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INSPIRE LEADERSHIP:

Creating lasting behavior change

Investing in training that doesn't produce lasting behavior change is a waste of money. Follow these steps to make sure this doesn't happen to you.

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For most businesses, salespeople represent a large investment. Is that investment returning value to your business? A significant gap between what it could be producing and what it is producing represents potential that could generate double-digit improvements in sales and profitability within a year. Achieving a high return requires carefully planning and managing your investment in employees to create lasting behavior changes.

Appraising the Situation

Ask yourself the following:

- Are you seeing the behavior changes you've asked for?
- Are training sessions received with enthusiasm or reserved skepticism?
- Are your development goals for the sales team focused on general sales knowledge or specific behaviors?
- Do you view training as an event with a beginning and end or as one step in a process of change?
- Do your training and development efforts focus on skill transfer or on strengthening motivation?
- What responsibility do managers accept in continuously upgrading sales associate performance?
- Following your last training program, did you change your feedback and reward systems?

Best Practices

Here are the critical steps in creating lasting behavior change:

Start with a “process” perspective. Permanent behavior change requires designing and embracing an ongoing process, not a one-time training event. Training by itself typically creates only transitory change.

Establish an inclusive set of goals. Objectives like “improving closing ratios” or “reducing the size of discounts” are necessary but not sufficient. Permanent behavior change requires behavioral and motivational goals. Begin by identifying specific behaviors that will distinguish your brand in the marketplace. Next, consider the skills needed to execute these behaviors. Finally, what changes in workforce motivation are required to ensure that the behaviors occur? Once you have an inclusive set of goals composed of brand-building behaviors, requisite skills, and motivational imperatives, you're ready to make a high-return investment in your people.

Don't just teach—motivate. There are two reasons behaviors don't change: Employees “can't” and employees “won't.” You need to deal with both. This involves analyzing on both a group and an

individual level what the skill and motivational barriers are to change. Make sure training and ongoing coaching address both issues.

Get managers involved early. On the motivational side, managers are in the best position to communicate the need for and value of change, as well as their personal expectations for change. For effective skill development, they should model the proper behaviors, provide feedback, and coach employees during skill acquisition. Their feedback needs to focus not only on outcomes (e.g., are sales improving?) but also on whether the correct new behaviors are occurring (e.g., how frequently is each sales associate making an up-sell recommendation to customers?). To ensure lasting change, managers must prepare employees for change well before training begins and stay involved long after it ends.

Employ behavior-based training. Knowledge acquisition through lectures is not enough. To ensure behavior change, training must involve lots of role-play, on-the-job application, and mentoring.

Align your organizational systems and processes.

Rewarding old behaviors while expecting new ones is madness. As part of any workforce investments, review and adjust your hiring and selection practices, your performance evaluation process, and how you recognize and reward employees.

In summary, to maximize your investment in people, identify the specific behaviors that will drive sales and build the brand, hire people who can learn the behaviors, teach them what they need to know, provide feedback and coaching, and motivate behavior through appropriate rewards.

About Shanker Inc.

Martin Shanker is the founder and president of Shanker Inc., a Manhattan-based international management consulting firm for such companies as Burberry, Cartier, The Estee Lauder Companies, Ralph Lauren and Van Cleef & Arpels. Described as a 'behaviorist' by The New York Times, Martin specializes in helping global brands accelerate sales and profit by growing their companies from within. By addressing the tough issues of sales and management teams, and the behavioral dimension of retail relationships, Shanker Inc. offers a unique, multi-dimensional way for companies to achieve success through their own people.

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