

THE SCHNEIDER REPORT

Volume 9
August 18, 2010

Welcome to the Schneider Report,

We would like to thank you for the continued support and positive feedback we have received for The Schneider Report since its inception in March of 2009. Since our first issue, we have grown our subscription from a little over 1,000 to currently reaching more than 16,000 financial service professionals and industry leaders. We sincerely appreciate your interest in our articles and value your readership. Please visit our website www.schneidersales.com if you would like to view past Schneider Reports articles.

Our latest Schneider Report article is brought to you by Cindy Phillips, Director of Training and 12 year veteran of Schneider Sales Management. Prior to joining Schneider Sales Management, Cindy was the Senior Vice President of Sales and Marketing for a mid-sized community bank. Cindy has built her career working with others to develop sales and service skills, including roles in sales and service management, employee development, and designing comprehensive recognition programs. She received her B.A. in Education, Communication, and Psychology from North Central College.

SALES TRAINING: LIKE GROWING PLANTS

How much time, energy and money has your institution invested in sales training? Are you satisfied with the results? If not, you join the ranks of many others. Too often, businesses expect training to be the ‘end-all’ for generating sales. They fail to establish a development process that creates anticipation and excitement leading up to the training and fail to incorporate best practices that maintain momentum and enthusiasm following the training sessions.

People don’t learn to sell in the classroom. They get great ideas on best practices and a chance to rehearse “how to” skills in class, but they learn to sell on the job. That’s where they see what works and what doesn’t work and where coaching pays off. The most important thing a manager can do to increase sales is to spend more quality time with each employee. That starts with proper preparation prior to sales training and continues with follow-up coaching after training. In other words, they need to be an active partner in the training process. The best thing that an organization can do is to provide effective tools and resources to the managers so they and their teams can be successful.

Developing people to produce consistent sales is like growing plants which produce flowers to create seeds so other plants can grow.

THE SCHNEIDER REPORT

Here are the three crucial elements of a valuable sales training initiative:

1. Laying the Groundwork so Employees can Absorb the Sales Training they Attend (*Like planting the seeds so they can grow roots*)

- An effective sales program begins when the organization communicates to the entire staff the company-wide effort and commitment to reach a higher level of excellence in their service and selling. Learning goals should be clearly defined and consistent with business goals and objectives. The expected new skills should be linked to the employees' performance expectations and scorecards. Also state how improvement will be tracked and measured.
- Train senior management first and line managers second. Their training should include both the actual sales training that will be delivered to their staff as well as sales management training. We find that our sales management conference is often the managers/supervisors first exposure to coaching techniques. This approach allows managers at all levels to model expected sales behavior, as well as develop the skills to recognize and reward appropriate behavior and correct inappropriate behavior.
- Require managers to meet one-on-one with participants in advance of the training conference. Discussion should include course expectations, learning opportunities, class participation and accountability of skill application upon returning to work.
- Prepare attendees mentally and contextually for their training by having them complete a pre-conference assignment prior to training day. Activities can include learning contracts, self-assessments, shopping the competition, product comparisons, client profiles, employee observations and sales report analysis. These exercises allow the employees to be more inspired, engaged and committed to the training session. Pre-work is most effective when reviewed and endorsed by the immediate supervisor.

THE SCHNEIDER REPORT

2. Delivering Training that Captivates the Participants and Compels them to Improve Sales Performance (*Like roots absorbing water and food from the soil to produce beautiful plants*)

- Organizations often struggle with selecting the right facilitators. Many of our clients ask what is better, “Using training department staff that knows how to facilitate?” or “Utilizing employees out in the field who know what’s happening in the real world?” When possible, select facilitation teams that include one experienced trainer and one subject matter expert (SME). You get the best of both worlds. Look for the following traits:
 - o Effective facilitators have a *magnetic* personality that shows their passion for the preferred way of selling!
 - o They have a talent for telling *compelling* stories/analogies and keeping people on the edge of their seats with *gripping* real life examples.
 - o They are able to *pull* information from the group with their open-ended questions.
- Integrate the pre-conference assignment into the group discussions and interactions. Failure to do so will send the message that the pre-work wasn’t important and trainees will see it as a waste of time.
- Minimize lecture and maximize activity and participation. Class time should be spent on learning exercises, group discussion and role-plays.
- Incorporate plenty of practical sales applications into the training session that answer for the trainee, “What’s in it for me?”
- Use various teaching techniques to help accommodate different learning styles (e.g., sensory vs. intuitive, visual vs. verbal, active vs. reflective, and sequential vs. global).
- Have the trainee practice the skills through role play - we all learn best by actually doing it— (“I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand”— Confucius).

THE SCHNEIDER REPORT

3. Training Transfer (*Continually fertilizing the soil with water, nutrients and sunlight*)

- Training does not stop when the session is over! An organization must continue the learning process by helping participants apply what they have learned in the work environment.
- We find that having employees set improvement goals during the training session that support the learning goals in their learning contract increases their focus during training and provides the foundation for follow-up.
- At the end of the session, ask each trainee to commit to trying three new skills in a post-conference action plan. This plan should be shared with their direct supervisor upon returning to work so they can establish a coaching routine and immediately reinforce new skills and behaviors. Doing this will put the accountability where it belongs and will increase the likelihood of training transfer to performance on the job.
- Ongoing follow-up is an appreciable component. Monitor progress, give positive feedback and encouragement, coach routinely, and adapt coaching to the pace of each individual's development. Continue to role play until skills are mastered.
- How do you measure success? Creating and using progress charts are helpful. If you can't measure it you can't manage it. The measurement we're talking about here is not just the increase in sales numbers, although they're important, but the progress being made in developing new skills and demonstrating the expected behaviors.
- Acknowledge training and development achievements. As an employer and as a manager, take the time to recognize and thank employees for successfully completing training as well as the efforts they put into changing behavior. Receiving recognition is a powerful motivator and stimulant towards trying new things and growing as an individual.

What *planting* is your organization doing to *sprout* a Quantum Leap in sales skills, process and employee development? Let us know.

THE SCHNEIDER REPORT

Thank you for your time. We would like to hear your feedback about this article or about topics that you would like us to address in future volumes. As always, please call or e-mail us for a no obligation discussion on ways to improve your sales organization.

Regards,
Ben Kinning
Director of Sales

About the Author

Cindy Phillips is the Director of Training Certification, a position she has held for the past twelve years. Prior to joining Schneider Sales Management she was Senior Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Mountain Parks Bank, a \$636 million, 8 branch bank headquartered in Denver, CO. Cindy received her B.A. in Education, Communication and Psychology from North Central College.



SCHNEIDER SALES MANAGEMENT, LLC