

Building Your Sales Machine

by John Chapin

The “how-to” behind building a highly-effective, competition-dominating, sales juggernaut is actually fairly simple. What isn’t simple is executing the steps and sticking to the plan. The dedication and resolve necessary to start and complete the process is where the majority of people fail. That said, if you’re ready to skyrocket sales in your organization, here are the steps to get it done.

Step 1: Super-intense Sales Training

The most important tool a salesperson can have in their arsenal is great sales skills. Yet, while most organizations spend tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars on a new producer, send them to product training, and load them up on technical skills, most balk at investing a fraction of that on the most important training: sales training. Poor sales skills is a key reason why most salespeople end up with mediocre or bad sales results.

When considering how to train your people, let’s start with the gold standard. In the best case your training would look like what my dad got from I.B.M. The first six months were spent at I.B.M.’s main office where new salespeople trained half the time on product and half the time on sales. Everyone was given a sales play book that included all scripts for what to say and how to handle all sales situations. Next, that play book was memorized, practiced, and drilled until they had every single sales situation embedded in their brains. When my dad finally returned from training, he was with his manager and one of the top sales reps out in the field for three more months. They practiced, drilled, and rehearsed everything before, during, and after live calls. Finally, after nine months he was allowed to go on calls by himself.

If you’re like most people reading this, you don’t have the resources of an I.B.M. and you probably can’t invest nine months doing the training mentioned above. In that case, you want to do something similar to what I do when training brand new agents in the insurance industry. The first thing they do is spend two days in one of the top insurance producer schools. When they get back, I give them a play book with reinforcement CDs, all the scripts, and everything else necessary to handle all sales situations and scenarios they’re going to encounter when they’re out prospecting and chasing new business. They memorize these and we practice and role-play. After a very short period of time, once they have the basics down, they start calling on live prospects. They learn most of what they learn by getting their nose bloodied out calling on small accounts.

After weeks of internalizing everything they learned in the first school and from me, I send them to a second school. We follow the same reinforcement process as we did above. Next, I send them to a third school and once again, the process is repeated.

By the time they’ve completed the above process, their sales skills are better than about 97% of the people they are competing against. As a result, because sales skills are the most important skills *by far*, they are doing a significant amount of business at this point.

Step 2: Activity

Although activity is actually more important than sales skills, it is second in chronological order. Before I send someone out to make calls, I want them to have a general idea of what they're saying so we train on sales skills first.

Step 2 is all about massive activity and tracking that activity. The insurance agents have a quota for new people they have to attempt to contact every week. At the end of the week I want: the number of new people called on, spoken to, prospects, appointments, follow-up calls on prospects not reached, sales, and several other items.

While the most important tool a salesperson can have is great sales skills, the most important attributes a salesperson can have are: hard-working, persistent, and an ability to persevere. This is all about making a ton of calls and staying after it no matter how badly they get beat up.

Step 3: Continuous practice and reinforcement of sales skills.

Your people have to constantly be reading the scripts, listening to sales CDs in the car, role-playing, and otherwise practicing, drilling and rehearsing everything they've learned. As a leader you want to test them by throwing objections and different situations at them along with going on some calls. It's also important to work on sales skills in sales meetings.

This also means resending your people to training. An insurance agent will go to each of the producer schools three times the first three years they are working with me. Each time they learn something they missed the first time and the ideas they do remember get further reinforced and improved. Every time they come back there is an instant bump in sales.

Step 4: Continue to improve and innovate.

Once you find what works, don't rest on your laurels. Continue to look for ways to improve and get better. Look for better ways to compete, better answers to objections, better ways to communicate and build relationships, and in short, more effective and efficient ways to operate.

Step 5: Remove obstacles from the sales process.

Obstacles come in several forms. It can be support people not doing their jobs, inefficient systems or processes, tedious, unnecessary, extra items that you ask your people to do or even having salespeople doing items that support people should be doing. Keep an eye out for anything that seems to be taking your salespeople away from "new business" activities.

Step 6: Remove negativity and slackers from the environment.

The key to all of the above is to develop and follow a proven system that trains and reinforces sales skills and ensures your people are doing tons of the right activities the right way.