

Sales Force Tune-Up: Building Sales in a Down Economy

Improve Sales Performance with Competency Models

So, we're in what economists call "The Great Disruption" and you're trying to figure out how to improve your sales training programs so they'll produce more measurable results. Bottom line: Your sales force needs to deliver new sales, quickly. If they don't, training budgets will be decreased or cut all together. The answer: It's not simply a new training course; it's a new training approach.

Organizations need to know what skills their sales people possess, what skills they lack and to what degree. By taking the time to catalog these skills, identify which ones are most critical to success, and deliver more highly focused training, organizations can make dramatic performance improvements in weeks, not months.

The first step to improve your under-achievers' results is to identify the most critical skills that are producing sales for your top performers. A few examples might be product knowledge, relationship building, communication, and project management. Consider the most obvious skills but don't forget secondary skills like organization and punctuality which can also play a big role in a sales person's ability to generate revenue.

Next, define these skills in as much detail as possible since everyone will have their own ideas of what each skill means (several sample skills and definitions appear later in this paper as a reference). Once you've defined these skills, develop several assessment questions that will assess each person's level of proficiency for each skill. It is typical to use a 5-point rating scale with 1 meaning little or no proficiency and 5 meaning complete proficiency. Self-assessments are a good way to get a general sense of someone's skill proficiency. You may also decide to have that sales person's manager complete assessments on their team members, and weight the results to come up with a final proficiency level. In most cases, the more assessments done on a single

(continued on reverse)



Different Types of Sales Competency Model Skills to Consider

Defining Key Workforce Skills

Professional Skills

Sales professionals need skills that include greater resilience and resourcefulness, as well as improved inquiry and influence skills.

Leadership Skills

Sales leaders need to become greater coaches and situational leaders, and need to help their sales force create and execute their development plans.

Occupational Skills

Sales professionals need to be up-to-date with product knowledge and have an increased awareness of how to go about crafting creative solutions as their customers' needs change with the economy.

Improve Sales Performance with Competency Models continued...

individual and combined for an average rating, the better that rating will describe the employee's actual proficiency level, as long as the peers completing the assessments work relatively closely with the employee.

Now that you've identified the critical sales skills, defined what they mean, and developed assessment questions, you're ready to evaluate the sales force against your sales competency model to determine the skills that your weaker sales people are lacking. Once identified, provide the training that is needed to those in need. Many organizations are surprised by the results of these exercises and find that they have been spending money year after year on training initiatives that don't address the largest skill gaps.

With this type of system in place, you can assess the skills, analyze the results, and act upon the deficiencies. That may mean cutting redundant training and adopting new programs. It may mean shifting additional focus on a few select employees. It may mean creating new internal policy training content to help speed up the onboarding process for all new sales hires. Whatever the decisions may be, you can now clearly identify why you're making them, how critical the needs are, and after-the-fact, whether you received an acceptable return on your training investment.

The idea of developing skill profiles based on specific job roles is central to the core methodology of Competency Management. More specifically, a competency model defines the specific skills that an employee needs to be successful at their job role. It is Avilar's strong belief that by implementing a competency management program and using it as the foundation for all employee development and training activities, organizations can optimize the performance of their workforce while maximizing the return on their training investment.

ABOUT AVILAR, INC.

Avilar, Inc., The Competency Company™, is a leader in web-based competency management and learning solutions for corporations and government organizations. With its Smart, Strategic and Proactive™ solutions, Avilar offers a competency-based approach to workforce development. Formed in 1997, Avilar was a pioneer with its award-winning WebMentor LMS. In 2006 it continues to be a leading innovator with WebMentor Skills™, its web-based competency management solution. As recipient of the "Excellence in E-Learning for Customer Satisfaction" award from Brandon Hall and E-Learning Magazine, and Avilar's ranking as a top "Price-to-Value" provider by Training Magazine, Avilar has built itself on the basis of superior customer service and highly adaptable product design. In addition, Avilar consultants are recognized as industry thought leaders and have decades of experience in implementation and analysis. Visit www.Avilar.com for more information.

Additional Competency Model Applications

- Succession Planning
- Targeted Training
- Total Quality Management
- Certifications
- Staffing
- Career Development
- Project Team Building
- Reorganization

Sales Competency Model Excerpt

Skill Set: Sales Skills

Competency: Sales Management

Skill Sales Closing & Agreements

Definition Evaluates when and how to ask for the sale. Identifies common buyer anxieties and techniques for addressing them. Identifies when and how to develop special deals and non-standard sales agreements.

Skill Tunes-in to Customer

Definition Observes customer to pick up verbal and non-verbal signs to indicate interest. Asks questions to confirm assumptions about customer reaction. Listens and responds to real meaning in customer questions and comments.