Save the Art of Sales from Extinction

The Art of Sales is endangered and headed toward extinction.

Why the panic?

I ask the following question to the 100 or so candidates I interview each year: *"What formal sales* **soft skill training** *have you been provided by past employers?"* Not product training, not industry training, not sales stage training ... Sales SOFT SKILLS training.

The answer I get over and over is this: ***"I haven't had any formal sales training."***

THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE!

I'm so concerned about this that I'm going as far as to call this sales leadership malpractice. That's right, malpractice. As in, you should be required to have insurance so when you fail your sales team due to a lack of training and coaching, they can sue you for preventing them from hitting quota and making the OTE that YOU told them was possible.

It is our responsibility, as sales leaders, to help sales professionals become better than when we hired them. It's in our job description. It was expected when you were hired that you would provide training and coaching to your team. However, as sales leaders, we're not holding ourselves accountable to consistently making our teams better. We're so caught up in the Science of Sales — data, automation, AI, BI, and "the tech stack" —that we've completely forgotten it's our responsibility to train this generation of sales professionals on the softer side of sales.

Don't get me wrong. I'm a data chick, and I love a good dashboard. However, a dashboard is just a snapshot of what is happening at any

given time. The best dashboard can't tell you if your rep's voice quivers and trails off every time they are asked about price or if they tend to present during discovery at the first sign of interest. Only call monitoring, ride-alongs, and sitting in on meetings with your reps and their prospects will help you identify gaps in skills related to the Art of Sales.

Here's what will happen if we aren't teaching the Art of Sales to the next generation. Today's under-trained sales professionals are going to be tomorrow's sales leaders, and that scares the shit out of me. How can a sales leader be expected to lead and train their up-and-coming team members or struggling sales reps on The Art of Sales if they have never received any formal sales soft skills training themselves?

Let's take a step back to make sure you and I are on the same page about what I mean by the Art of Sales.

What is the Art of Sales?

The Art of Sales is the practice of using personal intuition, creativity, and interpersonal skills to build relationships, **influence decision-making**, and effectively communicate to prospects and customers. It involves understanding the psychology of buyers.

Here are some Art of Sales training topics:

- **Communication** – Do your reps understand the concept of mirroring?
- **Story Telling** – Research by Dr. Jennifer Aaker in the Stanford Graduate School of business found "a story is up to twenty-two times more memorable than facts alone."
- **Deal Strategy** – Does your team know how to move a deal forward by multithreading within a company?
- **Active Listening** – Are they using active listening to help them determine the next question to ask during discovery?

- **Building Trust** – Do your reps understand the importance of doing what they say they're going to do when they say they're going to do it?
- **Negotiation** – Do your reps know what give/gets can be used during a negotiation to reach the win/win?
- **Persuasion** – Can they effectively influence a decision?
- **Emotional Intelligence** – Are your reps able to manage their own emotions and understand and influence the emotions of others?

Some argue the Art of Sales is more nature than nurture, but I disagree. Just like you can teach your company's outbound prospecting process to your team, you can teach them to create a sense of urgency, persuade someone to make a change, or ask the "scary" questions about what could keep the deal from closing.

Now that I've convinced you to spend more time training and coaching your team (wink), I want to discuss the difference between training and coaching so that you understand how to use each effectively.

Sales Training

Sales training provides the foundational skills and knowledge necessary for sales professionals to perform their roles effectively.

Here are some good sales training topics:

- Determining customer "Fit"
- Creating interactive demos
- Effective negotiation practices
- Working the current outbound prospecting process successfully

- Managing the territory productively
- Writing compelling and professional emails
- Handling objections impactfully

Sales Coaching

Sales coaching builds on the foundation you've laid by offering continuous, personalized support aimed at refining skills, addressing challenges, and promoting ongoing personal and professional growth.

Here are some coaching topics for individual team members:

- Personal sales math and the areas for improvement (ACV/Close rate/sales cycle length)
- Goal setting
- How to run an effective discovery call

- How to be persuasive
- Identifying and leveraging sales superpowers
- Sales skills that are a challenge for a specific rep
- Business acumen

The Art of Sales is on the endangered list, but we can keep it from becoming extinct!

Kristie Jones is the author of *Selling Your Way IN.* She specializes in helping Founders and Sales Leaders improve sales processes and hire top talent. She's passionate about helping sales profession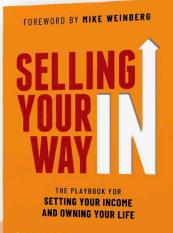als become Top Ten Percenters. Learn more here