

An Strategic Learning Point of View Paper



# **DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN SALES**

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**Strengthen Your Emotional Muscle To Enhance Sales Performance**

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## **THE CHALLENGE**

Of the many challenges facing sales trainers in their efforts to develop highly-skilled and successful sales professionals is the discrepancy between what they believe they accomplished during training and the results reported by managers once the person is on the job. What is learned and seemingly perfected during training is often not applied to challenging or difficult customer situations. Despite the efforts of trainers to provide intense "skill and drill" activities, feedback from field management suggests that sales personnel "need more training". This leaves trainers struggling with the question, "What stops sales people from doing what they already seem to know how to do?"

Typically, this "need more training" feedback is directed at sales people who have clearly demonstrated their capability during performance assessment in which simulations of "real world" conditions were used to test competency. When sales people have acquired the skills and demonstrate their ability, it is unlikely that more "skill and drill" will make a difference. Once an individual has acquired the behavioral repertoire, it is likely the barriers to high performance reside in another aspect of professional development. That aspect of development involves complementing their cognitive and verbal ability with expanding the individual's emotional intelligence.

## **LOGIC AND EMOTIONAL CAPABILITY**

Practicing psychologists in very diverse fields have found that it's not just a matter of developing "cognitive power" to succeed. Whether one considers the counselor assisting a person experiencing feelings of depression, the sports therapist coaching an athlete to reach peak performance, or the business coach assisting an executive struggling to rebound from a major financial set-back, the evidence is clear--emotions play a major part in human performance that is distinct and separate from the individual's cognitive or physical ability.

The research of neuroscientists such as Joseph Le Doux has substantiated the experience of practitioners that the emotional system of the brain acts independent from the neocortex, or logic system.

Le Doux's research indicates that some emotional reactions and emotional memories are formed without any conscious, cognitive participation. An excellent review of the research findings are detailed in Daniel Goleman's books on Emotional Intelligence. Goleman regards the two distinct mental functions as: the logical factual system and the emotional feeling system. He describes how reason originally freed people from the influence of emotion that would sometimes sway their logic in making sound judgments.

A new paradigm suggests that a more harmonized head and heart partnership is needed to balance human nature and logic. When combining the experience of psychologists and the research of neuroscientists the answer to the question regarding what limits performance is very clear. What stops people from doing what they already know how to do, is their failure to recognize the impact that emotions have on their actions. This is especially true when there is a failure to apply skills and knowledge under challenging or stress provoking situations.

This performance problem points out the need for business educators and instructors to learn how to assist individuals in developing emotional intelligence. Developing Emotional Intelligence requires a very different learning methodology than is used to train for product or technical knowledge.

## **TRANSFORMING SALES DEVELOPMENT**

Given the increased competitive pressures of the global market place and major changes in customer requirements, sales professionals have found they must call on different decision-makers and buying groups than they did in the past. These new requirements can result in feelings of inadequacy and frustration.

For many individuals this requires more than additional technique training. It requires learning how to manage tension and increase personal comfort in adapting to various challenging situations. This adaptive capability cannot be acquired using traditional training methods. It requires that sales trainers modify their instructional methodology to include a Discovery Learning Process that assists salespeople in:

- Developing timely awareness of their emotions “in the moment”
- Managing emotion and using “emotional muscle” to enhance business effectiveness
- Increasing perceptual sensitivity to detect and respond to subtle customer signals
- Integrating emotional awareness with authentic behavior

## **DISCOVERY LEARNING PROCESS**

As previously stated, developing emotional intelligence requires a new approach to learning. The sales professional needs to become aware of the impact various interpersonal verbal and non-verbal behavior has on their emotional reactions and how these emotional reactions influence their ability to effectively respond to customers.

Standard training procedures focused on learning what to say or how to deliver an effective presentation. This type of training is aimed at increasing the sales person's interpersonal communication skills. Much of this communication training is based on the assumptions that if a sales person utters certain keywords, the customer will almost automatically respond in a positive manner. A major problem occurs when the sales professional uses their best verbiage, and the customer responds in an unpredicted or challenging manner. It is almost like a scene from a play where one actor speaks their lines to another actor who seems to have lost their place and fails to respond with the ‘right’ scripted words. Responding effectively to these unanticipated situations is impacted by the sales person's awareness of their emotions, and understanding how these feelings influence their actions.

Developing timely awareness of the intrapersonal communication isn't achieved using typical or standard training techniques. It is achieved through a process of recognizing and overcoming emotional barriers that can misdirect intentions. An approach titled Discovery Learning Process was developed and implemented by Strategic Learning consultants to facilitate examination of internal messages that trigger emotional reactions. The first step in examining one's emotional intelligence is to become more aware of internal communication. We all talk to ourselves, and many times this internal conversation (self-talk) has a negative or limiting impact on our actions. This awareness is

especially useful for those who have been taught that emotional reactions must be avoided or somehow concealed. To increase this accessibility, the Discovery Learning Process uses a variety of video vignettes designed to evoke and help the individual examine their intrapersonal communication. Often this intrapersonal communication seems to be traveling over a fine internal telephone line with many resistors. People frequently mention that it may be a day or more after a difficult business call that they become aware of the full range of feelings they had that influenced their actions during the call. By increasing awareness of their intrapersonal communication and identifying how emotional reactions impact behavior; the individual is ready to examine especially challenging or confrontational situations.

Using the Discovery Learning Process, professional coaches use various questions and inquiry techniques to assist individuals in overcoming intensive limiting reactions. Key performance breakthroughs occur when sales professionals develop the ability to immediately access their emotional reactions, recognize the impact certain interpersonal allergies have on their behavior, and develop the ability to respond in an authentic manner to the challenging situation. This learning process develops the emotional "muscle" and strengthens interactive competency.

## **INTERPERSONAL ALLERGIES**

A particularly valuable application of the Discovery Learning Process occurs when individuals learn that they are limited by certain interpersonal allergies. In a manner that is similar to physical allergies, where the individual's sensitivity is extreme; interpersonal allergies occur when a situation triggers a particular anxiety or fear. Albert Ellis, who pioneered investigation into a rational-emotive approach to psychological counseling, discovered that when certain beliefs and fears are carried to extreme an internal dialogue develops which limits the individual's interpersonal behavior.

For instance, one of the common interpersonal allergies of sales professionals is the belief that they should be accurate and correct in their communication. This is certainly a rational expectation. However, when this realistic expectation becomes an exaggerated irrational expectation, the sales person feels they must always be right. The professional who holds this type of irrational belief and fears ever making a mistake will impose limitations on whom they call on and how they interact. By trying to limit the potential of making a mistake, they limit their ability to achieve performance breakthroughs and growth as a professional.

## **SALESFORCE EXCELLENCE**

Overcoming the barriers to high performance and the challenges imposed by a rapidly changing market has prompted Chief Learning Officers and business managers to consider alternatives to the "skill and drill" approach. These traditional training techniques are necessary to establish foundational skills, but are insufficient when engaging sophisticated buyers and complex sales. High performance can be achieved when a learning process is used to develop the professional's cognitive, behavioral, and emotional abilities. Cultivating the individual's emotional intelligence in harmony with their knowledge and skills enables the professionals to adapt their interactive skills to achieve peak performance despite industry volatility.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

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Bill Mehnert, President and Principal Consultant, is responsible for managing the long-term development Strategic Learning. Dr. Mehnert's career spans 35 years of successful training and development in both the academic and business environments. As a graduate faculty member he taught and conducted research in the field of Counseling and Consulting Psychology before transitioning into the business world. Dr. Mehnert's experience as a Sales Executive and Performance Consultant, coupled with his research in the behavioral sciences enables Strategic Learning, Inc., to develop and implement a "best practices" approach to competency development.

## **ABOUT STRATEGIC LEARNING:**

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