reporting into them). During a strategic review, she put forward a plan to have the Marketing Team report into her alongside the Sales team. The Board agreed. In her plan Linda also outlined her vision of having a much more

integrated Sales and Marketing team, where all members used similar tools and models, and where her Sales Managers took on the role of lead-coach first and assistant salesperson second. She also wanted to develop the behaviours of her salespeople so they were better equipped to build a strong rapport with their customers to make them more able and willing to proactively surface more innovative solutions to them. This approach, she knew, would help increase their strategic importance and with it, the share of the customer's budget.

To bring her vision to life, and help her put in place an integrated long-term solution which would meet the long-term needs of the business, Linda partnered with SalesGym 360. Over a number of months SalesGym 360 were able to provide the skills training, behaviour training and complementary tools, plus they also worked with Linda and her Sales Managers to develop and equip them to play a much more active role in the development of their teams.

Twelve months on, the partnership with SalesGym 360 continues to develop, and today they are helping Linda develop a more robust and effective on-boarding programme designed to help reduce the amount of time taken for new hires to become net-contributors. As a by-product of the enhanced on-boarding programme Linda has found that she's getting the pick of a much more capable group of candidates, as people who are new to sales want to work with organisations who can better develop them. The return on Linda's strategy and investments are already paying off with a 18% increase in new business and a 23% increase in customer retention.



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