



THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO ***SALES TRAINING SUCCESS***

Featuring New Research on Top-Performing Sellers and Sales Managers

By Mike Schultz, Dave Shaby, & Andy Springer

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Key Takeaways

Sales training fails to deliver long-term business results much more often than it succeeds. In fact, our research shows that only 18% of sales organizations rate their training as effective.¹

The problem?

Most training doesn't change sellers' behaviors. This leaves business results to chance.

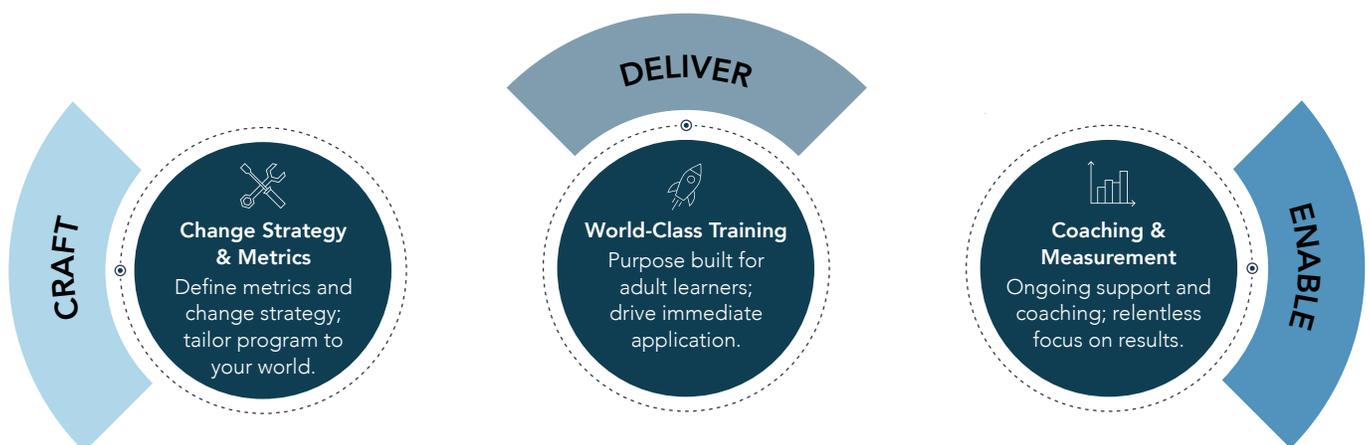
Transforming your sales results requires that you abandon typical training in favor of training as a change management initiative.

We recommend an approach proven to drive change through training based on three key pillars:

- **Craft:** First, you need to identify the business metrics you want to drive and then develop a change strategy to get you there. Training programs and curriculum can then be tailored for the participants and specifically designed to drive the desired change. This leads to focused training targeted to achieving your specific objectives.
- **Deliver:** Gone are the days of long, lecture-based learning done in a physical classroom. Today's modern learners need experiential training that's practical, interactive, and impactful. They must be able to put new learning to use immediately with feedback and coaching. Adopting a modular, multi-modal approach to learning delivers a transformational experience that ensures new skills are developed, adopted, and implemented.
- **Enable:** Sellers and sales managers must be enabled with action-oriented coaching that prepares them for real situations, provides direct feedback, and holds them accountable to execute at high levels. Ongoing measurement is needed to track results and identify areas for continuous improvement.

It's the combination of Craft, Deliver, and Enable that allows sales organizations to implement training that drives business results and sales transformation. At RAIN Group we call this Execution Assurance.

EXECUTION ASSURANCE PROCESS



¹ RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *The Top-Performing Sales Organization Benchmark Report*.

The State of Sales Training

Sales training has reached an inflection point. Typical, traditional sales training—in the manner of tailor a program, deliver training, follow up in the near-term—is failing to meet the needs of both modern learners and organizations.

Companies are spending billions of dollars each year, yet 85% to 90% of sales training fails.

Moreover, this is happening at a time when 97% of sales leaders say upskilling their sales force is a top priority and fewer than half of them believe most of their sellers have the right capabilities to succeed.²

The fact is significant amounts of time, money, and effort are wasted on corporate training every year. Much of it fails to change habits and behaviors, enhance skills, or create significant ROI. Think about the training you've invested in over the years. How effective has it truly been?

Here are some statistics on the shocking failure of traditional training:

- 70% of the information B2B sales reps learn is forgotten within a week of training.³
- 90% of new skills learned from corporate training are lost within a year.⁴
- An estimated 90% of training expenditures don't result in improved performance.⁵
- Only 21% to 25% of executives report their company's training effectively prepares employees to drive business performance.⁶
- 33% of leaders say their organization's learning strategy and business goals are aligned to a high extent, and only 16% are aligned to a very high extent.⁷
- Only 38% of managers believe training programs meet their learners' needs.⁸

Sales Training Defined

Sales training is the process of improving seller skills, knowledge, and attributes to drive seller behavioral change and maximize sales success. To be most effective, sales training should be viewed, designed, and executed as a change management initiative.

² Boudewijn Driedonks, Sinem Hosletter, and Ryan Paulowsky, "By the numbers: What drives sales-growth outperformance," McKinsey, April 13, 2021, <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/growth-marketing-and-sales/our-insights/by-the-numbers-what-drives-sales-growth-outperformance>.

³ Jordan Bryan, "The Evolution of Sales Training and Coaching Technology," Gartner, September 19, 2019, <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/the-evolution-of-sales-training-and-coaching-technology>.

⁴ Winfred Arthur Jr., et al, "Factors That Influence Skill Decay and Retention: A Quantitative Review and Analysis," *Human Performance* 11, 1 (1998): 57–101, DOI: 10.1207/s15327043hup1101_3.

⁵ Enoch A. Awoniyi, Orlando V. Griego, and George A. Morgan, "Person-environment fit and transfer of training," *International Journal of Training and Development* 6, 1 (2002): 25-35, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2419.00147>.

⁶ Stated percentages refer to frontline and midlevel employees. "Building organizational capabilities: McKinsey Global Survey results," McKinsey, March 1, 2010, <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/building-organizational-capabilities-mckinsey-global-survey-results>.

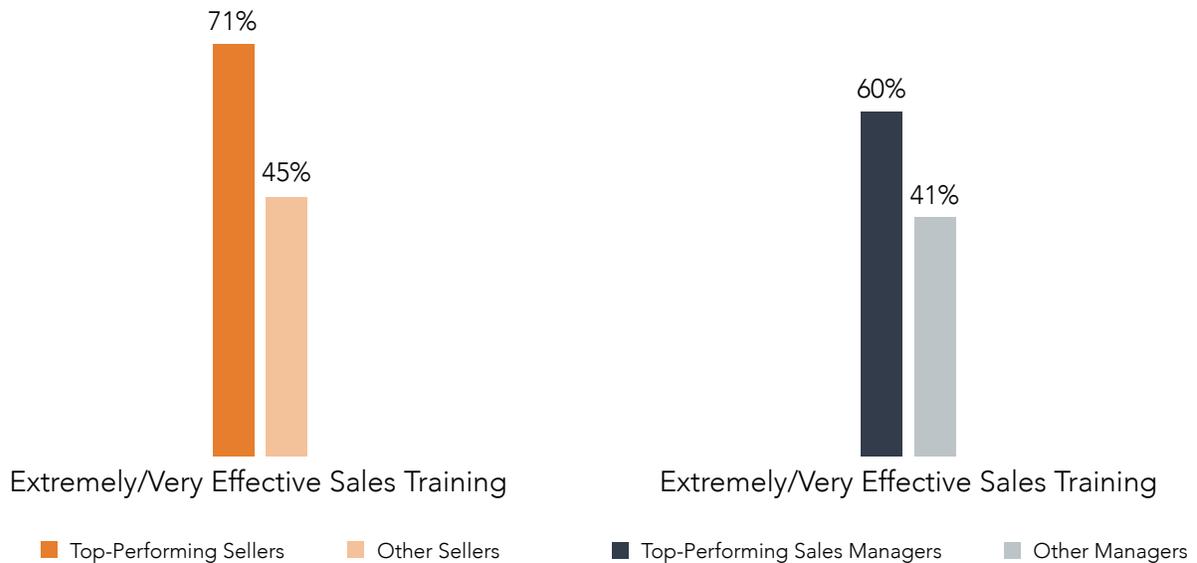
⁷ Ryann Ellis, "All About Alignment," CTDO Magazine, June 15, 2016, <https://www.td.org/magazines/ctdo/all-about-alignment>.

⁸ "Instructional Design Now: A New Age of Learning and Beyond," ATD Research, March 2015.

At the same time, it turns out that Top-Performing Sellers and Sales Managers are significantly more likely to receive effective sales training:

- 71% of Top-Performing Sellers report receiving extremely or very effective sales training
- 60% of Top-Performing Sales Managers report receiving extremely or very effective sales training

SALES TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS^{9,10}



⁹ RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *The Top-Performing Seller Benchmark Report*.

¹⁰ RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *The Top-Performing Sales Manager Benchmark Report*.

¹¹ RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *The Skills and Behaviors of Top-Performing Sales Managers and Sellers*.

Who Are Top Performers?

- 100% of sellers met challenging sales goals
- For sales managers responding for their teams, 75% or more of their sellers met challenging sales goals
- Greater than 50% win rate on proposed sales
- Achieved premium pricing

Top Performers (including Top-Performing Sellers and Sales Managers) represent 18.7% of survey respondents in a global survey of 1,004 sellers and sales managers. The Rest, everyone else, represents 81.3% of total respondents.¹¹

Which begs the question: how can you ensure your sales team gets as effective sales training as Top Performers do?

For today's sales training to be effective, it needs to go beyond traditional training. It must be:

- Crafted to drive business results (this includes first defining the specific results you want to drive)
- Built for modern learners and delivered in specific ways so it's retained and applied
- Designed so it supports sellers with ongoing coaching and enables organizations to realize results over the long-term

We'll dig into all three of these areas—part of what we call Execution Assurance—soon, but first we want to draw attention here to the learners. Who are the modern learners frequently overlooked in traditional sales training? How do their learning preferences differ from learners of the past?

Today's sales training participants are dominated by Millennials and Gen Xers, with plenty of Gen Zers and Boomers in the mix. But, across generations, what we're seeing is that modern learners don't want to sit for hours being lectured to regardless of whether the training is on site or virtual.

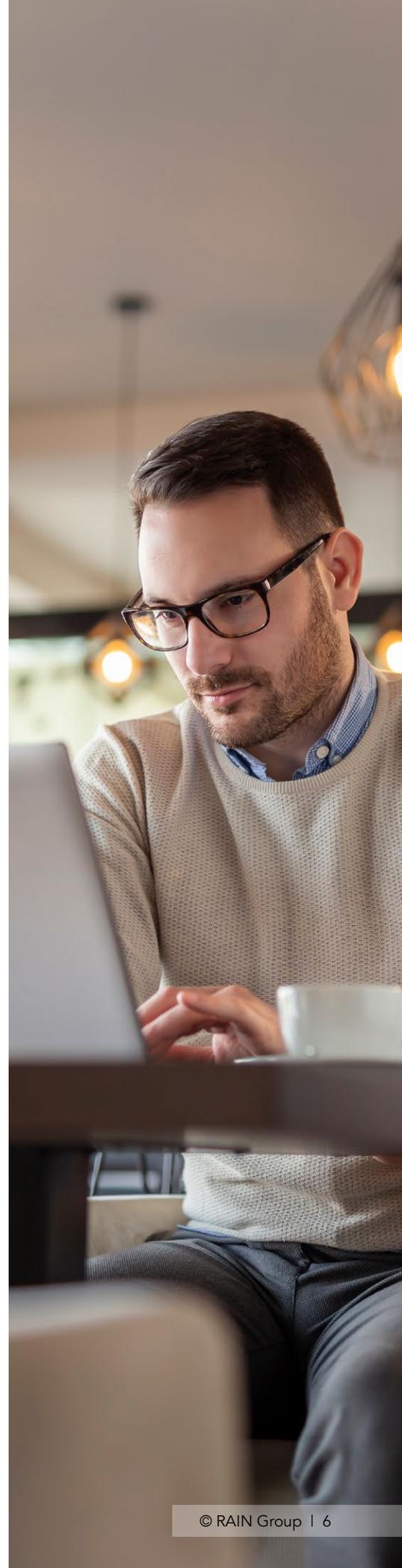
Further, sellers and sales managers have a low tolerance for training that's not directly applicable to their needs, which means they'll disengage when training misses the mark.

Instead, modern learners want training that is:

- Immediately accessible and mobile
- An experience, not a presentation
- Collaborative between the learners, not just experts
- Personalized to their situation and circumstances
- Easily applied to their specific role

For today's sales training to be effective, it must meet sellers and sales managers where they are.

Yet, sales organizations have struggled to keep up. Organizations that only recently established sales training and enablement programs now expect them to drive competitive advantage, do it fast, and keep sellers in the field as much as possible. Simultaneously, enablement teams must drive seller learning even more rigorously, often with constrained resources.



The Sales Training and Enablement Revolution

In the face of the above and given the explosive technology-driven environment, high turnover rates, and hiring challenges, unleashing the potential of your sales force has never been more complex.

Moreover, sellers themselves remain focused on the sale and target right in front of them. Many sellers tell us they're too busy trying to achieve target this quarter to have time to focus on their own development. So they push it off. And off. And off.

With these headwinds, it's no wonder sales training fails much more often than it succeeds.

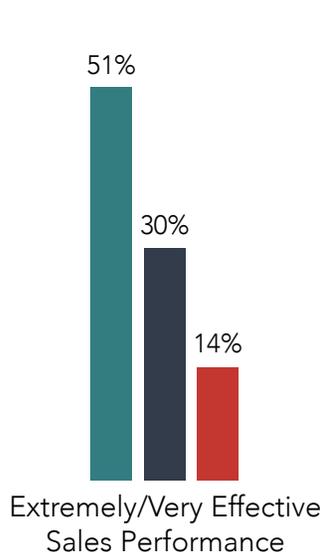
When done right, however, sales training changes sellers' behavior and improves business results. And the results can be impressive.

A study from RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *The Skills and Behaviors of Top-Performing Sales Managers and Sellers*, reveals that highly effective sales training is correlated with three key metrics.¹²

- **Win Rate:** Respondents with extremely/very effective sales training report average win rates that are 7 to 11 points higher than those with less effective training.
- **Sales Goal Attainment:** 76% of respondents with extremely effective sales training met their sales goal, compared to only 31% of those with the least effective training.
- **Premium Pricing:** 91% of respondents with extremely effective sales training achieved premium pricing, compared to just 43% of those with the least effective training.

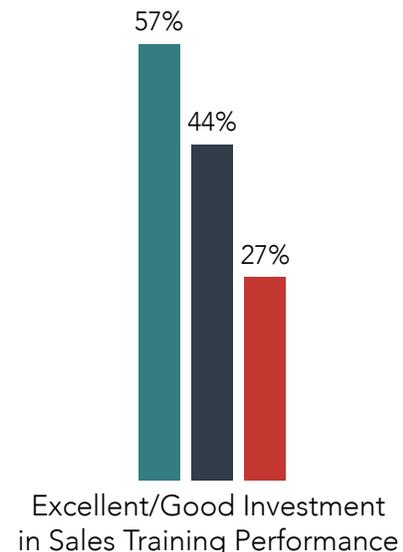
Furthermore, organizations with stronger sales training effectiveness and stronger investment were much more likely to be Top and Elite Performers vs. The Rest, as we found in a study of 472 mid-size and large sales organizations that analyzed factors including sales training efficacy and investment.¹³

SALES TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS BY PERFORMANCE



■ Elite Performers ■ Top Performers ■ The Rest

INVESTMENT AND FOCUS ON SALES TRAINING PERFORMANCE



¹² RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *The Top-Performing Seller Benchmark Report*.

¹³ RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *The Top-Performing Sales Organization Benchmark Report*.

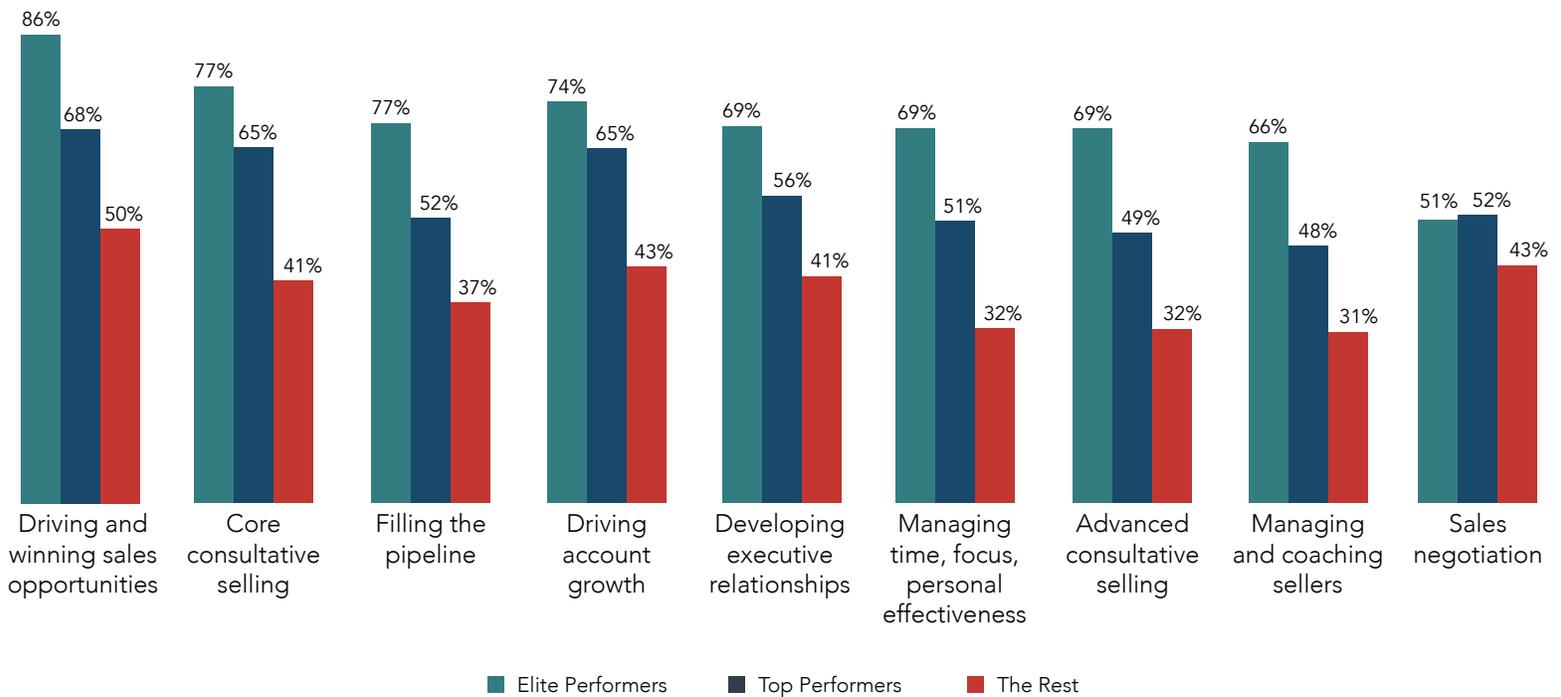
Yet,

- The bulk—80%—of organizations aren't Top or Elite Performers, and
- Overall, only 16% of sellers and sales managers rate the sales training they've received as extremely effective, indicators of sales training failure.

However, when sales training is undertaken as a change initiative and done well, skills improve, and over the course of months, results and ROI are realized.

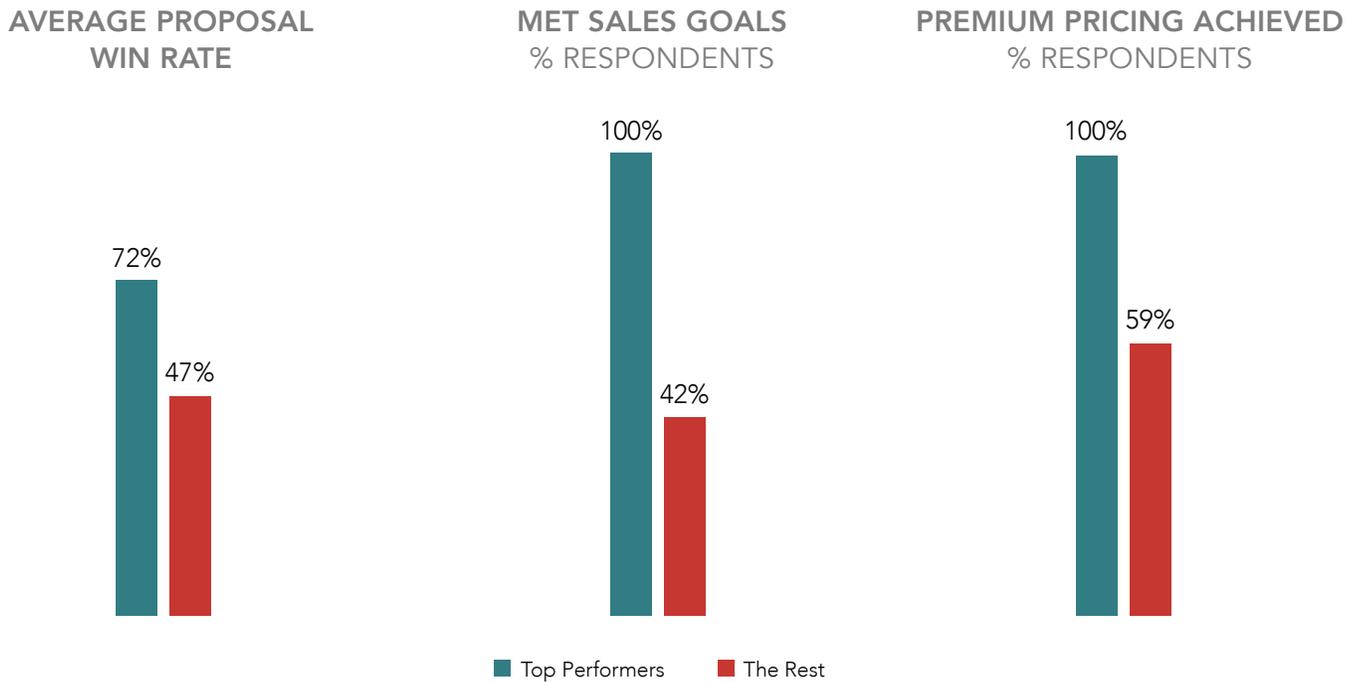
This is what happens at Top-Performing Sales Organizations. Sellers receive highly effective sales training and develop the skills they need to find and win business consistently.

SELLERS HAVE THE SKILLS THEY NEED TO FIND AND WIN BUSINESS CONSISTENTLY AND AT A HIGH LEVEL¹⁴



¹⁴ RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *The Top-Performing Sales Organization Benchmark Report*.

Top Performers get results: higher average win rates on proposed sales, greater sales goal attainment, and stronger pricing.¹⁵



And, because high-performing organizations provide strong training and support, they're also less likely to lose their top sellers. Which is why it's doubly damaging to experience a sales training fail.

It's time for an innovative approach to sales training; an approach that changes the way sales training is conceived, designed, and executed over the long-term. An approach that drives real behavior change and results and builds a team of top performers who not only meet, but consistently exceed, quota.

Keep reading and we'll share how the companies that make it happen are getting it done.

¹⁵ RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *The Top-Performing Seller Benchmark Report*.

Sales Transformation: Sales Training as Change Initiative

Here's the typical training flow we often see.

TYPICAL TRAINING AS TRAINING



Typical training often involves program tailoring, training delivery, and reinforcement.

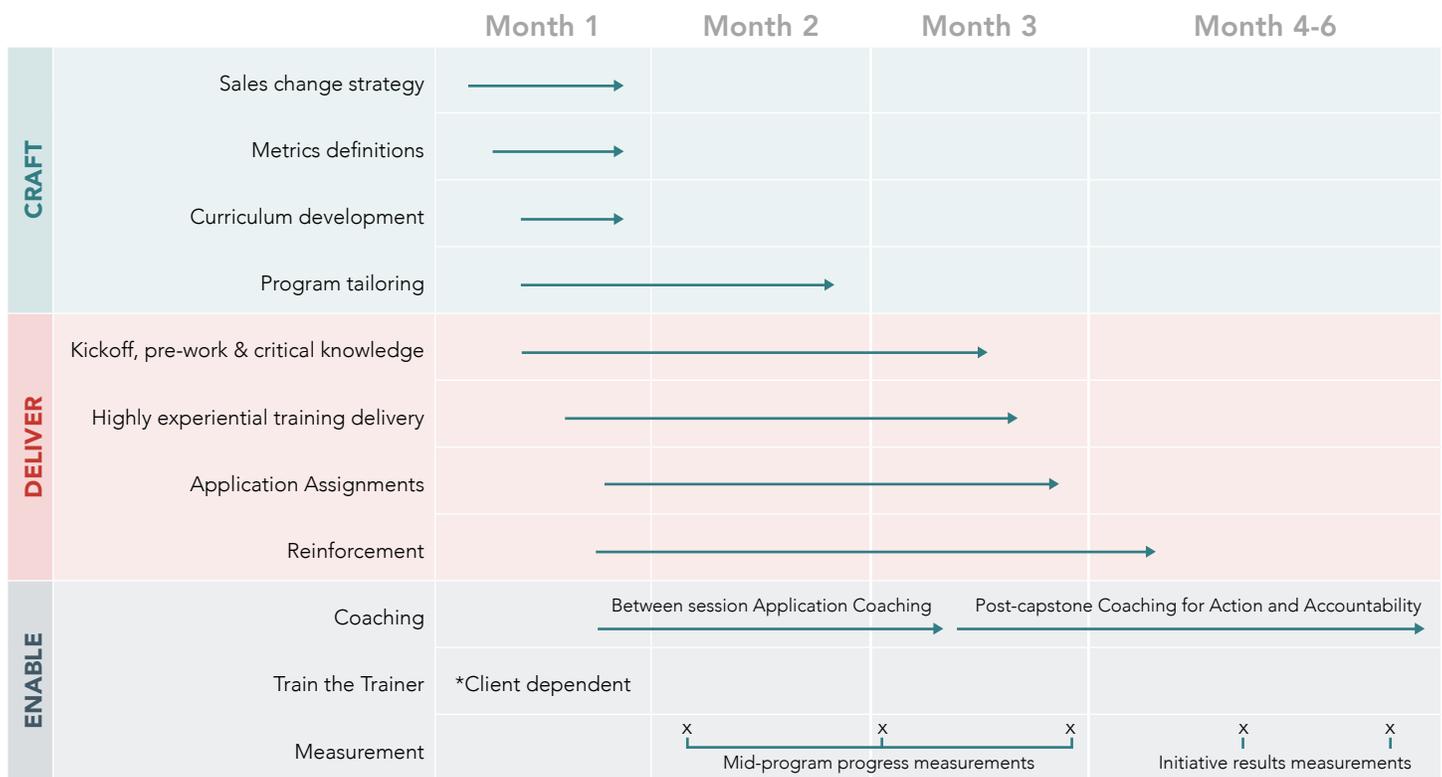
As we know from the previous pages in this guide, this leaves impact, implementation, and business results to chance.

Change is at risk and transformation doesn't happen.

There's so much more that goes into driving change and achieving results. When the entire process isn't attended to, you end up with failed training initiatives where skill gaps grow, accountability decreases, and desired results aren't achieved.

However, when training is approached as a change initiative, all three stages of the process—Craft, Deliver, and Enable—are robust and lay the groundwork to ensure the training succeeds.

EXECUTION ASSURANCE: TRAINING AS CHANGE INITIATIVE

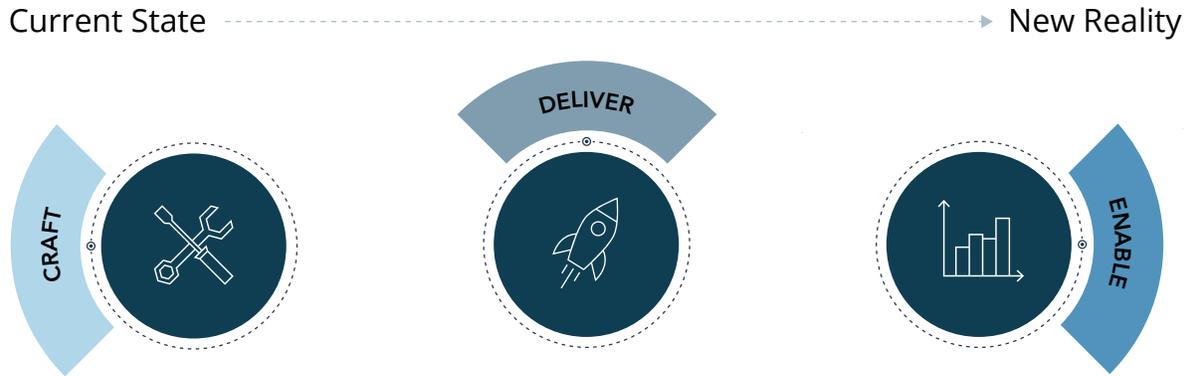


5 Critical Success Factors Are Required for Training as a Change Initiative:

- Executive sponsor(s) are bought in to the process
- Key stakeholders are engaged
- Vision is defined and expectations set from sales leadership
- Metrics are defined and a reporting cadence agreed upon
- Communication plan is mapped out

Let's walk through the process of implementing an effective sales training change initiative using the Craft-Enable-Deliver framework.

EXECUTION ASSURANCE: TRAINING AS CHANGE INITIATIVE



- **Craft:** First, you must define the metrics you want to drive and then craft a change strategy to get there. Part of this is building the right curriculum and tailoring the program content and tools for participants and your world. Training needs to be designed to connect sellers to their specific work context. The Craft phase requires adequate time to involve key stakeholders, implement a strong communications plan (with executive involvement), and provide learners' notice of the initiative.
- **Deliver:** Next is training delivery. By taking a modular approach to delivery, you allow learners to focus on learning specific skills, practicing those skills, and receiving immediate feedback to refine the skill, then moving to the next. Interactive videos, microlearning, hands-on application assignments, and coaching all contribute to training that meets the needs of modern learners.
- **Enable:** Lastly, the approach needs to be embedded into the organization. This Enable phase begins during the delivery but also continues in a focused way for 90 days following the final or "capstone" training session. It includes the active participation of sales managers working with sellers to implement the training in their daily workflow, as well as an ongoing measurement of results and continuous improvement.

Eliminate any stage of the process and you risk the entire initiative failing. You can't follow the traditional training paradigm and expect to achieve long-term sales results. Not only is there a large body of sophisticated skills and knowledge to master, but sales training often involves changing the behavior of adults who are set in their ways.

Regardless of the scope or size of your sales training initiative, incorporating the three pillars of Execution Assurance into your initiative boosts the likelihood of success. Let's take a look at each in more detail.

You can't follow the traditional training paradigm and expect to achieve long-term sales results. Not only is there a large body of sophisticated skills and knowledge to master, but sales training often involves changing the behavior of adults who are set in their ways.

Typical Training vs. Sales Transformation

Discrete-event training simply can't mirror the effectiveness of a well-planned strategy executed with concerted effort over time.

Leading organizations don't see sales training as an event—they view it as an ongoing process. They approach it holistically where they not only build sales team capabilities, but also design training that enables sellers to apply those capabilities to transform the way they sell.

Leading organizations approach sales training as a sales transformation.

	Typical Sales Training	Sales Transformation
Approach to sales training	Flavor of the month, jumbled	Focused, organized, logical, long-term view
Staying power	Learning forgotten, not applied	Learned, internalized, applied
New hire ramp-up	Slow, inefficient process to get new hires to full capacity	Fast, effective, repeatable
Delivery method and components	Limited	Blended instructor-led (virtual or in-person), online learning, multiple modalities, testing and certification
Customization	If done, lots of effort, little use	Maximum use for sales enablement
Sales approach (method)	Aging, limited, jumbled mix	Research-based, current, field-tested, comprehensive
Effectiveness	Not remembered, not connected to daily work	Internalized, integrated with sales performance environment, behaviors applied on the job

Craft Change Strategy and Metrics

It's in this early Craft stage where the vision and objectives for the training initiative are set, business metrics are defined, and the change strategy is developed.

1. Define Business Metrics

The performance metrics are based on the objectives or desired outcomes of the training initiative. Therefore, the metrics will vary by organization. Define the business (lag) metrics you're trying to affect and the indicator (lead) metrics that show you're getting there.

Once you know the metrics, you can define the strategy to accomplish them.

MENU OF COMMON MEASURES

Lead Measures

1. Weighted average pipeline size
2. Pipeline growth
3. Sales activity (e.g., outbound activity, meetings)
4. Sales productivity (e.g., time spent selling)
5. Sales method and process adoption
6. Deal reviews (Wins Labs) conducted
7. Sales skill progress / certification
8. Satisfaction with training
9. Seller engagement
10. Seller action plan clarity

Lag Measures

1. Win rate on proposed sales
2. Average sale/order value
3. Time to productivity
4. % attainment of sales goal
5. Discounting / profitability of sales
6. Average account revenue
7. Average revenue per seller
8. Repeat business rate / chum
9. Length of sales cycle
10. Sales force turnover rate

[Click here for an essential list of sales metrics. →](#)

2. Build a Change Strategy to Achieve Metrics

Once the business metrics are defined, it's time to identify how you'll achieve them: the change strategy. When sellers and sales managers need to change habits, behaviors, and mindset across the board, typical training isn't sufficient.

Why?

If you're doing something simple, like training people how to use Excel, they'll learn it, use it, and get better. It's linear. It's simple.

Most selling, however, is neither linear nor simple. You're asking adults who are often set in their habits and mindset to do something different with their time. To take risks by doing something they're unfamiliar with, and, potentially, where they don't yet excel. To change habits that are not only routine, but also backed by a belief system.

Usually the stakes are high. It's easy to make the case that millions, hundreds of millions, or billions in financial gain can be achieved through sales improvement. Growth, competitiveness, and stock price—common items on leadership teams' top priority lists—can all be impacted.

Get sales right and you can be significantly more competitive and successful.

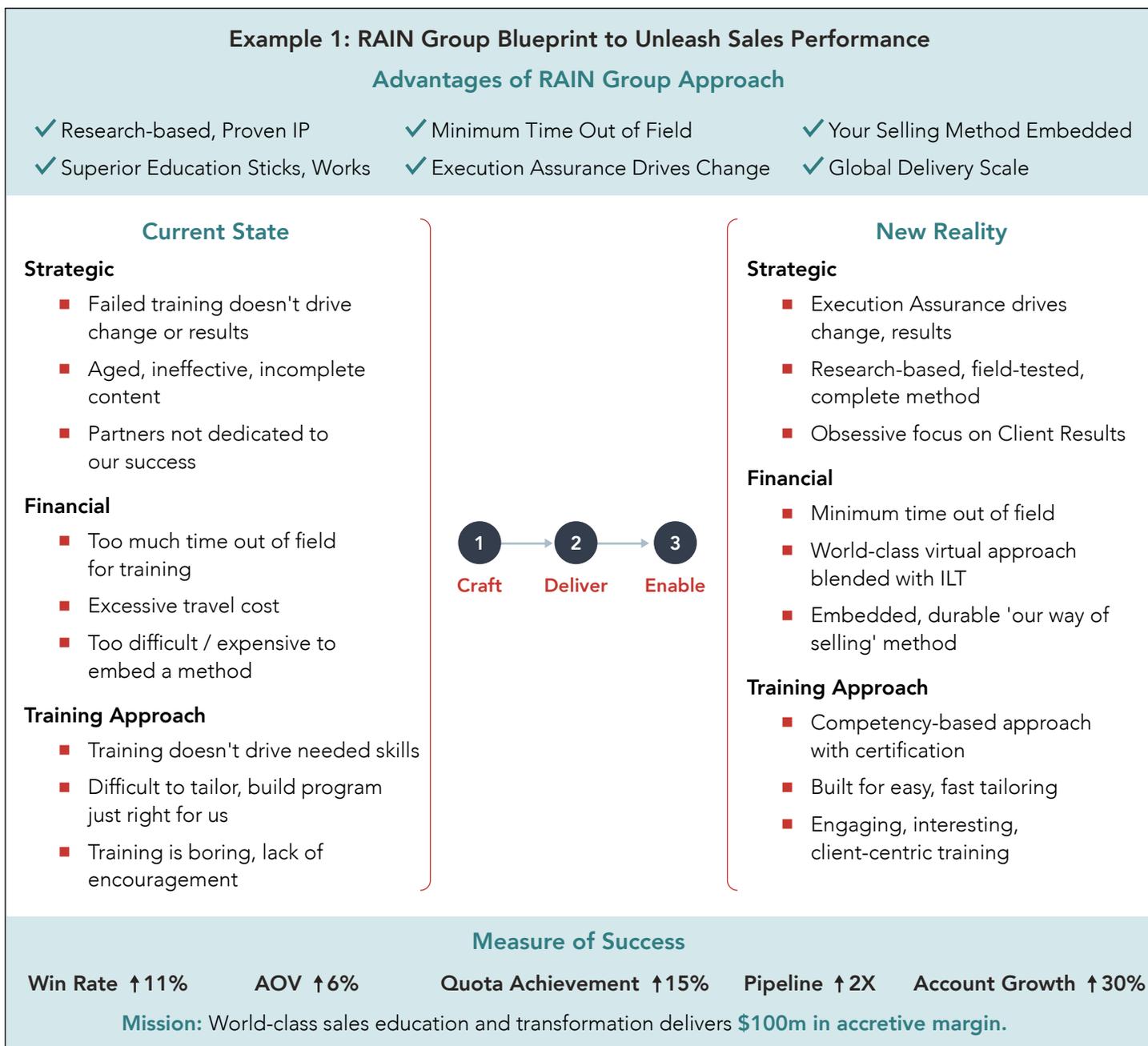
However, this success is rarely achieved because typical training isn't built for this outcome. Achieving results takes change: systematic, architected behavior change across most of your team.

To affect this type of broad-based change requires bringing executive sponsors and key stakeholders together with the training provider to collectively define the vision and set related expectations for sellers and sales leaders. Getting all the key stakeholders engaged and aligned from the outset creates the "true north" that you can keep coming back to throughout the initiative to ensure its success.

If you know where you are (i.e., your current state) and where you're headed (i.e., your New Reality), you can build a path to get there (see example on next page).



Here's an example:¹⁶



Note that the content in this blueprint is an example. Your current state, New Reality, advantages, and measures will be different. For example, other current state challenges often include lack of strategic account growth, rampant discounting, disjointed and ineffective sales management, high sales turnover, and more. The point is if you know what you want to change, you can build a plan to change it.

¹⁶ This example is in the format of a Buyer Change Blueprint that we, at RAIN Group, use to teach sellers how to craft a case for and communicate change to buyers.

Now on to planning for execution. Organizations that get sales education right answer two important questions in the early stages:

- **How will sellers implement what they learn?** Organizations that don't consider how sellers will implement what they learn, or make assumptions, will ultimately fail to resonate with sellers. Sure, there will always be some naysayers, but there's often a disconnect between the thinking and expectations of the sponsors of the training and the participants themselves.

Posing the question of how something will be implemented goes a long way towards solving this issue and planning for enablement ([Enable](#)).

- **What will it really take to change the way our sellers sell?** Most companies underestimate the effort needed to change the way their teams sell. Even if skills and knowledge training is effective in that it builds capabilities, it doesn't ensure that sellers will change the way they sell. Sometimes sellers learn it and then don't do it.

You need the right plan in place to ensure sellers change their behaviors and implement their new skills on-the-job.

A Note About Change

The RAIN Group Craft-Deliver-Enable framework is the strategy and action plan to deliver change. We created the framework with underpinnings of theory from John Kotter's 8 Steps to Change, Chip and Dan Heath's Switch principles, McKinsey 7-S, Nudge theory, and our own 9 Habits of Extreme Productivity and habit change. Through decades of over 1,000 client engagements, we've honed and updated this framework to deliver the highest likelihood of success.

It all starts at the top. Like any change initiative, the first step is to create a sense of urgency, a belief that it's important. If senior leaders, colleagues, and other stakeholders don't believe it's important—that it's worthy of their focus over and above their other priorities—then you start the change process with a steep hill to climb.

Furthermore, senior leaders need to communicate the initiative's importance. Many transformation initiatives fail simply because the communication of expectations isn't clear or shared appropriately or frequently.

3. Tailor Program Curriculum, Content, and Cohorts to Your World

Almost all training needs for a sales force can be defined in advance once you know what people need to do and produce. If you know what they need to do, you can define the knowledge, skills, and attributes required to do it. If you have defined the skills, knowledge, and attributes, you can define the content and format of training programs best suited to build them.

An early step in the process, then, is to build a sales competency model so you understand the skills your sellers need.

There are numerous sales competency model frameworks, and we have our own research-based model we use with clients ([see page 20](#)), but the point is this: have a competency model in place for each sales role so you clearly define what a great seller looks like.

Then you can build their skills to get there.

A lot of sales training is done on little more than a whim. The problem is that next quarter or next year someone else has another whim, leading to another “priority” training roll-out. When this happens, sellers tend to dismiss the importance of the training because, well, whatever was critically important two months ago is now off the radar screen.

Using the research-validated [Top-Performing Seller](#) and [Top-Performing Sales Managers](#) models to build your curricula solves this problem.

Defining your curriculum starts with identifying your objective or the output a particular role is expected to produce.

EXAMPLE: MAPPING OBJECTIVES TO A CURRICULUM

Your Objective	Suggested Approach
Account managers need to proactively drive growth within select accounts	Strategic Account Management curriculum for client success team to XYZ
Sales force shift from selling benefits to selling value	Consultative Selling curriculum for field sales reps with foundational and advanced tracks
Prospecting at the C-Suite	RAIN Sales Prospecting curriculum for BDRs to XYZ
Initiative must work	Executive Assurance with sales manager and coach the coach training to drive leader-led change

If you want to connect with participants and make learning most impactful, you must tailor the content. Certain topics may be universal. However, if you don't customize examples, exercises, tools, and reinforcement activities to match the context of your organization and market, sellers won't accept it.

Customization takes some work, but it's necessary to make any corporate training initiative effective. Unfortunately, much of the customization work for training:

- Isn't readily applicable to the seller's job
- Gets lost or forgotten after the training, so it's not used even when it is applicable

If you want to effectively customize your programs, don't just focus on classroom-based case studies.

Build job-aids, tools, and playbooks—assets your team can use on-the-job while selling—including:

- Opportunity and account-planning tools
- Needs discovery guides
- Sales messaging, including how to sell new ideas and position your company value
- Sales playbooks for supporting behavior across the sales cycle, from prospecting to negotiating to winning major opportunities

Receiving, practicing with, and using these kinds of sales performance support tools is often cited by sellers as the most beneficial part of training. Plus, they're critical for helping the training stick.

Many organizations charge forth with a beer budget and expect champagne results.

Note on Budgeting

Once you define what your ideal return is (lead and lag measures), what your curricula look like, what your change plan looks like, and what customization and sales support assets you require, you should ask, "What resources (money, people, tools, etc.) do we need to get this done?" There are two hurdles to jump in the craft phase of a sales training initiative:

1. Defining the sales transformation itself: goals, curricula, change plan, etc.
2. Funding the initiative

Define the goals and outcomes of a sales transformation, then figure out the resources and investment required, and you'll find a strong ROI story to tell.

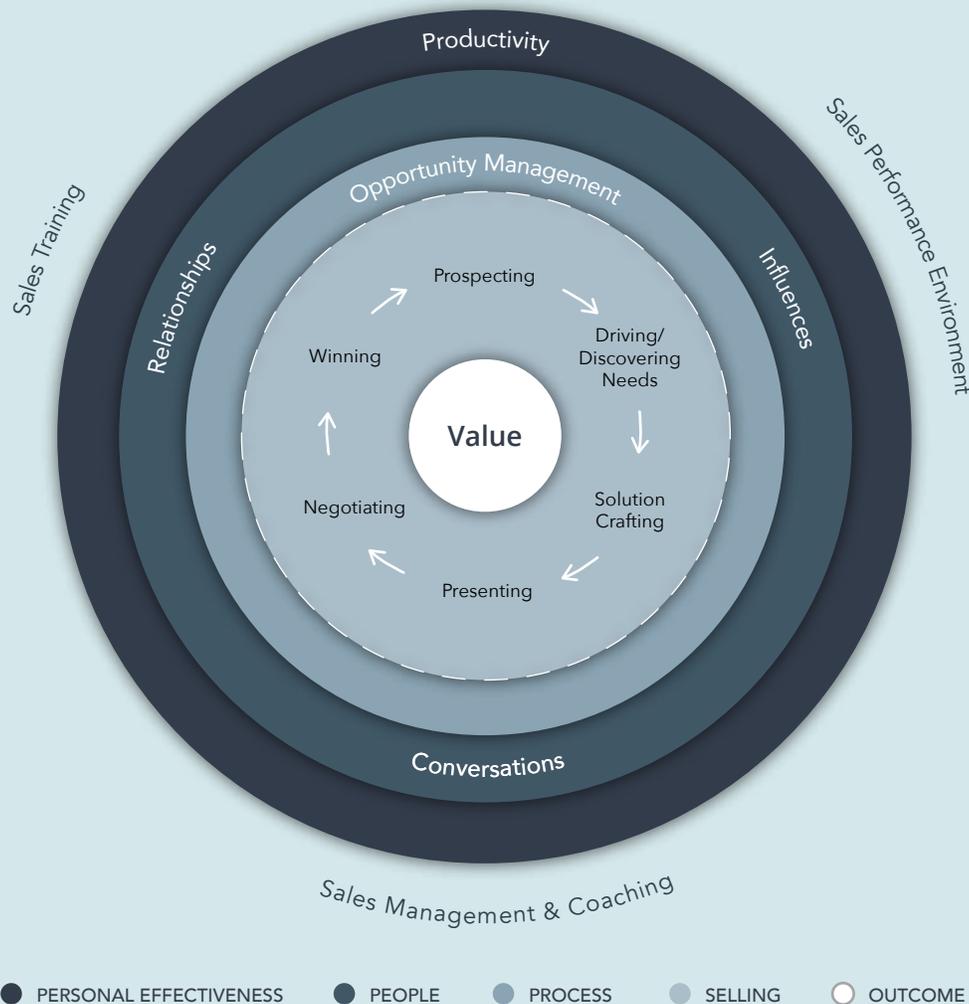
Too often sales leaders ask, "What should we pay for sales training per person? What are the best practices?"

This is fine to know, but don't set your budget on it. Set your budget once you answer the question, "What will it take to get a worthwhile return for our business?" It might be more or less than the average. In any case, it needs to be enough to achieve your New Reality.

Many organizations charge forth with a beer budget and expect champagne results.

If resources are limited, make a case for training a smaller group but doing it right, or licensing content to tailor and deliver on your own. Then make sure the training succeeds and shows impact. A great way to optimize your change effort is to create an internal success story with internal champions who believe in it.

The Top-Performing SellerSM



The Top-Performing Seller model identifies the capabilities and behaviors that separate Top-Performing Sellers from other sellers. Our research shows that Top Performers are statistically significantly more capable in the following categories of selling:

- Achieving the outcome of value
- Winning the sale
- Driving account growth
- Succeeding with people
- Maximizing personal effectiveness

Outside the circle in the model are three categories that impact sales performance but that sellers themselves don't control. These are:

- Sales management and coaching
- Sales training
- Sales performance environment

To learn more about the Top-Performing Seller model and the underlying research, download [The Top-Performing Seller Benchmark Report](#). →

When thinking about a curriculum, a primary—yet often overlooked—role is the sales manager. If sales managers coach and lead their teams well, it makes a critical difference in your success and that of your sales force. In fact, Top-Performing Sellers are 83% more likely to have an extremely or very effective sales manager.

Based on our research and two decades of fieldwork with clients, we've found that the best sales managers excel at:

- Delivering a regular rhythm and frequency of coaching
- Playing five sales coaching-related roles and five sales management-related roles well
- Leading masterful sales management and coaching conversations

Organizations that don't prioritize sales management alongside seller skill development—including having a curriculum for sales management success—find themselves spending a lot of time and money with little to show for it.



When developing training curricula for your sales managers, be sure to evaluate their competencies in the areas highlighted in our [Top-Performing Sales Manager model](#). →





Deliver A Transformational Experience

It wasn't long ago that most training was delivered live, in person. Out of necessity, that changed overnight. Unfortunately, the pendulum often ended up swinging far in the other direction, with much training delivered as hours of uninspiring and disconnected video conferences, webinars, and self-paced learning.

Neither situation is good enough. Today's modern learners need training that's practical, interactive, and impactful. They need and expect training they can use immediately. They need practice and feedback.

And organizations require training that drives desired business results.

A transformational experience must be delivered.

1. Engage with Highly Interactive, Experiential Learning

A pivotal point in the success or failure of a training initiative is the delivery itself. While trainers often dismiss the participants' individual ratings of the efficacy of a training program, these evaluations are vitally important. Not because a "5 out of 5" in satisfaction with the program ensures success, but because a "2 out of 5" ensures failure.

When participants are highly satisfied with training, they:

- Are open to applying what they learn in the field
- Are willing to accept reinforcement and coaching
- Will come back for future training

Deliver training that's boring, disconnected from daily work, or delivered by someone who doesn't gain respect and trust, and you lose your sellers' attention and engagement.

As we've shared, modern learners want training that's accessible, experiential, collaborative, personalized, and easy to apply. The following components are critical for the instructor-led portion of training delivery to be successful and connected to the daily work of selling:

- Credible and skilled facilitators
- Custom cases and job aids ([see Craft](#))
- High level of interaction, discussion, and collaboration versus lecture
- Gamification, technology, and custom assets embedded in learning

Do it right and even the most experienced sellers will be inspired and willing to embrace the change.

Instructor-led delivery, however, is only part of the story.

2. Deliver Modular, Multi-Modal, Modern Training

In the past there was only one core way to deliver sales training: instructor-led in the classroom. Sure, there might have been computer-based training solutions that were reasonably useful even 20 years ago, but it wasn't until recently that effective blended delivery approaches became commonplace.

Delivering learning through multiple modalities has two effects, it:

- Makes the training more engaging
- Has a cumulative positive impact on learning

In recent years, web-based tools and strategies (think video, gamification, AI, and digital simulations) have made training more engaging and fun. But these aren't the only delivery mechanisms outside of instructor-led training. Typical training modalities include:

Training Modality	When to Use and Why
Instructor-led training (ILT)	In-person, instructor-led training has the benefit of having the full engagement of the participant. Participants can learn from their peers, practice new skills, receive real time feedback, become immersed in the topic, and be inspired to change.
Virtual instructor-led training (VILT)	Virtual instructor-led training is an increasingly important component of learning as technology tools to support interaction and participant engagement have vastly improved. Furthermore, there are benefits to VILT, such as practicing new skills between sessions, chunking learning, keeping sellers in the field and more.
Online (elearning, asynchronous)	Online learning is convenient and allows for flexibility. It's self-driven, self-paced, interactive, and measurable. It's often used as pre-work to build knowledge around a subject, post-work for reinforcement, and as a standalone to provide a baseline level of knowledge and skill transfer. With quizzes, tests, and reports, you can see if sellers are engaged and if the training is making a difference.
Micro-learning videos via email or mobile	With email and mobile, core concepts can be delivered primarily via video and/or text to drive learning and reinforce over time so learning is retained. These messages can guide seller behavior, drive knowledge and skill, increase online engagement, test seller knowledge and skills with scenarios, and assist with analysis and coaching.
Simulations	Simulations can be done live or asynchronous (including AI). They're fun and engaging and involve a "choose your own adventure" experience where participants are tested, rated, and given feedback using real life scenarios.
Gamification	Games can make learning and behavior change fun and drive engagement across the team. People tend to chase goals. Badges, scoring, and gamification lead people down desired paths of behavior change, while keeping them engaged and interested.
Coaching	Coaching is a linchpin of a successful sales training and transformation initiative. Sales coaching is a necessary part of change management. The importance and power of sales coaching can't be understated. More on this in Enable .

Emergence of the Flipped Classroom

We're often asked, "Can we minimize the length of time sellers are out of the field?"

The answer is yes, but there are additional criteria to consider:

- If you want the same result, you must design pre-work and post-work to get there
- This strategy has a few more moving parts; you have to be willing to execute them

If you take a two-day program and deliver it in one, but just cut half, you cut half. Our programs, and other well-designed programs, are designed to minimize the necessary time spent on topics to achieve learning. You can't just truncate them.

However, if you're willing to properly execute a flipped classroom, you can achieve a lot in less live-class time.

A flipped classroom is an instructional strategy and an approach to blended learning that reverses the traditional learning environment by delivering instructional content, often online, outside of the classroom. It moves activities, including those that may have traditionally been considered homework, into the classroom.

In a flipped classroom, participants complete pre-work that may include videos, online discussion, reading, or research before the instructor-led training takes place. Classroom time (either in person or virtual) is then reserved for applying concepts with the guidance of a facilitator through role plays, exercises, etc.

A flipped classroom is a powerful strategy. It works. But we often hear, "We can't get our team to focus on anything until we get them live and tell them to put their phones and computers away. That's the only time we get full attention. We've tried it the other way and it doesn't work."

Well, perhaps it hasn't worked yet. That doesn't mean you can't make it work. With the right plan, *it is possible* to get full engagement in even the most difficult environments.

In any case, flipped classrooms work, are powerful experiences, and can minimize out-of-field selling time.

Learn more about RAIN Group's [VILT](#) and [Hybrid](#) approaches to training that utilize a flipped classroom approach.



3. Reinforce with Engaging Videos and Microlearning

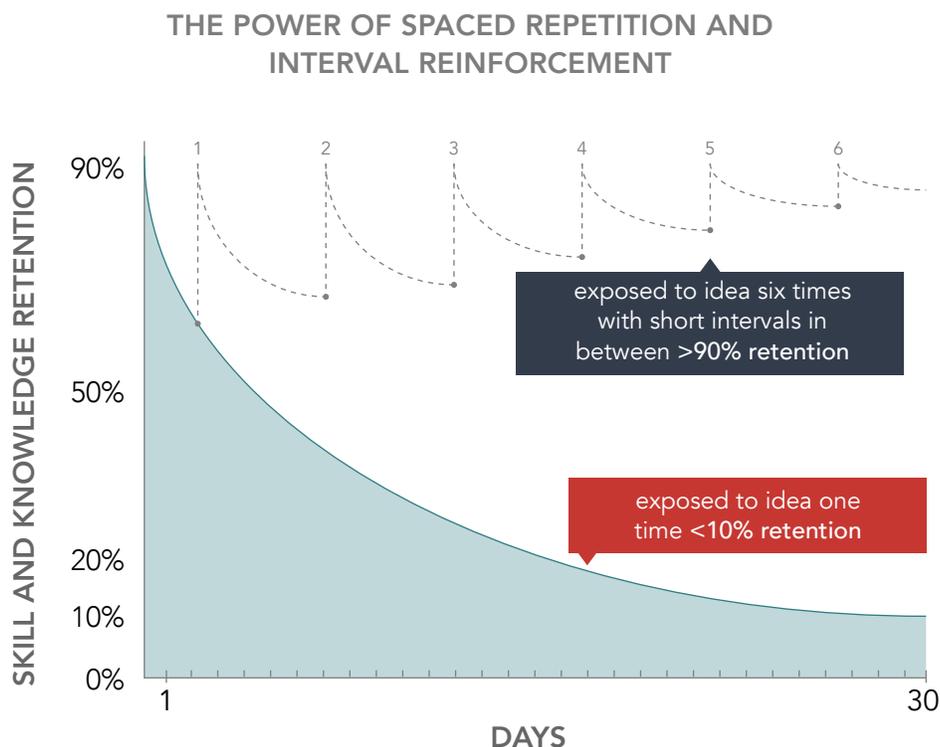
Reinforcement has been a trend in the world of sales training for a while now. The research data in sales training—and learning and development in general—supports the need for robust reinforcement.

But it's still not happening nearly often enough.

Fewer than half (44%) of companies formally follow-up initial sales training with reinforcement. At the same time, the companies that do reinforce training see 20% more salespeople achieve sales quotas.¹⁷

Given that up to 77% of learning is forgotten within six days, reinforcement is a must.¹⁸

The best way to drive retention is through spaced repetition and interval reinforcement. When a participant is exposed to an idea one time, there's less than 10% retention. However, when they're exposed to an idea six times with short intervals in between, you can achieve greater than 90% retention.



One of the major advantages to approaching sales training as a change initiative and sales transformation is the ongoing learning and reinforcement that's built into the process.

Reinforcement happens by way of:

- Concept reinforcement
- Expectation reinforcement
- Motivation enhancement

- Complementary learning
- Action planning and review
- Practice and feedback
- Technology embedding

You can have a lasting impact on people and results for years to come with reinforcement in place that includes video, microlearning, and coaching.

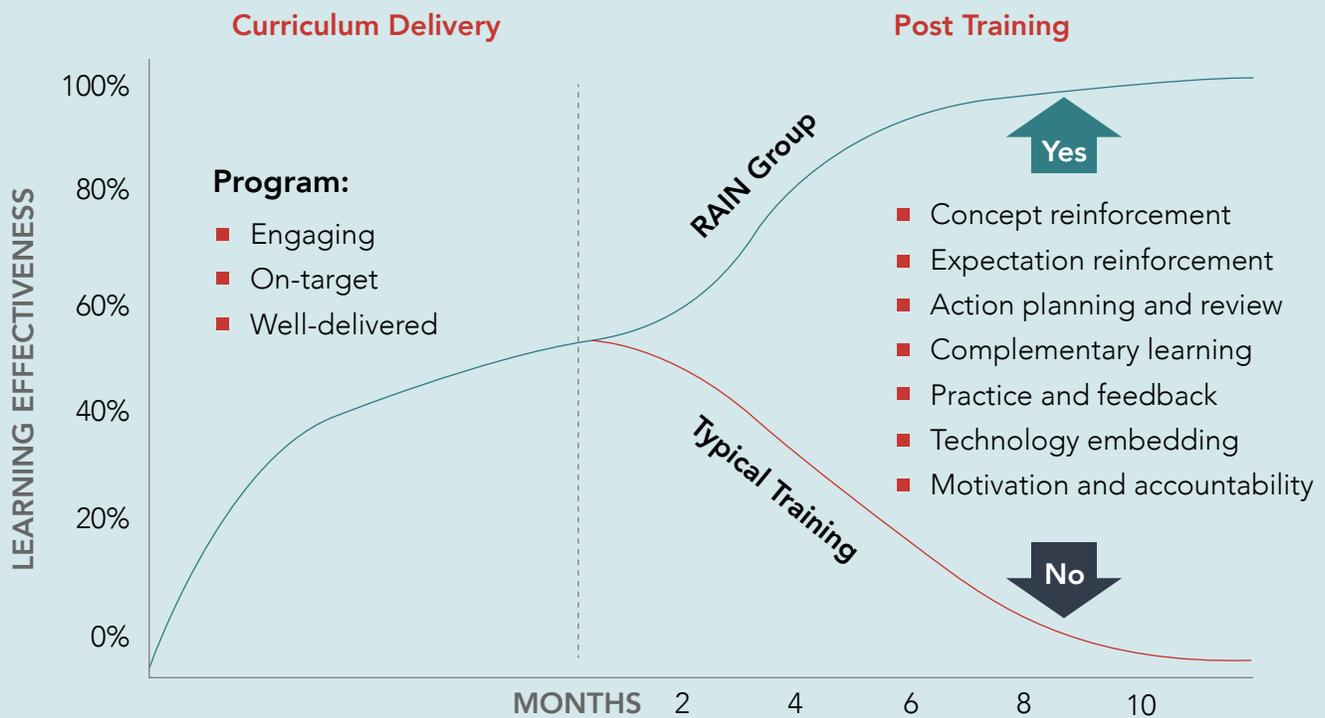
¹⁷ Peter Ostrow, *It's a Marathon, Not a Sprint: Best-In-Class B2B Sales Training for an Ever-Changing Market* (Aberdeen, 2015).

¹⁸ Hermann Ebbinghaus, *Memory: A Contribution to Experimental Psychology* (Teachers College, 1885).

Reinforce for Maximum Results

Here's an example of [RAIN Group's process](#), which includes a robust reinforcement platform to drive behavior change and achieve results:

REINFORCE FOR MAXIMUM RESULTS



RAIN Group training has a **lasting impact** on people and results for years.

RAIN Group Reinforcement

Drive behavior change and results with:

- 90-day Coaching for Action and Accountability
- Spaced repetition that improves retention
- Ongoing access to video training library and tools
- RAIN MailSM scenarios to reinforce content and skills
- Technology embedded in your LMS, CRM, or sales enablement platform
- Tracking through LMS and RAIN MailSM



Only with consistent reinforcement will you transform the behaviors of sellers—this is the intersection of sales training and sales enablement.

Of course, sales coaching plays a vital role here and we address that in [#5 Drive Adoption and Confidence with Application Coaching](#). In addition, sales managers and coaches themselves need to be engaged, aligned, and prepared to support the initiative. More on this in [Enable](#).

4. Apply and Improve Skills with Assignments

You don't learn to ride a bike by watching videos and reading about it. You need to get on the bike, fall down, get up, and try again until you master it. The same is true for selling.

Sellers need to apply new skills, receive feedback, and continue to refine their approach until they reach mastery.

A great way to do this is through what we call Application Assignments. With each module or new skill, sellers are given practical, hands-on assignments they're asked to complete and then present to their coach or manager for feedback.

See below for a couple of example Application Assignments RAIN Group uses for modules related to overcoming objections and needs discovery.

Note that in both examples, participants are using actual selling situations as the basis for the assignment. Furthermore, their coach or manager holds them accountable for completing the assignment and provides feedback allowing sellers to quickly apply and refine those skills.

MODULE: OVERCOMING OBJECTIONS

Assignment: For an upcoming sales call, fill out the Buyer Objections section of the Sales Conversation Planner available in this module.

- Make note of the possible objections or questions a buyer will have
- Identify the type of objections they are
- Prepare your strategy for responding

Be prepared to discuss with your Application Coach.

MODULE: NEEDS DISCOVERY

Assignment: Plan questions for an upcoming needs discovery and share with your Application Coach. Use the Sales Conversation Planner available in this module.

Optional assignment: Record the needs discovery meeting and share it with your Application Coach. Remember to ask permission before recording any call.



5. Drive Adoption and Confidence with Application Coaching

To drive adoption, sellers must be held accountable for applying new skills. With the above assignments and follow-on coaching:

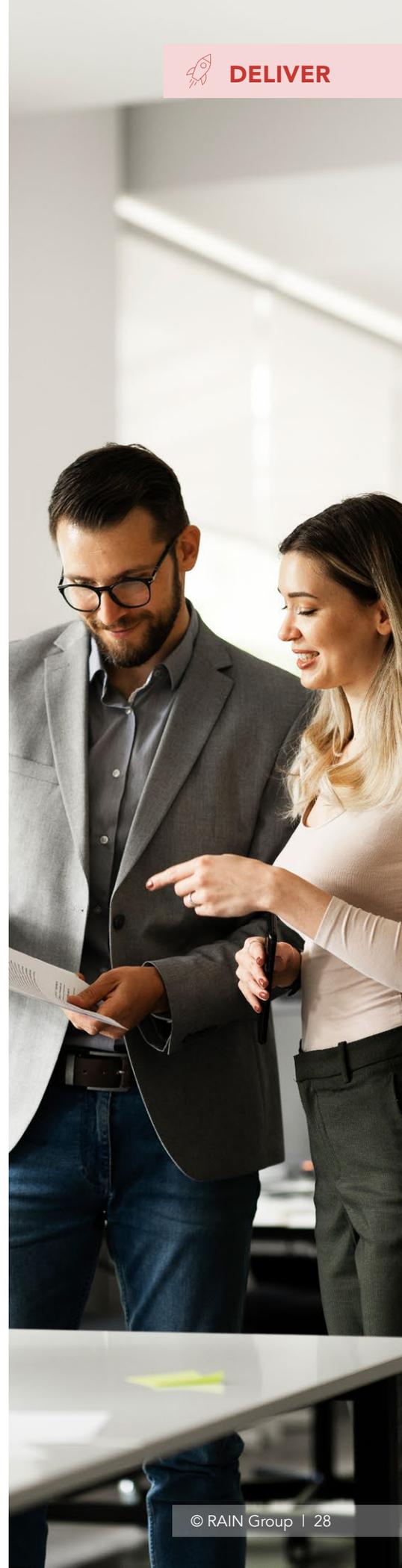
- Expectations are reinforced (the seller is expected to apply new skills in an actual sales opportunity by completing the assignments)
- Actions are planned (specific assignments drive the behavior we want sellers adopting)
- Practice occurs (by sellers completing the assignment)
- Feedback is received (with follow-on coaching)
- Accountability is provided (by the coach)

We call this type of coaching Application Coaching. The Application Coach can be a manager, training facilitator, or sales coach.

Playing out our examples above, once the seller completes the assignment on overcoming objections, the Application Coach works with sellers to advise on the best ways to handle and respond to buyer objections. They ask questions, provide direct feedback, and guide seller behavior.

In the module on leading a needs discovery, the Application Coach reviews the seller's needs discovery plan and discusses it with them in a coaching meeting. If applicable and feasible (i.e., if the coach is the seller's manager and coach and seller agree), the Application Coach reviews and evaluates the recorded needs discovery meeting and provides guidance around areas for improvement.

You can see how in each of these scenarios we move from learning the skills to applying them immediately on the job while receiving support and feedback. This is a powerful way to ensure training sticks and seller behavior changes.



Enable with Coaching and Measurement

You defined your goals for action and change in Craft. You've delivered transformational training in Deliver.

Now it's time to enable the change and empower your sellers to execute.

It's no easy task. Four of the top five [sales leader and enablement challenges](#) reported as very to somewhat challenging in our research include:¹⁹

- Developing sales skills (90%)
- Increasing lead quality and quantity (89%)
- Driving seller and team productivity (i.e., execution) (86%)
- Developing sales managers (85%)

Top sales leader and enablement priorities reported as very to somewhat important include:

- Improving seller productivity (96%)
- Increasing business with existing accounts (96%)
- Improving sales opportunity approach and planning (96%)
- Improving ability to communicate value (94%)
- Driving new logos/new accounts won (93%)
- Winning against difficult competitors (92%)
- Improving sellers' ability to inspire buyers with ideas (92%)

Everything on the list below "improving seller productivity" can be addressed with training. But not unless sellers execute.

And sellers can't execute if they aren't productive.

¹⁹ RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *Top Sales Leadership Challenges & Priorities*.

A recent Forrester study found that B2B sellers spend more time on internal communications than they do on important sales activities, such as opportunity planning, relationship building, presentation preparation, territory and account planning/management, and customer/competitor/industry research.²⁰

Astounding, but not surprising to modern sales leaders.

Sellers don't operate in a vacuum. They're constantly pulled in 10 different directions by 10 different teams. The result is a lot of inboxes and messaging apps overflowing with internal communications. Coupled with the amount of time sellers spend in front of a screen each day, it's a potentially massive productivity sink that sellers must cope with daily.

Yet, it turns out that Top-Performing Sellers are more skilled at managing their time. In fact, they're 62% more likely than other sellers to maximize time spent on sales activities that drive the best results.²¹

Counter to sellers' protests of having no time to focus on their development or do anything new or different, the reality is that most can find the time. In fact, 47% of respondents report they spend a significant amount of time each day on non-value-add activities.²²

When you combine skill development with the right productivity and execution coaching, success follows.

This is what drives Enabling the Change.

It's essential to embed the sales method into your company, especially through your sales managers and how they work with sellers to implement the training. Enable covers how to do this effectively, measure results, and improve the process.

²⁰ Jennifer Bullock, Peter Ostrow, and Eric Zines, "Introducing The Sales Communications Process Model," Forrester, August 2, 2021, <https://www.forrester.com/report/introducing-the-sales-communications-process-model/RES176008>.

²¹ RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *The Top-Performing Seller Benchmark Report*.

²² RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *The Extreme Productivity Benchmark Report*.



1. Achieve Leader-Led Transformation with Sales Manager Training and Coaching

If you've been following the process we've outlined, you're set up for success. Now you just need to ensure everything is applied and adopted over the long-term. A core leverage point here is sales management and how managers help drive seller skills, productivity, and execution.

It's the sales manager's job to:

- [Motivate sellers](#) to get to, and stay at, the top of their game
- Help sellers define [goals and action plans](#), and guide them to the behaviors that will help them succeed the most
- Work with sellers to use the tools and resources available so sellers execute more consistently and with better results
- Advise sellers on how to win sales
- Guide sellers to develop into top performers
- Hold sellers accountable for their results

How do you enable and equip sales managers with the skills and tools they need to support their sales teams? Training and coaching.

Start by having sales managers attend seller training. Simultaneously, have sales managers attend training and coaching to improve manager coaching skills.

Manager training sessions, assignments, and coaching should focus on developing managers to:

- Observe seller skills
- Give feedback on seller skills
- Encourage the application of seller skills
- Hold sellers accountable

When manager coaching sessions are conducted in small groups, it allows a high level of focus and personalization.

Such coaching sessions provide sales managers with the mindset, tools, and skillset they need to ensure their team adopts and embeds new skills and tools into their everyday operating rhythm.

Top-Performing Sales Managers Receive Better Training

We know that Top-Performing Sales Managers receive highly effective training themselves, which correlates to team performance. Managers of top-performing sales teams are 46% more likely to receive extremely or very effective training compared to other managers.

SALES TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS
% RESPONDENTS



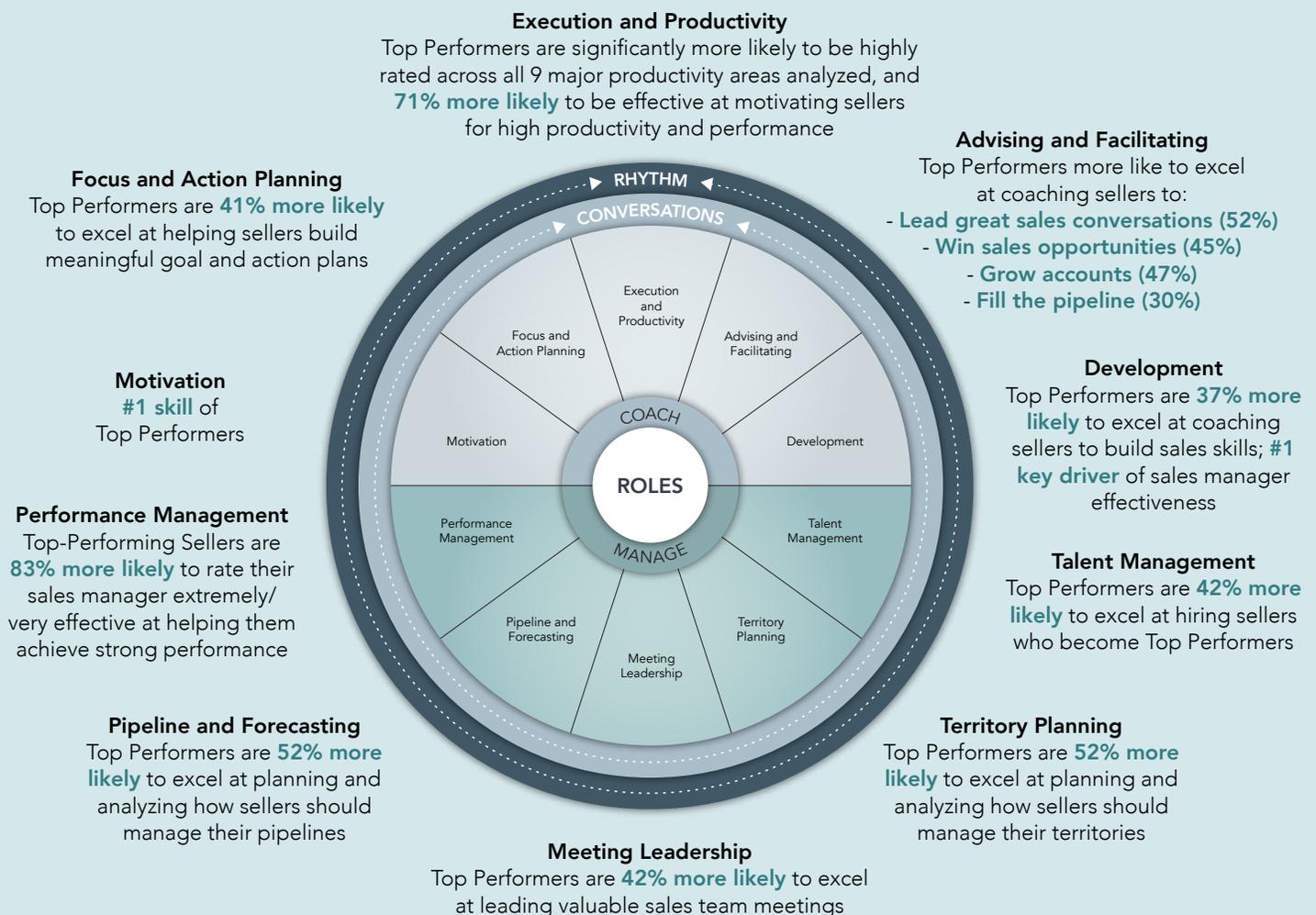
The Top-Performing Sales ManagerSM

In a global study of 1,004 sales managers and sellers conducted by the RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, we learned what the best sales managers do to achieve top performance and drive exceptionally strong results. This research underpins our model of The Top-Performing Sales Manager.

When developing training curricula for your sales managers, be sure to evaluate your sales managers' competencies in these areas and provide training in the areas that will support manager development.

Here's a sampling of the validating data from the research:

- **Rhythm:** Top Performers are 51% more likely to have regular, ongoing coaching.
- **Conversations:** Top Performers are 40% more likely to be skilled at leading valuable coaching meetings.
- **Roles:** The 10 roles (5 coaching-focused, 5 management-focused) are all statistically validated as 10 critical areas where Top-Performing Sales Managers excel versus other managers.



To learn more, download [The Top-Performing Sales Manager Benchmark Report](#). →

2. Implement 90-Day Sales Achievement Challenges for Execution and Results

There's a powerful link between sellers' productivity behaviors and performance. Not only are productivity behaviors positively correlated with top performance (i.e., attainment of challenging sales goals, higher average win rates, premium pricing), but the teams with Top-Performing Sales Managers are significantly more likely to be highly rated across all nine productivity habits that enable sellers to execute and become top performers.

When managers help sellers apply productive habits, sellers are more likely to choose the right activities, be motivated, be inspired to change, and take actions that produce results.

For a sales transformation to be most successful, sales managers need to work with sellers to apply and adopt these habits in a highly structured way.

Here's how we do it at RAIN Group. We first teach the coaches how to get their teams motivated, focused, and executing. Then we coach the coaches for 90 days to implement a 90-Day Sales Achievement Challenge with their teams. Each month has an important focus:

- 1. Launch:** Designed to ensure sellers apply new sales skills and habits right away and get on the right track. If not, inertia will take hold and old habits will reign.
- 2. Amplification:** Focuses on challenging sellers to push their skill and productivity gains to the extreme limit. If not, potential remains untapped and old behaviors re-emerge.
- 3. Embedding:** Focuses on making new behaviors permanent. Staying with it for 90 days is essential.

For example, we worked with a mid-sized IT systems integrator and ran a trial of RAIN Sales Prospecting paired with a 90-Day Sales Achievement Challenge. Within eight weeks, they had quadrupled their connect rate with prospects from three connections per week to 12. They went from booking an average of two and a half meetings per week per seller, to nearly eight per seller per week.

During the 12-week period from start to first measurement, their product pipeline doubled and their professional services pipeline just short of tripled. Combined they got 2.2x, or 220% growth, in just 12 weeks. The challenge and coaching were a huge part of their success.

In short, sales managers are critical to ensuring sellers A) learn the skill, B) apply the skill consistently, and C) spend their time on the right activities to drive the best results. Many companies miss this part of the process. Those that don't tend to achieve outsized success.

3. Embed with Total Access, Train the Trainer

What's the linchpin to making sure a sales transformation is successful and a sales method becomes embedded in the organization's culture?

Management that knows and lives the method.

As noted above, managers need to coach sellers to help them implement. But imagine what happens when sellers get advice on how to sell from managers and coaches who don't know the selling method itself. The entire process breaks down.

It's important to have trained coaches involved with any major training initiative so they can bring the method alive in their conversations with sellers.

The challenge here is that Train the Trainer is often onerous, requiring too much instructor-led classroom time to transfer the knowledge. However, as we noted earlier ([Flipped Classroom](#)), it's possible to decrease the time needed out of the field to transfer the method and knowledge for both internal trainers and sales coaches.

For example, RAIN Group provides access to our suite of instructor-led sales training programs, online learning, performance support tools, learning journeys, and resources for your entire sales team through [Total Access](#). In addition, our Client Results team supports seamless integration and use across your sales organization to maximize the results from your investment.

Furthermore, with a complete method, you can build upon skills overtime and instill a shared language across the team. No more flavor of the month training, a consistent method offers a focused, organized, logical, and long-term view.



4. Measure and Report on Metrics and Implement Continuous Improvement

You'd be hard pressed to find a piece of management advice that doesn't advocate for measuring, analyzing what you find, and applying those measures for continuous improvement.

But it often doesn't happen. Identifying, tracking, and reporting on metrics and KPIs customized to the organization and its sales transformation initiative requires forethought and planning. It's well worth the required effort, however, because the resulting metrics are what enables you to see what's working and what's not. It allows you to make adjustments and calibrate the inputs so you maximize sales improvements.

EXAMPLE: MEASUREMENT, KPIS, AND CADENCE

Opening Game	Middle Game	End Game
<p>Learner Engagement & Experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Attendance ■ Completion ■ Learner Satisfaction 	<p>Business Lead Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Account plans completed ■ Account plan quality ■ # new contacts established ■ # presentations delivered 	<p>Business Lag Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Revenue ■ Yield ■ Average discount % ■ Share of Wallet / Market Share
<p> Weekly</p>	<p> Monthly</p>	<p> Quarterly</p>

For example, when we work with clients, there are a range of measures we review jointly prior to deciding whether to continue or pivot on a training element based on the results we're seeing at different stages of the program deployment.

In the very early stages (opening game), you'll want to focus on learner engagement and experience measures, such as attendance, completion, and learner satisfaction.

Once you're satisfied the learning experience itself is hitting the mark, you can turn your attention to business lead indicators. At this stage of the program (middle game) you're tracking the metrics that indicate the approach and tools are being adopted and applied, such as account plans being completed, account plan quality, number of new contacts established, number of presentations delivered, and so on.

An improvement in the lead indicators should result in an improvement in the business lag indicators, which of course is the ultimate goal.

The actual metrics used need to be defined for your organization and the change you're looking to drive, which is why this step in the Craft phase is so critical.

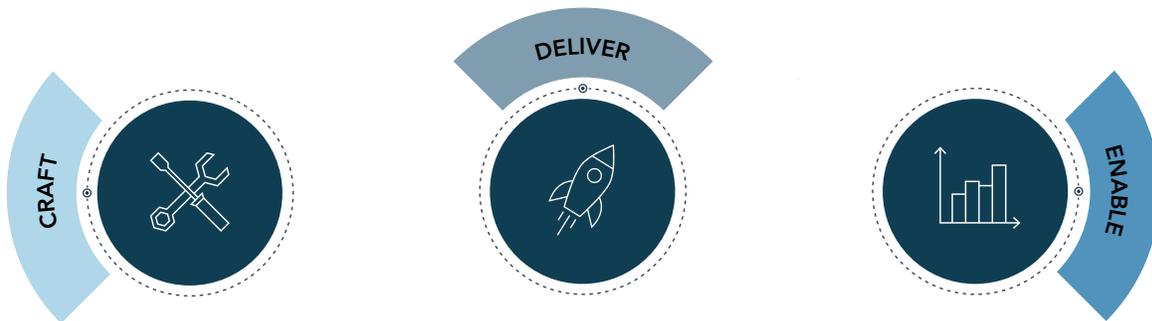
Sales Training Success Summary

Driving change and results through sales training has never been more important. Yet, all too often, traditional sales training fails. To achieve results and ROI growth over the long term, a different approach is required.

In the end, the organizations that embrace a sales transformation will build sales team capability, design training that enables sellers to apply those capabilities, and transform the way they sell. Follow the steps laid out in this guide and you'll be well on your way to becoming one of these organizations.

EXECUTION ASSURANCE: TRAINING AS CHANGE INITIATIVE

Current State → New Reality



Change Strategy & Metrics

- Define **business metrics** to attain
- Craft a **change strategy** to achieve metrics
- Tailor program **curriculum, content, cohorts** to your world

World-Class Training

- Engage with **highly interactive, experiential learning**
- Deliver **modular, multi-modal, modern training**
- Reinforce with **engaging, interactive videos** and **micro-learning**
- Apply and improve skills with **Application Assignments**
- Drive adoption and confidence with **Application Coaching**

Coaching & Measurement

- Achieve leader-led transformation with **manager training, coach the coach**
- Implement **90-Day Sales Achievement Challenges** for execution and results
- Embed with **Total Access, Train the Trainer**
- Measure and **report on metrics** ongoing
- Implement **continuous improvement**

Result: Training is adopted, change happens, business results get delivered. **Execution assured!**

Sales Training to Transform Your Team

RAIN Group works with organizations to deliver a transformational sales training experience purpose-built for adult learners.

Following the framework introduced in this white paper, we help you:

1. **Craft** a change strategy to achieve key metrics and tailor the program to your world
2. **Deliver** world-class training that drives immediate application
3. **Enable** training success through ongoing support, coaching, and KPI measurement

Whether you have a geographically distributed team, multi-language needs, or a complex sales process, we work with you to design a custom solution that drives results.

Areas of focus include:

- Foundations of Consultative Selling
- Advanced Consultative Selling
- Virtual Selling
- Strategic/Key Account Management
- Winning Major Sales
- Sales Prospecting
- Sales Negotiation
- Sales Management
- 9 Habits of Extreme Productivity
- Sales Coaching

In addition, with solutions like Train the Trainer and Total Access (licensing), you reduce the time out of the field, equip leaders to support sellers, and embed a proven sales method in your organization.

[Click here to request a complimentary consultation →](#)



RAIN Group Delivers World-Class Sales Training

- Modular, multi-modal, and purpose-built for the **modern learner**.
- Unique approach to driving **behavior change** through training that we call Execution Assurance.
- Focused on driving the **business results** important to you.
- A **transformational experience** that ensures the development, adoption, and implementation of new skills.
- Action-oriented **coaching** prepares sellers for real situations and provides direct feedback.

RAIN Group Unleashes Sales Potential

We help organizations:

- Develop and improve sales strategy, process, messaging, and talent
- Enhance sales capability with award-winning sales training
- Design and execute strategic account management initiatives
- Increase effectiveness of sales management and coaching

Best IP: We study buying and selling relentlessly through the RAIN Group Center for Sales Research. Our research and field work allows us to create industry-leading intellectual property to help our clients achieve the greatest success.

Best Education System: We use the best education approaches, methods, and technologies to make training work, stick, and transfer to the job.

Best Results: We make it our mission to drive value and achieve the highest client satisfaction through excellence in quality and producing transformational results for our clients.

