

Orangespiel

Volume 25, Number 4
April 1997



Technology Training for Salespeople: Seven Secrets to Success by Fran Berman

Some of my toughest audiences have been salespeople. They've also been my most rewarding, participative, and fun. Salespeople generally agree that sales skills training is beneficial: It helps them sell more and make more money.

But how do you get them excited about learning to use software? The high rollers who are already successful can be especially hard to convince that it's worth their time. They often think technology will slow them down, that "Big Brother" is watching.

The answer is seven simple steps:

1. Find out what turns them on. In traditional terms, do a needs assessment, formal or informal. Remember to draw out the benefits that will be meaningful to *them*. What's keeping them from closing more sales, exceeding quota, and earning greater commissions and bonuses? Can the software help them do that? Perhaps it can lessen the time they spend on administrative tasks and allow them more time on sales related activities—seeing more customers, learning more about their own products, and finding out more about the competition.

2. Give them substance. Feed and water them. In the room, have cold water and appropriate refreshments: coffee, decaf, tea, bagels in the morning (no donuts—the sugar and caffeine ups and downs will work against you); soft drinks, mineral waters, fruit in the afternoon (cookies are tempting, but again, watch out for the after-sugar-crash).

3. Make it meaningful. If it's word processing, teach them how to create their reports or proposals. When training them on spreadsheet software, have them create a sample sales forecast, projecting how many of their products they expect to sell to their customers over the next few months. Help them experience the impact on an audience that a PowerPoint presentation has when it's projected from a portable computer. When I train salespeople on contact management software such as ACT!, I use a database of a dozen or so records that are typical of the clients or customers with whom they do business.

4. Give it to them in small bites. No one likes a lot of change all at once. Salespeople are no different. And they don't want to be out of the field or away from the phones for very long. I've found it best to limit my sessions to half a day with one 20-minute break. And here's a secret: Announce the break as a 15-minute break. They'll immediately head for the phones (yes, even before the restrooms), but budget your time for 20 minutes...and start promptly at the end of 20 minutes.

5. Stir their competitive spirits. Play games, run contests, pit teams against each other. At the beginning of the class, tell them that there will be a contest and prize(s) at the end. The prize can be a dollar bill for each right answer, a single prize for the person with the most right answers, or something for the winning team. It doesn't have to be expensive or elaborate as long as it's something fun or useful to them.

6. Learn by doing. I test them on each of the ten most important skills that they need to acquire. For each one, I tell them what I want them to do. I instruct them to raise their hands as soon as they're done. As they finish, I check their work. I have the first one with the right answer to come to the front of the class and show everyone else how s/he did it. (Salespeople are not shy. They'll love for you to stroke their egos.) If s/he was wrong, there was no shortage of eager volunteers to take his/her place. This worked like magic by holding their attention and enhancing retention.

7. Give them simple, short, easy to follow reference materials. The documentation included screen captures, menu maps (flow charts), sample printouts, and troubleshooting tips. We knew that salespeople don't like a lot of paperwork and may not read the manual in depth, so we also created a quick reference card for the custom application and a keyboard template.

Follow these seven simple steps with your sales audiences. They'll love you and you'll achieve the desired results.

Fran Berman is a speaker, author, trainer, and consultant. She has published two books, *Trash to Cash: How Businesses Can Save Money and Increase Profits*, and *Marketing Magic: Proven Pathways to Success*, and several articles. For help in making the most of your resources, contact her at (949) 643-0803.