Best Practices for Making Training Sticky

When your team completes a training experience, how do you ensure that they use, apply and adopt what they just learned? How can you achieve your training objectives if the training isn't sticky?

Getting adults to change their behavior is one of the most difficult things to do. Unfortunately, there's no single silver bullet. But there are common characteristics of organizations that have been successful. What we share in this white paper are best practices for making training sticky based on thousands of training engagements.

ValueSelling Associates™

WHAT'S AT STAKE WHEN TRAINING FAILS?

According to Deloitte, over $130 billion is spent on training worldwide, including funds allocated to outside vendors, corporate universities, and travel budgets to send valued employees off-site. It's a huge investment that corporations around the globe are making. And close to half of the spend is US-based. So are you getting a return on your investment?

Training fails because people don't change their behavior. There is a tendency for corporate training, and sales training in particular, to emphasize knowledge acquisition—"what" people should do. At ValueSelling, we tailor our training workshops, coaching and reinforcement on "how" to develop sales skills and incorporate those new behaviors into existing processes.

There is a tendency for sales training to emphasize knowledge acquisition versus skills competency—"what" people should do rather than "how" to do it.

COMMON REASONS TRAINING FAILS

Often, people think of training as an event, not a process. Numerous people are sent to training. They return inspired. But they haven't practiced or developed skills to increase their proficiency and competence. And their managers don't have the time, accountability or coaching skills to support the new behaviors. Because of this lack of management support, sales training will not thrive and learning will cease.

Some common reasons that training fails include:

1. Failure to align sales training with the strategic objectives of the organization
2. Sales training is too generic and irrelevant to industry trends or business reality
3. Training is complicated and theoretical versus practical and pragmatic
4. Lack of management buy-in and accountability
5. Poor integration with existing processes and tools, such as CRM
6. Little or no ongoing reinforcement
7. No measurement of success indicators

Consider your employee-learners as internal customers who must stay engaged over the course of their tenure. High-performing sales organizations spend more on training than average. This investment pays off by increasing each team member's productivity, especially given that most companies are challenged to hire and retain seasoned sales professionals.

Bersin by Deloitte reports that organizations must adopt a continuous learning model, which addresses the near-term and long-term through immediate performance improvements, increased competency in the current role, and skills development for career growth.

ORGANIZATIONS WITH

↑ 90% quota attainment spend **$3,390** average

↓ 90% quota attainment spend **$1,250** average

on training and development per sales headcount

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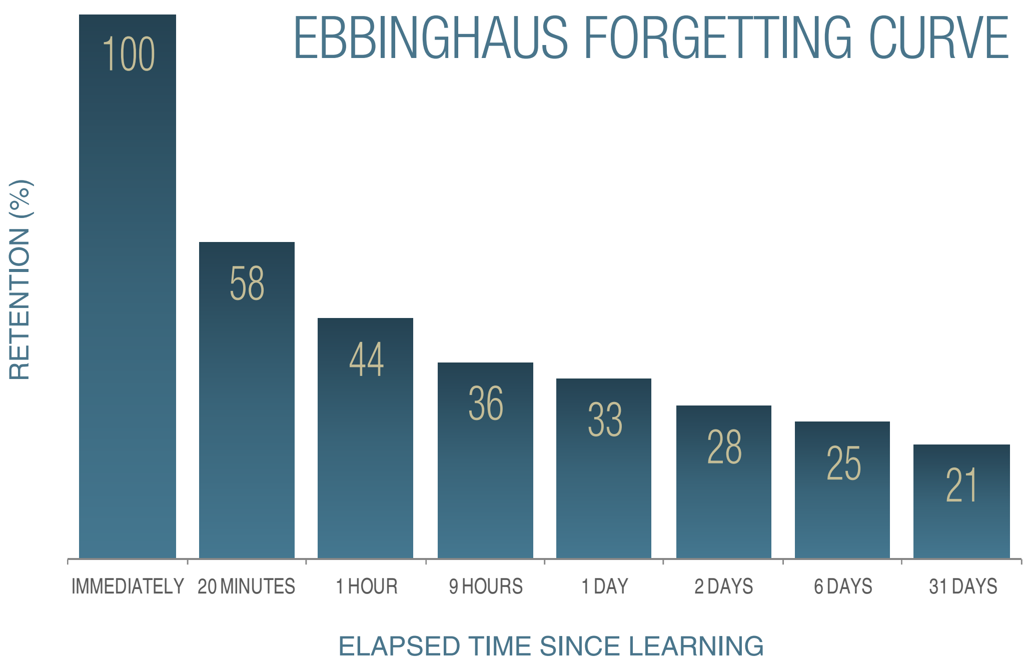
The Forgetting Curve

Hermann Ebbinhaus, a German psychologist and pioneer in studying human memory discovered that information we acquire is forgotten—within days or weeks—if not revisited. He called it the “forgetting curve.”



The reality is, 9 out of 10 sales training initiatives have no lasting impact because of the Forgetting Curve. Our challenge is to minimize this naturally occurring phenomenon.

Critical Success Factors

There are four critical success factors to enhance continuous learning and training stickiness: involve the entire team, present easy-to-understand concepts, ensure a change management process, and coach and reinforce with managers.

1. **Involve everyone.** To get systemic impact and results, everyone in the organization needs to be involved in shaping what the training is, how it will be implemented, and why the training is taking place. When organizations train selectively (only the sales team or the customer service reps), they have a difficult time showing organizational results.

   We've seen the best success when the sales (outside, inside, channel), marketing, and product teams are all trained on the same methodology. In those instances, marketing provides the right sales materials, the product team understands the solutions that buyers want, and the sales team continually learns from one another, all because they are using a common language.

2. **Keep it simple.** To adopt a new habit, it's got to be simple and straight-forward. The more complex a new habit or process is, the more it will tend to collapse under its own weight. Many times, you'll hear the "Yeah, but" syndrome. Sales reps will say, "Yeah, I can see how that will work for major accounts, but it won't work for me because I call on small and medium businesses."

   The willingness for people to change is critical in driving adoption. By making the new habit simple, you increase the likelihood that change will happen.

3. **Include a change management process.** Create a comprehensive implementation plan and change management process. If you want your organization to change behavior, training always plays a role. But, unfortunately, change management is not always part of a training rollout.

   To increase the stickiness of what your team is learning, look for training that takes a change management approach with these three key elements:

a. **Preparation & Alignment.** While you receive proprietary core content in any given training, the training facilitator should be familiar with your industry and terminology, and be prepared to apply the methodology to your company and your target buyers.

One size doesn't fit all. It's the job of a trainer to make the core content applicable to your business, within the context of the way your team works. If the content isn't relevant, then the participants will be checked out from the first slide and they won't bother to retain any of the information.

Another part of customization is integrating the salient points into your existing processes, including forecasting, CRM, onboarding, and reward system. By aligning to existing processes, you make it easy for your team to adopt the training because it's part of their daily habits.

b. **Execution.** Any training rollout needs to accommodate various learning styles. To attack the Forgetting Curve, you need to present content over time, in multiple ways. Thus, most training companies offer blended learning.

Adult learning principles show that learners are most effective when they learn by doing. They need to know "what to do," but more important, they need to know "how to do it."

As it relates to sales training, be sure to ask these types of questions:

- *Can we observe them* making a sales call in the workshop?
- *Can we coach them* as they make sales calls on a daily basis? Managers must observe sales executives in the field, on the phone, in the real world, making sales calls.
- *How does this change make a difference?* The only reason to conduct training in a corporate environment is because you expect it will make a difference in performance.

Consider a continuum of learning that includes pre-work, workshop and reinforcement. For example, on-demand courses give each person a familiarity with terms and expedites the absorption of information. Build on that foundational knowledge in the workshop. And afterwards, provide reinforcement tools and consulting.

Again, all these materials must be customized and designed to reflect your real world situation.

c. **Transfer of Ownership and Measurement.** At the end of training, your training vendor should set you up to be self-sufficient, because that's when the real work begins. Look for a smooth hand-off, reinforcement tools, and managerial coaching.

Embed the new processes into the sales manager's routine: deal reviews, forecasting, incentive schemes. By integrating the new sales methodology throughout your existing processes, you'll see greater behavior changes.

A best practice for measurement and driving adoption is measuring leading versus lagging indicators. Leading indicators are the behaviors that lead to results.

For example, "Are we adequately qualifying our pipelines?" The better your sales reps are in managing the dead weight out of their pipeline and rigorously applying a qualification process, the better their win rate. You want a pipeline that's more efficient, which yields more quality deals. According to SiriusDecisions Benchmark Index, the highest performing reps had a lower pipeline-to-quota ratio, but they achieved a higher win rate by focusing on real deals.

> "Organizations that manage a 3x or lower sales pipeline to quota ratio out-perform—by 32 percent—those that manage a 4x or higher sales pipeline to quota ratio."
>
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4. **Coach and reinforce with managers.** The Sales Executive Council reported that managers who received 3 hours of coaching per month performed 15% to 17% better than their peers. By combining training and coaching, they improved productivity by 88%. And improving coaching programs increased revenue by 19%.

   - Are your managers ready to coach and reinforce the new behaviors?
   - Are there specific expectations and inspections that managers will be doing as part of the follow up to training?
   - Do your managers know how to tactically assess behavior?
   - Do they know how to provide positive and constructive feedback?

   To make training sticky, your management team may require coaching and reinforcement. Their job is not to tell a rep everything they're doing wrong. It's to tell a rep what they're doing well and how they can improve. We believe that as you build a rep's selling skills competence, you'll build their confidence.

We started by saying there wasn't one specific silver bullet. But if there was, it would be the first line sales managers. The more they show leadership, giving their team reasons to adopt the new behavior and demonstrating how to do so, the stickier your training will be.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COACHING

- **3 hours** of coaching per month perform **15% to 17%** better than their peers
- Combining training and coaching **improves productivity by 88%**
- Improving coaching programs **increases revenue by 19%**

SALES EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

> "Being an effective coach requires a different skill set than being an effective manager. A coach observes, provides feedback, role models and motivates. The more time spent coaching a sales team, the faster they'll improve their performance."

JULIE A. THOMAS, President & CEO, ValueSelling Associates

IN SUMMARY

How will you know that your training investment has been worth it? Put a stake in the ground. Identify what to measure. Establish a baseline. And continue measuring going forward.

Design the training around your employee-learner audience so it's relevant and engaging. Training works well when there's a skill gap that you want to close. Make participants prove they understand the concepts.

Train your managers first. Have them in the workshop with their teams, coaching on-the-spot, and improving their performance and their team's performance at the same time. Because if managers aren't being trained on the same thing, they won't be able to coach their teams. They have to support and role model the behaviors you want to see.

We spend so much time thinking about the training event. Spend just as much time pre-planning and after the workshop to ensure your sales training is delivering the results you need.

For more information on this topic or to learn about the ValueSelling Framework® sales methodology, contact Julie Thomas, President and CEO of ValueSelling Associates at julie.thomas@valueselling.com or +1 800.559.6419.

About ValueSelling Associates

ValueSelling Associates™ is the creator of the ValueSelling Framework®, the first and only methodology with a toolset integrated throughout the entire sales lifecycle. Thousands of sales professionals around the world have adopted the ValueSelling Framework to better qualify prospects, advance bigger contracts and close deals faster. We tailor our training, coaching and consulting so it's relevant to your business, engaging for your teams and localized to your region. The ValueSelling Framework gives you a proven formula for accelerating your sales results. For more information, visit valueselling.com.