

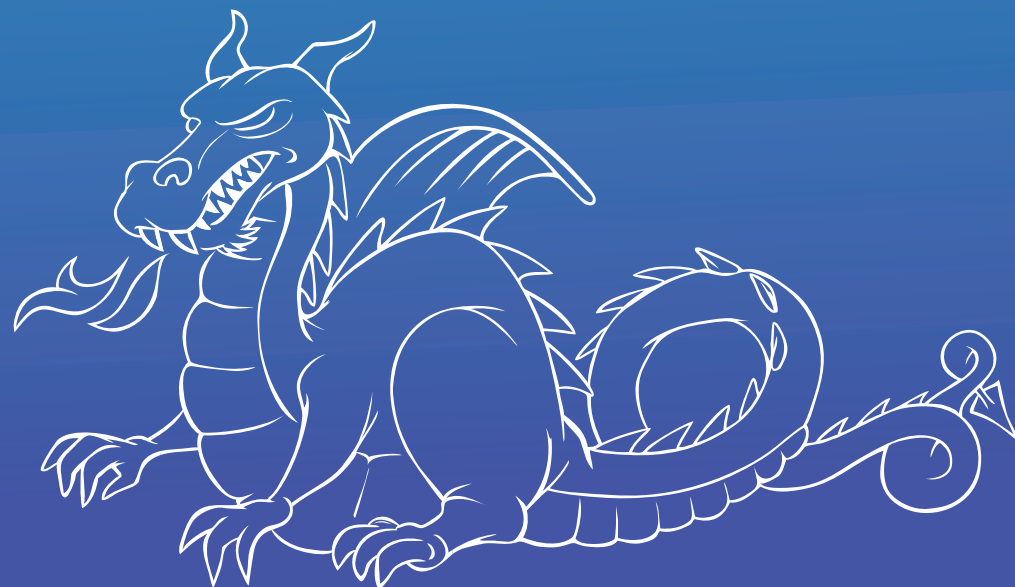
Sales Training Doesn't Work

and Four Other Common Myths About Sellers, Buyers, and Coaching

Myths are widely held but are often false beliefs or ideas. They arise and are hard to shake because they are usually based on perceived common sense and logical or long-held thinking. **But, myths are myths: incorrect, untrue, and just plain wrong.**

You can't afford to hold onto concepts simply because they feel right or seemed to work before. You've got too many deals and margins at stake, too many buyers to lose, and too many sellers to support, mentor, and evaluate.

That's why empirical research is such a critical resource for sales management and sales training. You don't need to go on 'gut feel' or rely on vendor claims. Instead, you can use independent, academic information to adopt, develop, and customize sales training programs for your organization.





Myth

Standardizing on
the right sales
methodology
will create high-
performing sales
teams.

Companies have operated on the age-old assumption that the “right thing” means choosing the best sales process or sales methodology and requiring salespeople to learn and use it in all their buyer interactions.

But, there is a frustration among leadership that sellers do not use the sales training that they’ve been taught. They believe that their investments are going to waste and salespeople are ignoring “the correct way” to make quota.

What if instead, by implementing one or even many types of methodologies, you’re setting your sales team up to be average and/or fail because you’re not teaching the key top performer attributes across industries and geographies?



Reality

High performers recognize buying situations and use the right selling strategy for each conversation.

The research shows that salespeople who trust a company's approach and use it consistently tend to end up being an average or low performer. Those who recognize the methodology's shortcomings however, will often try other approaches during a deal. In fact, while low performers' toolkits had only one or two approaches to selling, high performers in our research used up to five different strategies per deal in a typical sale, and it depended on the situation.

Key Takeaway

It doesn't matter what methodology training you implement. If you are not identifying the buying situations unique to your company, determining which strategy wins in those situations, and then training your team to identify that situation and call the right play in the moment, you're losing about 75% of your revenue.

Get the research paper!

Click here to download the research paper on this topic: ***Why Agile Salespeople Outperform Challengers—Situation-based Sales Strategies Win More Customers.***

Download the research



Myth

Disruption works
as well for sellers
in established
accounts as it does
in new accounts.

Sellers are a channel of information for buyers—especially when buyers are looking to understand and address a challenge they are facing. So the prevailing thinking around customer problems is simple: reps need to get involved early in the definition process to ensure that the buyer sees the issue in a way that their company can best provide the answers, and furthering that consultative approach, push for quick resolution. That thinking applies for an established salesperson or a new one.

But, the research tells a more complicated story...



Reality
Disruption
causes decision-
makers to look for
other sources of
information, which
hurts incumbent
salespeople.

Want a deeper dive? Read
the blog post!



The more defined a problem, the less likely a buyer is to go outside of its network to solve it. And if a buyer *does* consult an outsider on a defined problem, the structure of that problem matters. The research shows that your reps need to cast doubt on an existing problem definition and avoid taking a consultative approach when they are the non-incumbents because a familiar rep is preferred in that scenario. If your salesperson is not established in an account, then you want to “muddy the waters” concerning business challenges, creating uncertainty and slowing things down.

If You Are:

Incumbent

- Push as hard as you can to quickly frame a problem and provide a consultative sale that creates a sense of urgency for resolution.
- Play up gains.
- Make sure you or your rep talk about improvements and increases.

Non-incumbent

- Disrupt the problem structure, continually pushing for further problem definition and understanding, and emphasize the need for time.
- Talk in terms of losses.
- Have your sellers talk about negative decreases and declines.

This will feel counterintuitive to both reps and managers, but our research proves it out.



Myth

Sales reps are closest to customer opportunities, so they are best equipped to assess them.

Pipeline evaluation and accuracy have never been more important to companies. Unfortunately, research shows that only 50% of forecasted customer deals and sales opportunities close as expected—and the gap between projections and actual closings is getting bigger.

There is a belief that sellers know their pipeline best since they are closest to the deals. And, top sellers are the most accurate source of information because they perform so well.

Hold on...



Reality

Managers are better at forecasting deals because they consider all data, positive and negative, when reviewing opportunities.

Even with exhaustive and objective data, sellers tend to give more weight to positive information regarding sales opportunities than they would any negative information. But, that very same data is interpreted differently by managers. They don't usually bring biases to deal prediction. However, they *do* leverage past successes and failures in that process.

Key Takeaway

To overcome this disparity, your managers need to do regular, comprehensive deal reviews. There, they should focus on uncovering and acknowledging the biases in your reps' assessments. This active approach to sales opportunity evaluation and planning will afford your managers the most potential impact to coach and "course correct" during the sales process.

“

Due to past successes, high-performing sales reps tend to be the most overconfident in terms of forecasting.”



Myth
High sales
performers are
always more
aware in customer
interactions.

Effective seller understanding and evaluation must go well beyond customer problem identification and deal assessment to include customer meetings and interactions. That's because intermittent touch points and check-ins during the sales process have enormous impact on deal viability and health. More to the point, a lack of rep situational awareness can have devastating effects on a sale.

High-performing salespeople are typically more aware in customer interactions. But, this awareness often diminishes in reps who have recently been very successful because they tend to become overly confident.

Instead...



Reality

Reps who have recently been very successful often become overly confident, diminishing their situational awareness.

So, what influence can your managers have on your sellers' situational awareness—regardless of their place on the leaderboard? If your managers are very prescriptive in coaching discussions prior to client meetings, our research shows that your salespeople will have lower situational awareness. This is because they will essentially be going through a mental checklist about what to do and when and focusing less on what's unfolding in the room. As a result, they will have lower awareness about what is actually happening in their meeting, which will impact their perception of how it is going.

Key Takeaway

As a manager, you must take a collaborative approach with your reps. You must help them think through contingencies and possible alternatives to increase situational awareness in the actual meeting.

“The type of presentation used in these interactions also influences situational awareness. Interactive presentations—such as whiteboarding—increase situational awareness, while a more scripted approach decreases situational awareness.”



Myth

Differentiated
messaging should
focus on the core
product.

You need messaging that stands out for customers—regardless of the access point. So, you’ve probably done the hard work of attempting true marketplace differentiation. But, the next and harder step is pressure-testing your messages with your sellers in real client interactions.

If your customers rated your salesperson interactions, what do you think you’d learn about rep and messaging effectiveness? Moreover, how accurately do you think your salespeople would assess those interactions?

The latest research shows a startling disconnect...



Reality
Seller belief in the uniqueness of their presentation is wildly different from buyer perception.

Salespeople Said

50% of these interactions were unique to them and their offering—and included something customers care about.

Buyers Said

10% of the conversations contained content that they had not heard before and that they cared about.

According to buyers from 750 research meetings:

- 40% included information they viewed as important but not new.
- 35% included data they were hearing from other reps and they also deemed unimportant.
- 15% included data that was unique but unimportant or uninteresting.


Key Takeaway

So, what about that 10%? A full 100% of those meaningful interactions offered differentiation that had *nothing at all* to do with the core product being sold. Rather, differentiation for the customer was based on things like process, people and their expertise, and platforms.

And, the way reps presented their messaging mattered. More memorable interactions were rated as more and better differentiated. These interactions took many forms, and only shared the common trait of impact.

Want a deeper dive? Read the blog post!





VantagePoint is the only agile sales performance company delivering diagnostic-based training and consulting solutions—all grounded in the latest academic-led, agile sales research. The VantagePoint proprietary Agile Sales & Coaching Platform includes an agile diagnostic that identifies the behaviors and unique situations your sales managers and salespeople face in the customer's journey. Leveraging your company data, you will know the behaviors and strategies your high-performing managers and sellers use to win in each specific selling situation. With VantagePoint, you will equip all your managers and sellers to be situationally fluent, to execute each unique interaction in the buyer's journey like your top-performers. Our mission is your performance; we are VantagePoint Performance and we are agile to the core!

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The research in this ebook originated with the Florida State University Sales Institute.