

Management Involvement

Prepare the Proper Seedbed for Success.

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One thing clients always ask me is: "how can you get people to use the process once we've completed the training?" Too often, in spite of enthusiastic participation during the seminar, participants "fall off the wagon" sixty days, ninety days, or six months down the road, and do not stick with the discipline of the *Strategic Selling* process. So, they don't get the results they could, even if they do see incremental improvement in their selling behavior.

What these clients are usually looking for are my suggestions on how to improve the retention of the participants, how to follow-up with trainees, some reinforcement tips, reading or audio programs from Miller Heiman, high power facilitation tricks or tips, or even high-tech solutions, like web base reinforcement. Some or all of these things may indeed work, and we can provide lots of methods focused on the participants' learning and reinforcement. But without the right seedbed, a seed can't germinate and grow; these "band-aid" measures won't work. Too often, the "basic issue" is that the sales process has not taken root in the organization, and it dies. Sales managers are not asking to review the Blue Sheets, team strategies are not encouraged, or even overtly discouraged, executive management is not even familiar with the process, let alone reinforcing it, and sales people see no payback to taking the extra effort to document their strategies.

There are several points at which you, as a facilitator or sales manager, can prevent this kind of outcome. You can prepare the participants *before* the training by making expectations. You can impact participants *during* the training by providing excellent delivery, reinforcement and memory tips, and enthusiasm. And you can follow up with reinforcement *after* the training.

But perhaps the best thing you can do to "prepare your seedbed" is to work with your executive management before the training, get their involvement

during the training, and follow up with them to communicate the return on their investment after the training.

Consider these examples.

The Vice President of Sales of a software firm arrives at a *Strategic Selling* seminar at 8:30 am on the first day. He took 27 of his sales people from across the country out of the field and flew them all to a nice hotel in San Diego for this training, a considerable investment. He wants to jump-start his sales staff in a new sales management process. He kicks off the program himself. "Welcome to San Diego and *Strategic Selling*! What you are going to learn today is very important, critical in fact, to our continued growth. You are going to learn some valuable tools and a process to improve our sales and shorten our sales cycles. Your facilitator is experienced in, not only teaching these concepts, but also in using them in his own sales practice. I've selected this process as our standard sales management system..." A few minutes later, the Sales VP leaves the room quietly, not to be seen again for two days.

Here's another scenario:

Rick Tippett, President of Excellon Automation, a \$300M high-tech manufacturing firm, conducted a similar kick-off speech as the previous VP. But he adds: "I plan to participate in this seminar with you as much as my schedule will allow over the next two days. I want to gain a firm understanding of our key accounts and strategic sales, as well as help you in any way I can to close those important deals and develop sound strategies." He keeps his word, and is there throughout most of the three-day combined



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Strategic/Conceptual Selling program, and makes a point of being there during the critical Blue Sheet session stage. After the program during the wrap-up he says, "I want to tell you how impressed I was with the creativity of this group in developing value-added strategies for our key sales opportunities. I must say, I learned a lot. Even though I've taken *Strategic Selling* before and read the book, I have gained more insight into the process. I also learned a great deal about some important sales opportunities I was not aware of before, and about our customer relationships. I feel I can now support you better in making these deals come through. This program has changed this company's business strategy"

Finally, this example:

- Dr. Don Carlton, President of Radian International, a \$400M technology services subsidiary of a major chemical company, could not make the Strategic Selling seminar because of his schedule. But he did leave this videotaped message, which the facilitator plays before starting the program. "I'm sorry I couldn't be with you over the next two days to work with you on your important account strategies. As you know, my schedule is busy and I am on travel. But I didn't want my absence to send the wrong signal to you: that this is not important enough for me to participant. To the contrary, I have participated in several of these programs over the last year, and I would be there today if my schedule allowed it. I want you to know that what you are doing over these next two days is vital to our continued success in the marketplace. I have asked all three of our business unit managers and the VP of sales to work with you and to report to me as soon as I return on the most important Blue Sheet strategies you develop over the next two days."

These are all real examples. Each message spoken by

executive managers was similar, but each left a vastly different message by their actions. The sales VP (let alone the company's CEO) didn't feel the program was important enough to give it his personal time and participation. Yet he expected his people to sit there for two days. His skills, after all, don't need improving, his people's skills do. Rick Tippett, the president of the manufacturing company, on the other hand, saw how his leadership and involvement would send a positive message to his staff. He had a lot to learn about these accounts, and he had a lot to contribute. Even Dr. Carlton, the busy technology services firm president, by his past actions and obvious pre-planning to video-tape his message, sent a strong signal: "Sit up, pay attention, use this stuff, and I'll be checking to make sure we are following the process and discipline our company invested in."

Which firm do you suppose had the best results from their training investment? Which of these companies viewed this as important, not just a "training event?"

Some managers worry about getting their executive management involved in training, thinking that they might inhibit the participants or take over. This is certainly possible; I've seen it happen. Others feel that training is not important enough for their executives to be present. But maybe you're taking a too limited view of what you are doing. *Strategic Selling*® is not "training", it is strategic planning for your most important complex sales. Shouldn't your executive management be involved in strategic planning? Don't they want to be?

Tricks, games, and memory mnemonics will certainly spice up your sales training, but nothing will keep your trainees engaged like the active participation of your top executives



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