

# Service Sales Training – Model for Success

*By Joe Siderowicz*

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Over 40% of new service sales representatives fail within one year, 20% deliver marginal results. The remaining 30% achieve expected results, and 10% overachieve. These historical results were reported by a leading manufacturer of building systems. Unfortunately, these results are comparable to many other service providers. Clearly, these are not the metrics for success. Far too many companies find themselves in this situation and struggle to develop strategies to resolve the problem. Some companies rationalize their poor performance as being consistent with past results. For others the problem is masked by the high profits generated by the service business. The bottom line, if 80% of service sales representatives are not overachieving, there is room for improvement, lots of improvement.

How would your business model look if service sales representative turnover was under ten percent? What would be the impact on your P&L if you could sell the same amount of business with one half the current headcount? How much could be saved in time, disruption, and resources hiring and training new people? All of these targets are achievable. Sell more, spend less, it sounds too good to be true. It's not.

There are many areas that need to be considered when looking to improve service sales productivity. Many key activities take place before the hire is made. The job description needs to be properly aligned with the skills desired. The compensation plan needs to attract top sales people. Methods for attracting and screening candidates must be effective. Unfortunately none of these activities impact the performance of the people currently selling. The one area that immediately impacts both current sales people, and future hires, is effective service sales training.

Many companies utilize in house personnel to train service sales people. Some look to enroll their people in readily available courses that focus on value-based or relationship selling. Others rely on local management or existing sales people to provide guidance and on the job opportunities to learn. Often, these methods lead to success. This success, while limited, can also cloud the problem. It's always easy to identify individuals that are overachieving as a result of current methods. This usually

contributes to rationalizing the effectiveness of current programs. The result is usually minimal or no changes in current methods. Mediocrity prevails.

In house services sales training programs can be very good. The most effective usually utilize existing or recent service sales people to augment the training. The least effective utilize the same resources used for product training. For smaller companies both the demand for training and the resources required, are typically not available. This usually results in calling on an in house resource who is typically an overmatched employee.

Professionally packaged value based and relationship sales training courses are usually helpful. The primary shortcoming, and it's a big one, is the one size fits all approach. A sales person can comprehend every concept in a value-based course, but it doesn't always transfer to on the job success. It will definitely help, but it only addresses a small part of the training required.

For some companies on the job training may be the only option. This is the highest risk strategy. The newcomer is trained utilizing current methods and strategies. This approach almost guarantees mediocre results. Apprenticeships may be useful in training people to do manual processes, but trying to unlock the inner overachiever, in unique individuals, requires a different approach.

Having conducted many interviews with newly trained service sales representatives the problem is fairly apparent. They're energized, raring to get out on their own, but at the same time, confused and unprepared. Selling service agreements is a process. It encompasses all of the steps in the sales cycle; prospecting, qualifying, surveying, estimating, proposal generation, presentation, objection handling, and closing. Service sales representatives must also know the nuances of each market segment and its unique needs and purchasing process. After the knowledge is imparted, a solid activity model must be available to guide and manage the individual. Lack of knowledge and skills in any step in the sales cycle will lead to failure. In some cases new hires are given time to learn by trial and error. Unfortunately for the business this unproductive time results in lost revenue, and in many cases, termination.

The best method to insure success is to design a service sales training course that is market specific. The course needs to cover, in detail, each of the steps in the sales process. Each step should include specific, relevant information. Newly trained people should be independent, productive, and closing orders in a time frame consistent with market sales cycles. New sales people want to succeed.

Their managers want them to succeed. The key, train them to succeed. Far too many service sales training programs provide information that will “help” new hires succeed or provide them with the best current information to “support” their success. Service sales training that helps or supports a service sales representative’s chance for success falls short.

To increase service sales success rates companies need to provide training that is focused on the specific needs of the markets served. Individuals should be prepared to perform the job, independently, day one. The time and investment required for developing market specific service sales training is far less than most companies realize. The return on the investment is almost always more than projected.

Joe Siderowicz is President of the AfterMarket Consulting Group in Acton, MA. Joe has more than twenty five years experience in designing and implementing service marketing and training programs for leading technology based product manufacturers and dealers. He can be reached at 978-929-9790 or [joe@aftermarketconsulting.com](mailto:joe@aftermarketconsulting.com) or visit [www.aftermarketconsulting.com](http://www.aftermarketconsulting.com).