



The Current State of Sales Rep Onboarding and Enablement

SELLING POWER EDITORS



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Introduction: The Value of Onboarding

Recently, Selling Power and Janek Performance Group conducted research to uncover the challenges – from the perspectives of both sales leaders and sales reps – related to onboarding and sales enablement.

WHY A SURVEY ABOUT ONBOARDING?

Every sales leader wants to find the best, quickest path to sales productivity, especially for their new hires. In fact, you might say sales productivity is an obsession for good sales leaders.

Consider, for example, the hundreds of tools available to help boost sales productivity: Sales Hacker recently rounded up a listing of more than **800 sales technology vendors**, in nearly 40 categories – a 15% jump from 2017.

While productivity tools hold great value for sales teams, no amount of technology will help boost productivity if your sales organization is built on a shaky foundation. This is precisely where onboarding best practices come into focus.

The costs of neglecting your onboarding process are very real. Research reveals the following:

- It typically takes more than one year (381 days) for new salespeople to achieve the “same performance level as tenured sales reps” ([Training Industry Magazine](#)).
- The average time to replace a hire ranges between 3.69 months for inside sales reps and 5.42 months for field sales reps ([DePaul University Sales Effectiveness Report](#), 2015-2016).
- The average cost to replace a salesperson is \$97,690 ([DePaul University Sales Effectiveness Report](#), 2015-2016).

Great sales leaders understand best practices related to onboarding tend to yield a wide variety of benefits, including speeding salespeople to productivity quickly, building solid bonds between reps and the company, reducing turnover, and motivating salespeople to work hard and succeed.

This is exactly why we surveyed sales managers and salespeople, to: 1) get a clear snapshot of the current state of onboarding and enablement, and 2) explore ways we can help sales leaders improve their approach to onboarding.

HIGH-LEVEL FINDINGS: FORMAL ONBOARDING PROGRAMS ARE KEY TO SUCCESS

Our survey results showed good onboarding is a key component of running a highly successful sales organization. When sales leaders can train new sales reps quickly and get them up to maximum productivity, their time-to-revenue shrinks dramatically. At a high level, the survey found the following:

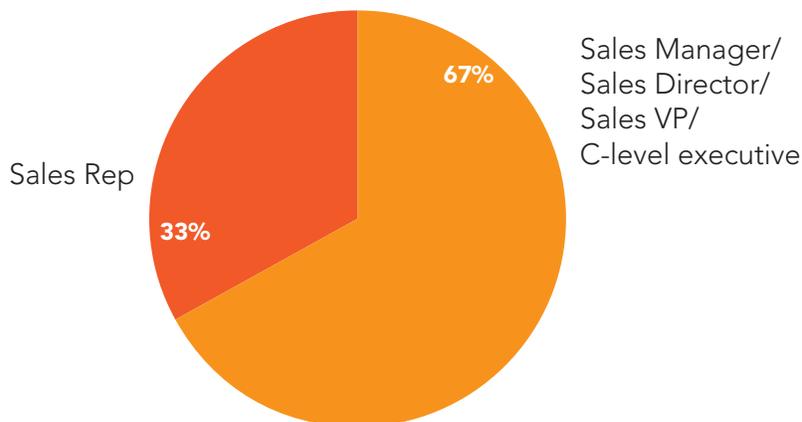
- A formal onboarding program produces sales reps who reach full productivity much faster.
- Sales reps and sales managers tend to express different opinions about which onboarding components are most effective.
- Companies with a formal onboarding program tend to spend more time mentoring and coaching sales reps after the initial onboarding program has ended.

The results of our survey shed valuable light on some practical steps sales leaders can take to benchmark onboarding success and more quickly achieve higher productivity and revenue from new reps.

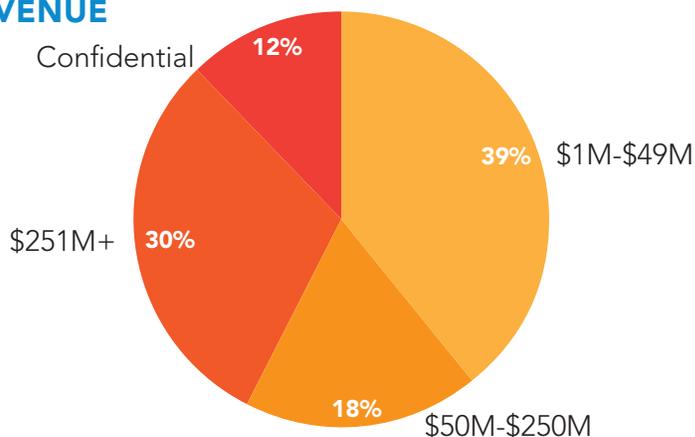
SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographic information on survey participants is as follows:

JOB TITLES



COMPANY REVENUE



SECTION I: ONBOARDING BASICS

The Connection between a Formal Onboarding Process and Sales Productivity

For companies **with a formal onboarding process**, survey participants indicated:

- 60.7% of reps reached full productivity within the first 6 months
- 85% of reps reached full productivity within the first 11 months

For companies **without a formal onboarding process**, survey participants indicated:

- 42.8% of reps reached full productivity within the first 6 months
- 67.8% of reps reached full productivity within the first 11 months

Analysis

What are your metrics related to the productivity of new hires? Do you have any established standards or expectations about their performance six to 12 months after they've joined your team?

The results of our survey show companies with formal onboarding programs show far more reps achieve full productivity in their first six to 12 months of employment.

If your sales cycle is about average (six to nine months), a sales rep could be on your payroll for three or four quarters before you see hard evidence that he or she probably isn't going to perform well. At that point, you will have paid that rep nearly a full year's salary. If the rep quits or you have to fire him or her, you're out significant costs and time; plus, you'll be back to square one in terms of hiring.

Yes, you can hire reps, not onboard them properly, and see 67.8% of them achieve full productivity within 11 months. But think of how much more competitive your sales team would be if you could bump that number up to 85%.

If you don't currently have an onboarding program, ask your frontline managers to give you a report six months after all new hires come to your company, and see what their level of productivity is. If many of your new hires consistently fail to meet standards six months in, onboarding is an area you need to prioritize.

SECTION II: COMMON ONBOARDING COMPONENTS AND CONTENT TYPES

Most common components of the onboarding process:

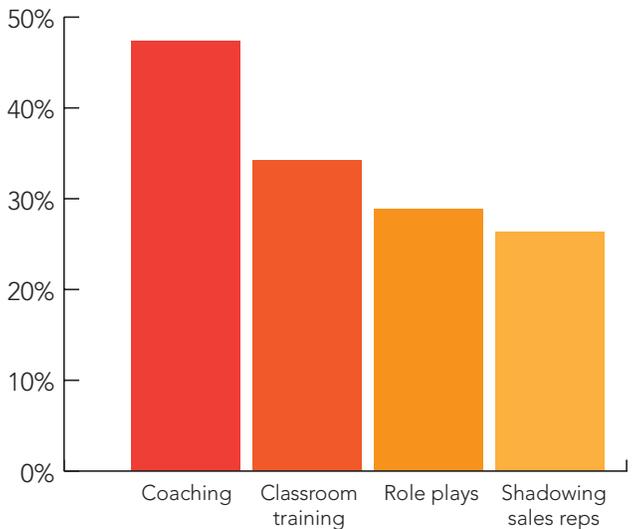
Coaching	64%
Classroom training	60%
Mentoring	59%
Meetings with senior executives or leadership team	54%
Weekly calls	53%
Shadowing sales reps	52%

Most common subjects and content types that were included in a company's onboarding curriculum:

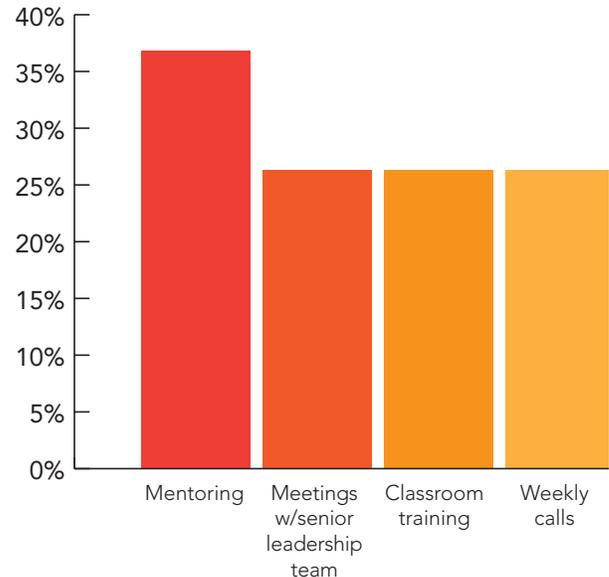
Product training	83%
Sales process	67%
Skills training	48%
Pricing and discounts	48%

Most Effective Components of an Onboarding Curriculum

Sales Manager Responses



Sales Rep Responses



Analysis

Both sales managers and salespeople agree classroom training is an effective component to a successful onboarding program. Reps prioritize mentoring, meetings with executives, and weekly calls. These results suggest a strong need for sales leaders to offer mentorship after onboarding and training.

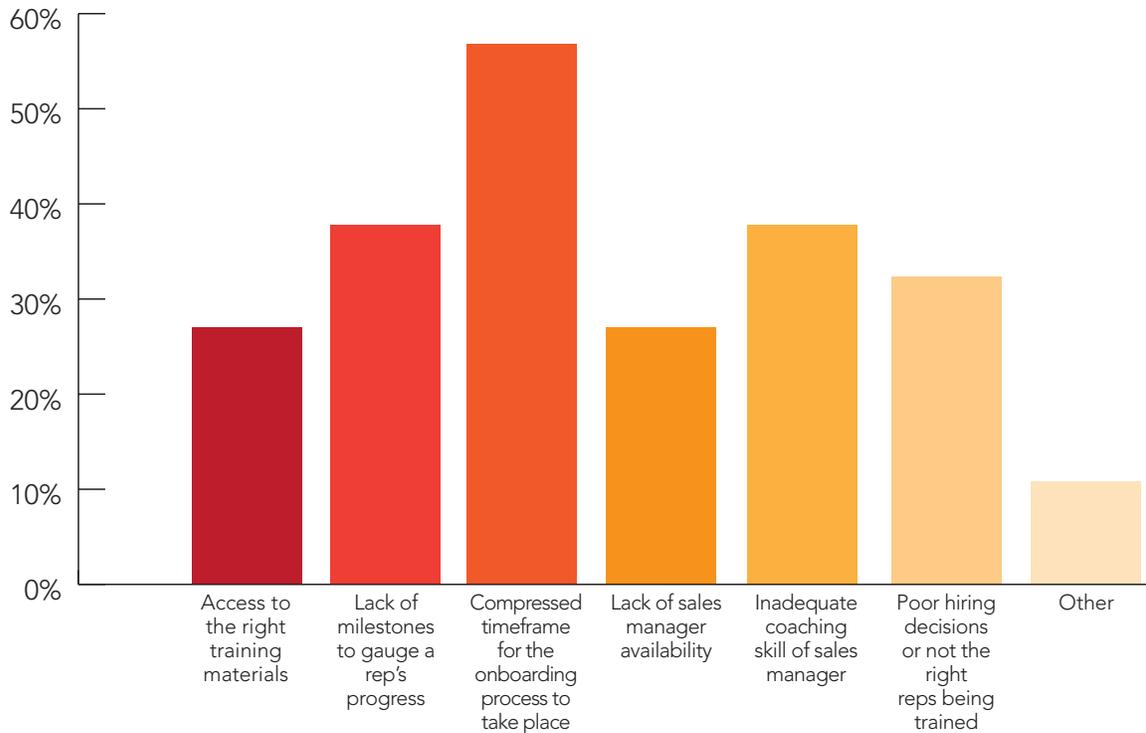
The reality is, despite the mutual agreement on the importance of classroom training and its seemingly high adoption rate, just over 50% of the organizations we surveyed even have a formal onboarding process – meaning just 30% of businesses utilize classroom training as part of a formal onboarding process. That represents a major missed opportunity for facilitating sales reps' acclimation and success. Although it's often tempting to quickly get new hires out into the field, it actually makes more sense to pause and take time to get salespeople into a classroom so they can start learning the skills that will allow them to shine when they do get in front of prospects and customers.

While we're not surprised to see that 83% of respondents train new hires on product knowledge, we also know it takes far more than product knowledge to succeed in today's selling environment. Without selling skills, the support of mentors, coaching, active practice via role plays, and peer learning, salespeople will have trouble achieving full productivity – particularly in the first six to 12 months of employment.

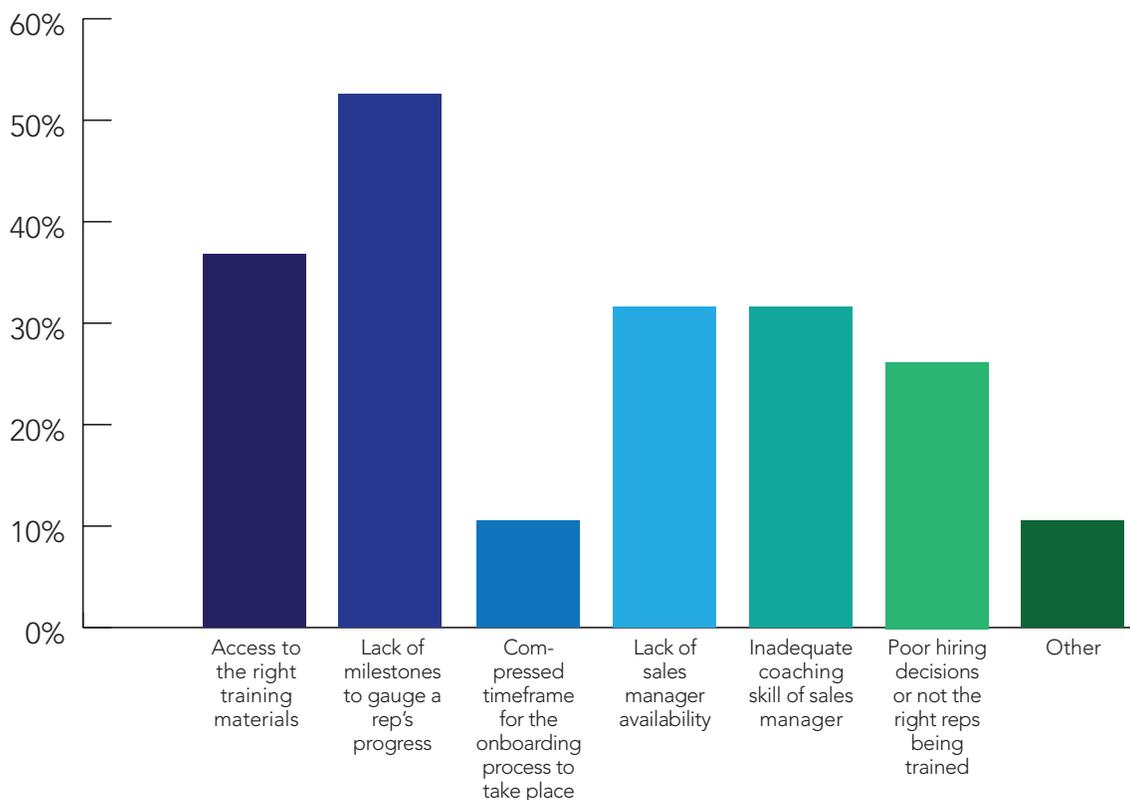
SECTION III: THE MOST COMMON ONBOARDING OBSTACLES

What are some of the most common obstacles your company faces in the onboarding process?

Sales Manager Responses



Sales Rep Responses



How Much Time Do Managers Spend Coaching Newly Onboarded Reps?

Clear discrepancies exist between reps and managers when it comes to the number of hours sales managers spend coaching newly onboarded reps.

- According to 74% of sales reps, sales managers spend anywhere from zero to three hours coaching newly onboarded reps. By contrast, 45% of sales leaders say they spend that amount of time coaching onboarded reps.
- 50% of sales leaders indicated that managers spend three or more hours per week coaching new reps. Meanwhile, only 16% of sales reps say managers spend three or more hours a week coaching new reps.

How Effective Is Your Onboarding Program?

- 27% of leadership thinks its onboarding program is highly effective or very effective.
- Only 11% of reps indicated its company's onboarding program is very effective (none said it was highly effective).

Analysis

The essential function of onboarding is a means to support salespeople. This is why we specifically asked salespeople and managers about sales coaching in relation to onboarding.

The value of good sales coaching has been proven time and again. In terms of productivity, nothing has the capacity to move the needle so much as good, consistent sales coaching. **CSO Insights** has shown "dynamic sales coaching" (coaching with a clear link to enablement processes) yields a 27.6% improvement in win rates. Research by the **Sales Executive Council** (SEC) has shown coaching can boost long-term performance by 19%.

In our own survey, we saw that many sales organizations train new hires on product knowledge during onboarding. However, it bears repeating that it takes much more than product knowledge to succeed in the field with actual customers.

In many cases, salespeople were limited in their ability to grow and adopt new skills without the benefit of hands-on coaching. This is why, even in the digital era, classroom learning remains a valuable experience. During classroom learning sessions, salespeople can feel free to challenge themselves, make mistakes, and learn in a supportive environment.

In general, sales reps and sales managers both agree the following two issues pose major challenges to successful onboarding.

- Inadequate coaching skills of sales managers
- Lack of milestones to gauge sales reps' progress

The results we see here signal that sales managers themselves need training in coaching skills – and part of that skill training is being able to properly plot out milestones on a timeframe that's reasonable for the average new sales hire. Little wonder so many sales reps and managers have a negative view of the onboarding process (even in the 49% where one exists). This is clearly the starting point for improving existing onboarding processes.

In addition, sales managers say the timeframe for onboarding is too compressed. This is an understandable viewpoint – there’s a lot of new information coming in at once for new sales reps, which is why reinforcement of the training they receive (especially during onboarding) is vital for better memory retention.

SUMMARY OF KEY DATA POINTS

- Having a formal onboarding program will get your sales reps to full productivity faster.
- Classroom training is still one of the most common components of onboarding programs, and both sales reps and sales managers agree that classroom training is effective.
- Newly onboarded reps say they need more coaching/mentoring time and that coaches need more training to be more effective as coaches.
- Overall, sales managers think the onboarding program is more effective than reps think it is for preparing them for success in their role.

ABOUT JANEK PERFORMANCE GROUP

Janek Performance Group, headquartered in Las Vegas, Nevada, is an industry leader in sales performance solutions. At its core, it is focused on the continual improvement of sales effectiveness and performance across a variety of industries and selling environments. As sales consultants and thought leaders, Janek strives to stay at the forefront of what truly works for top sales performers in today’s competitive marketplace. It is this combination of research and identified best practices that drive the development of world-class sales training courses and consulting processes.

Janek works with a broad range of clients in a variety of industries to provide the resources, expertise, training, and consulting services to address today’s toughest sales challenges.

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ABOUT SELLING POWER

In addition to *Selling Power* magazine, the leading periodical for sales managers and sales VPs since 1981, Personal Selling Power Inc. produces the Sales Management Digest and Daily Boost of Positivity online newsletters, as well as a series of five-minute videos featuring interviews with top executives. Selling Power is a regular media sponsor of the Sales 3.0 Conference.

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