

Follow the Leaders to Sales Training Success

Gary Braun and Mike Braun, Owners/Founders of Pivotal Advisors

ASTD Webinar Follow-Up Article

This is a follow-up article to a Webinar Pivotal Advisors presented as part of ASTD's Sales Training Drivers' Webcast Series. Instructions on accessing a replay of the Webinar, Training Adoption through Sales Leadership, can be found at the end of this article.

You might think a successful start to sales training begins with a room full of eager, well-prepped trainees. It might be a good start for the trainer, but a successful sales training program must begin with an entirely different audience: the sales manager.

That was one of the core messages of Pivotal Advisors' Webinar on Tuesday, November 10, and it's a topic near and dear to our mission. As we shared with attendees during The Training Adoption through Sales Leadership Webinar offered through ASTD's Sales Training Driver's live Webcast series, one of the reasons we founded Pivotal Advisors was due to the lack of results we saw from sales training as executives at both large and small organizations alike. Again and again, poor sales training results could be directly linked to either limited, or a lack of, sales manager participation. If managers aren't focused on training and its results, it's very hard to get employees to care and put lessons learned into practice. Attendees of the Webinar backed this point up by agreeing that the main reason their sales training had failed in the past was "no accountability from the sales manager."

Now let's be clear, our job here is not to give sales managers a bad name. In fact, we were sales managers for several years, and work with them every day. We want them to keep their good names and see that the \$56.3 billion that businesses spend in training each year goes farther and has greater bottom-line impact. The way to make that happen is to have sales training "follow the leader," who should be a fervent training aficionado and supporter. How do you do it? By integrating the sales manager into every phase of the sales training life cycle and giving him/her a performance management system that drives adoption.

Drive Adoption, Get Better Results from Your Sales Reps

For those of you unable to attend our Webinar and for those attendees wanting a review, here is Pivotal Advisors' advice for making sales managers enthusiastic and visible driving forces behind sales training success.

- **Sell the Manager by Underscoring the Benefits**

Before you even begin your first design planning session, you need to sell the manager on the bottom-line benefits of the training program. The front line sales manager is the most important person in the adoption of your training programs, as he/she provides coaching and accountability for its use on a daily basis. The manager needs to see how the training will lead to better performance, more sales opportunities, more sales closed, higher margins and a more intelligent, effective sales team. The great thing about great training is that it will make the sales manager's job easier because each team member will perform better.

- **Involve the Manager from Start to Finish**

If you want sales staff excited about training, make sure the boss has completely bought into it first. To ensure sales managers are promoters of the sales training system, materials and approach, involve him/her from the very start. Sales managers should be well integrated into all aspects of the sales training life cycle. From early design to training sessions to measurement, the more effort sales managers put into building and participating in the training program, the more knowledge and enthusiasm they will have for sharing it with sales teams and the more commitment they will get from their teams.

- **Have the Manager Train**

Sales managers have ascended to their roles because of their own sales talents. Put those skills to work for training's benefit by designing training segments for the manager to lead. By having the sales manager take on a role in the actual training, sales teams see their leader embracing the process and are more likely to understand the importance of adopting the new knowledge into their own sales processes. The team will also see the manager's commitment to the training and expectations of it, which should drive adoption by the team.

- **Integrate Training into Existing Systems**

Sales managers want and need simplicity when it comes to managing and monitoring their teams and performance. Likewise, sales reps want and need a documentation process that is streamlined with their existing practices. For this reason, sales training concepts should integrate into systems that are already in place instead of in a folder, binder or another tool. The better training works within the organization and its current sales processes and tools, the less the pushback will be from all involved.

- **Create and Use a Performance Management System**

To get a manager excited about sales training, show them a way to easily reinforce the training concepts and measure results. Whether the performance management system you use is a set of simple checklists or a sophisticated technology solution, measurement and accountability are the keys to driving adoption, increasing performance and showing the value of training.

If your company does not have a training performance management system in place, now is the time to implement one, be it simple or complex. Without a system for consistently reinforcing the concepts taught in training, concepts will be lost and reps will revert to their old habits. Develop a few simple tools to optimize training for greater business results.

As we said in our Webinar, leadership doesn't take a break when training begins!

Today's sales managers must take a proactive, front-and-center role in the sales training process in order to get the sales team performance increases they expect. If you would like to hear our full Webinar on this topic, which includes a case study covering the impressive results a \$500M business services firm has realized by following the suggestions outlined above, a complete playback* is available.

*To hear a replay of the November 10, 2009, Pivotal Advisors Webinar, visit <http://www.salestrainingdrivers.org/webcasts.aspx>. Please scroll down and select the On-Demand Archived Webcast titled, **Driving Training Adoption through Sales Leadership: Getting training to stick through the sales leader's Performance Management System.**

Pivotal Advisors, LLC is a national sales improvement firm dedicated to helping companies drive sales performance through the development of their sales management. Sales leaders that follow best practices for managing their teams outperform their peers consistently generating 17% more revenue with 22% more of their team members on plan. We provide leaders the knowledge, processes and tools they need to implement these best practices.

Pivotal Advisors has worked with multiple companies to implement systems that drive outstanding results. The results have been increased activity levels, higher win percentages and a much more structured organized and intentional way of doing business – with the ultimate results being increased sales and profitability.