



What Happens When A Brain Scientist is in Charge of Sales?

It stands to reason that the first approach a brain scientist would take in sales would be to analyze how a sales person thinks. Or, more specifically, how exactly do brains work in a sales setting?

We've heard about how incentives and motivators can spark salespeople to do near heroic feats to reach their goals, but what if we simply do a more efficient job of helping sales people have better

selling conversations, making every salesperson a superstar?

For example, you determine the desired sales behaviors and skills that you want your salespeople to use for making a sale. By applying

the basics of how brains learn and retain information, you can share your knowledge more effectively and have the sales team up to speed quickly – identifying pain, articulating value and making more sales than ever. Here are the five most essential learning tips:

1. Be a shiny object! In other words, get the sales persons attention. Give thought to what exactly grabs their attention and

highlight what's in it for them. If information is relevant, useful or entertaining, they'll pay attention.

2. See it, hear it and better yet - in context – We call this “memory encoding” and it improves when in context¹. For sales people, this means receiving coaching, enablement support and training relevant to their sales environment. The closer it is to a real-life selling scenario and the more cues associated with the memory, makes it easier to recall later.

3. Increase our brain memory card – Think of the brain as a computer hard drive and how we can increase the storage capacity. In the 1950's Harvard University's George Miller developed the Magic Number Seven theory that is widely accepted. He says that short-term memory capacity is 7 (plus or minus 2) items because it only had a certain number of “slots” where items can be stored. However, the amount of information that can be held in each slot can be increased if we “chunk” information together.

4. Learn the path or at least leave breadcrumbs - Is there too much to remember? Brain research suggests that instead of losing information we once committed to memory, it's the path to finding it is just currently inaccessible. Our retrieval strength is low or near zero. Exercise that particular memory muscle and we can strengthen recall.

5. Pretend and perform – Practicing and communicating to

others is like high-octane learning. Studies show it boosts retention by 20 to 30 percent vs. reviewing material alone². Role playing, practice dialog and demos make a tremendous difference, and expose us to what's been forgotten or confused.

Putting Science into Practice

Create small chunks of knowledge.

Breaking up new or complex information into small chunks is effective. Research shows that salespeople are 50% more likely to do a quick refresher if they can do it in fewer than 5 minutes. Therefore, it must be easy to understand and relevant to what they need at that moment. If they can apply the information immediately, as part of their workflow, job performance is improved.

Increase memory strength with refreshers

If the brain is like a muscle, then exercise makes it stronger. You can boost memory by an incredible 30% or more with recall practice. And

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today's technology tools can help to trigger memory with reminders, games, and knowledge recall exercises. Depending on how long you wish to remember something, scientists generally recommend spacing practice or “exercise” at 2 days, 7 days and 30 days after initial introduction of information³. Organizations have reported a 30-50% increase in training retention, which is essential for maximizing a new product launch or training new staff. The better their memory and retrieval skills, the more comfortable salespeople will be to change their behavior and include new material in their selling conversations.

Design for context and make it on-demand

It was reported (by IDC) that salespeople waste an average of 7 hours a week hunting for the right content! Salespeople are obviously at their best when they can access and use the right information to move the sales conversation to the next level. This can increase their confidence and identify more accurately where the conversation should go to ultimately close the deal.

The Brain Scientist dissects the playbook

Sales playbooks are a great asset, but they are often very dense and difficult to use - especially on the fly with a customer on the line. Most sales people report that they initially review the playbooks but rarely reference them again after the initial product launch or training.

Convert this great content into

short pieces and arrange by topic. As we know, small digestible chunks aid in attention, encoding and memory strength. Add them to the CRM or make them available on-demand by any device for real selling context. By making small changes to your format and ease-of-use for your salespeople, there will be a big improvement in adoption and results.

Human memory limitations and learning challenges will always exist, but technology today is getting easier to fill the gaps. However, this still depends on having digestible content - keep it short and distilled down to the most important points. The key is transferring the right knowledge, in the right way, to the sales force so they can close more sales.

Measure your success

We can track behavior through technology better now than we could just a couple years ago and we can have a constant feedback that allows the content to be adjusted at every step. By seeing what content is being used, and by whom, you can determine what is truly working. You can also tie this information back to selling metrics.

To sum it all up, brain science shows us that humans are truly amazing in our capacity to learn and grow. And now, with today's technology to give us an extra leg up, our sales teams can work smarter and better than ever.

Although brain scientists can give tips for learning, we agree to leave the sales teams in the capable hands of the sales managers! ■

¹ Robert Bjork "Environmental Context on Human Memory", 1978 Memory & Cognition.

² Richard Schmidt and Robert Bjork, "New Conceptualizations of Practice: Common Principles in Three Paradigms Suggest new Concepts for Training", *Psychological Science*, 1992.

³ N.J. Cepeda, E. Vul, D. Rohrer, J.T. Wixted and H. Pashler, "Spacing effects in learning: A temporal ridgeline of optimal retention", *Psychological Science*, 2008.

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