

## Strategic Sales Training - Interviewing and Selecting Training Companies

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Our previous article laid out sample components of a solid sales training program and how to rollout the program to your staff. This article takes into consideration that you may have decided to outsource this function to a company with expertise in writing and facilitating sales training programs.

As we discussed, sales training is a critical component to the success of your overall sales initiative. It is not something that should be shortcut.

However, once you start researching all the sales training programs out there, you may become overwhelmed and find it difficult to choose which program best meets your needs.

With that in mind, here is a list of considerations for interviewing and selecting training companies:

1. **Don't do standard! Standard sales training only works when you are trying to address an existing skill weakness (or two) in your staff.** It is not for a company like yours that has just gone through all of this strategy and staffing work to arrive at a custom plan. Your training – assuming you are developing your program from the beginning of these articles – must be customized to your program. Otherwise, the training will be disjointed from the plan, which will cause confusion in your team and lead to execution problems.
2. **Do your research.** Seek recommendations from your peers regarding companies they have used or have heard of. Search the web for custom training companies. Create a list of potential candidates from which to choose.
3. **Make contact and pay attention to how the training company “sells” you.** Communicate your needs (refer to previous article). How do they respond? If they do a poor job of follow up, do not ask good questions to understand your needs, do not effectively communicate or sell to you, their program is probably just as weak – so stay away!
4. **Ask for sample work product, testimonials, case studies, and references.** Read all of these and formulate questions. As far as references, call a couple before your first meeting, save the rest for final checks.
5. **Involve your staff where applicable.** Perhaps during the initial meeting, but perhaps not when fees are being discussed. Involving your staff with the selection will make them feel part of the process and increase the likelihood of their acceptance of the company and its material when it comes time to rollout the training program.
6. **Fully understand the training company's process and fee structure.** If its process for customization and facilitation does not make sense to you or is difficult to understand, its material will probably reflect this will cause issues with acceptance and implementation by your staff.
7. **Make sure the training program is interactive.** Many training companies espouse wonderful ivory tower tomes from their lecterns. This training is sure to fail. Make sure

there are ample interactive activities with the staff, such as discussion points, breakout group exercises, action plan development, role-plays etc. This greatly aids retention.

8. **Make sure there is a component of the program that helps train you or a member of your staff to facilitate the program on your own after the training company is gone.** You do not want to create a scenario where the material is not yours and you cannot facilitate future trainings on your own. Never allow yourself to be held hostage!
9. **Most importantly, if the training company does not have a plan for reinforcing the training program once it is rolled out – run!** A goal of training is to create habits...the habits one will need to execute each day to execute the sales strategy. Habits are not built with a singular training rollout. EVER! Whatever training program you choose, make sure there is a reinforcement component that has a proven system to ensure retention and live field execution.
10. **Conduct your final reference check and make sure everything tics and ties.** If you need more names, ask for them. Create a list of questions to ask those you talk to. The questions should surround the points listed in this outline. For example, *Please tell me about the reinforcement program XYZ Training Company used with your firm. How did it work? Was it successful? What needs to be improved? What should I watch out for or consider?* etc.

We will delve further into this concept of proper reinforcement in the next article. For now, however, if you follow the ten points above, you will be well on your way to making an informed and strategic decision with respect to who you choose for the all-important training of your staff.

Until next time...

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