

LESSONS LEARNED | BY GERSON ROSENBLOOM

Sales Aerobics

When you hire people for sales positions, do you hire musicians or sales professionals? The right answer is “both wrapped up in one tidy package.” But the reality is that frightful numbers of stores do little more than find good musicians without much regard for their sales chops. And even fewer dealers do anything to train those who are untrained or develop those who are.



Make employee sales training part of your daily routine to foster constant improvement

I did the same thing for years. I had the good sense to at least find people with the right raw talent to be in sales. But for too long, I did nothing to nurture their talents while hoping that my new hires would develop into good salespeople.

That changed when I learned a valuable lesson from a veteran speaker, the late Jack Berman. He suggested a program called “Sales Aerobics.” It inspired me to create my own program and keep it in effect every day up until I closed my store.

The concept is simple. Professional athletes would never dream of going out on the field without regularly practicing their chosen vocation. But unlike athletes, most sales “professionals” hit the floor and hope for the best. Sales aerobics offer your people the opportunity to practice their craft before they’re face to face with the person who pays their salaries: the customer.

I went back to my store and incorporated sales aerobics into my company culture. In my version of sales aerobics, we conducted a 15-minute session every morning before opening. (It lasted 30 minutes on Saturdays.) When done day in and day out, those quickie sessions added up to a fair amount of sales practice. It wasn’t optional, and my people quickly learned that it paid big dividends.

CONDUCTING A SESSION

The key to a sales aerobics session is team involvement. Start with any imaginary but realistic sales scenario. For instance, a customer comes into the store asking for a brand you don’t carry, or a customer tells you he or she is going home to speak with a spouse about buying a product. One sales associate plays

the customer, the other is the salesperson.

Let them role-play for a minute or two. That’s all it takes. You’re not looking for a complete transaction. Next, everyone gets to comment on what’s transpired. You’ll be amazed by what people learn in these interplays. Hope someone made a mistake during the mock sales approach. This is when the real learning takes place and when everyone has the opportunity to work together to make it better.

Some of our training focused on phone calls. The two participants worked through the bevy of miscues that often short-circuit any hope of converting a caller into a customer. One of my favorites was putting the caller on hold and requiring all the participants to sit in silence for 2 minutes. I witnessed an immediate reduction in call holding times throughout my organization.

Sales aerobics work because it’s much easier to see someone else’s mistakes than your own. I watched sales associates easily pick out miscues in role-plays that they regularly made. Everyone was grateful for the opportunity to err in front of colleagues rather than with a paying customer — when it could hit them smack dab in their wallets! **MI**

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