

INTEGRATING PROVEN SCIENCE AND SALES

There is an unsettling trend occurring in the profession of sales. Surveys indicate that a staggering 38% – 49% of all sales people do not make quota every year.^{1 2 3} Stop for a moment and ponder the severity of this issue. Roughly 4 – 5 out of every 10 professional sales people fail to meet the standard that their company has placed upon them. This lack of sales is not merely a problem, it has become an epidemic!

The reason that sales people are consistently underperforming is because they have not been equipped to succeed. Research from within the sales training industry has identified that an alarming 85% - 90% of all sales training has no positive impact beyond 120 days.^{4 5} This grim reality has been corroborated by additional research which has shown that the vast majority of training has only a honeymoon effect and does not impact long term behavior.^{6 7 8} Behavioral scientists Douglas Detterman and Robert Sternberg echo this assertion as their research confirmed that most training makes little difference in workers' job performance.⁹

Modern sales training is horribly ineffective at equipping sales people with the knowledge, beliefs and skills to be productive. Frequently, when sales people lose business it is not due to the inferiority of their product or service, but to their inferior sales ability. Research has shown that sales people often behave in ways that obstruct their prospects from buying. For example, a research study which analyzed the behavior of sales people and the results those behaviors produce concluded, “CEOs are investing more than ever in their sales forces, but results aren't improving. To understand this disconnect, we observed 800 sales professionals in live sales meetings... a mere 37% of salespeople — were consistently effective. What's more, some of the behaviors of the remaining 63% actually drove down performance.”¹⁰

The ineffectiveness of sales training is a catastrophic problem because selling is not innate skill, but one that must be learned. The quality of sales training a sales person receives will ultimately dictate how successful he or she becomes.

Selling Becomes a Proven Science

The reason that modern sales training is so inept is because it blatantly ignores and often conflicts with proven science. Most sales people are surprised to learn that within the last few decades there have been thousands of scientific studies focused on obtaining an exact understanding of the causal factors that create and enable influence. Through this mountain of scholarly research scientists have identified the measurable and repeatable principles that govern human behavior. Now to be sure, human beings are dynamic, but they are also predictable. It is rare that the cause of a human behavior cannot be explained by behavioral scientists. This has transformed the process of influencing others from an art to a proven science.

As behavioral scientists Douglas Kenrick, Noah Goldstein and Sanford Braver affirm:

For well over 50 years, researchers have been applying a rigorous scientific approach to the question of which messages most successfully lead people to concede, comply, or change. Scientists have long employed a set of systematic procedures for discovering and replicating findings, including persuasion findings. As a consequence, the study of persuasion no longer exists only as an ethereal art. It is now a science that can reproduce its results. What is more, whoever engages in the scientific process can reproduce its results. Brilliant, inspired individuals are no longer necessary to divine the truth about persuasions, for a compelling new reason: The power of discovery doesn't reside, Socrates-style, inside the minds of a few persuasive geniuses anymore but inside the scientific process.¹¹

This proven science of influence is extremely relevant to the profession of selling because influence is the foundation of selling. If you deconstruct the productive activities that sales people engage in (such as pre-call planning, discovering prospect needs, presenting product or service and closing the sale) you will quickly realize that each is done for the purpose of positively influence prospects.

Influence is essential in selling because it is what inspires others to take an idea seriously and act upon it. Information alone will rarely persuade a person to act. What moves people is not mere information, but how that information is presented. The necessity of relational influence within the context of selling is the very reason why sales people are needed. For instance, surveys which have examined the buying behaviors of over 100,000 prospects have revealed that often a decision to purchase is based not on the features, quality or even price of a product or service, but upon the sales person.¹²

As relevant as this proven science is to success in selling, often sales people are taught sales strategies and tactics that actually clash with how human beings are wired to be influenced. This has caused many sales to be lost because when sales people violate the proven science of influence their ability to sell is severely diminished.

Science vs. Proven Science

There is frequently confusion over the fact that modern sales training opposes proven science because the idea of selling with science has been touted for over 100 years. For instance, one of the first books on selling to have the word science in its title was Arthur Fredrick Sheldon's *The Science of Successful Salesmanship*.¹³ This book was circulated in 1904 and was used as a textbook for courses on selling. One year earlier, Frank Dukesmith published the magazine *Salesmanship* which stated that it was "devoted to advancing the science of salesmanship in its relation to the art of selling."¹⁴ Charles Wilson Hoyt penned a popular book on sales management titled, *Scientific Sales Management: A Practical Application of the Principles of Scientific Management to Selling*.¹⁵ In his book, Hoyt referred to science as "standardizing... the salesman's talk, his manner or approach, etc..."¹⁶

Though it is true that there are many books and magazines that deal with science and selling, it is important to understand what they mean by the term “science.” It is essential to grasp that when the previously cited books and magazines, as well as modern day books and magazines devoted to the topic of selling, use the term science they are referring to the quantification and systemization of selling activities. Each is proclaiming that certain activities, executed in a particular order, will assist sales people in generating sales. This idea is demonstrated by the fact that every sales process has steps that sales people are told to follow, with the hope that the steps will guide sales people in achieving more sales.

However, what none of the books or magazines that reference science and sales offer is proof. This is why at my firm, the Hoffeld Group, we use the term, “proven science.” We want to distinguish between the old ways the term science has been used with the current way it is being used within the scientific community. By proven science we do not mean an opinion based, systemized way of selling. Proven science denotes concepts that have been verified through vigorous, scholarly research. As behavioral scientist David G. Myers writes, “A scientific theory explains through an integrated set of principles that organizes observations and predicts behaviors or events.”¹⁷ Scientists do not debate core scientific principles. There is consensus as to what is known and what is not known.

This is what makes this proven science so powerful. It is true. Truth is the discovery of reality. Because of proven science, no longer must sales people stumble along hoping that they can guess their way to success. Now sales, like almost every other discipline, can be guided by proven science. No one would consider treating a deadly disease or launching a space shuttle into space without the guide of scientific research. Likewise, one cannot expect to effectively sell without leveraging proven science.

Selling is a noble and necessary activity that is a mission critical endeavor for every organization. I believe that those in the profession of sales deserve to know about the proven science that has the power to enhance their ability to sell. I also believe that selling is too important to be based upon anything other than proven science.

This is why I created the Hoffeld Group. The Hoffeld Group is a research based sales training, coaching and consulting firm that is the leader in the integration of proven science and sales. We study the scientific disciplines of social psychology, communication theory, cognitive psychology, cognitive neuroscience, social neuroscience and behavioral economics. We then take the repeatable and predictable principles, which science has proven create and enable influence, out of the laboratory and academic journals and apply it to selling. The results our clients achieve are amazingly consistent. Sales production increases, market share grows and sometimes businesses and careers are even reborn. In short, when sales people sell with proven science, their interactions are enriched and so is their effectiveness.

About the Author

David Hoffeld is CEO of the Hoffeld Group, a research based sales training, coaching and consulting firm that is the leader in the integration of proven science and sales. The Hoffeld Group takes the repeatable and predictable principles, which science has proven to create and enable influence, out of the laboratory and academic journals and apply them to selling. For a deeper look at the Hoffeld Group's groundbreaking research and innovative sales strategies visit HoffeldGroup.com.

Notes

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