SAP Litmos

# The 6 biggest sales challenges and how training can solve them

It's an exciting time to be in sales. Sales jobs are growing, inbound marketing offers sales teams more warm leads than ever before, and technology offers salespeople a variety of ways to connect with prospects.

But with this changing landscape comes challenges. Sales reps must be proficient in constantly-evolving technological tools while providing the trust and human connection that inspires prospects to buy. They must be able to reach out to their marketing counterparts in order to get better data for their prospecting efforts.

They're also expected to personalize the sales experience for buyers — today's buyers are used to the personalized service they get from companies like Netflix and Amazon. Your reps have to be able to offer that level of personalization as well, offering customized recommendations and understanding your buyers' concerns.

Buyers reward a tailored customer experience. A recent LinkedIn study[1] shows that buyers and decision makers are much more likely to consider a brand's products or services when a sales representative understands them and their role.
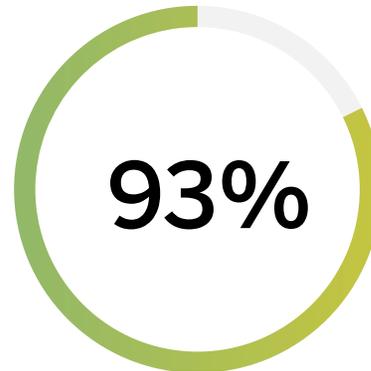
Prospects are more likely to buy:

96%
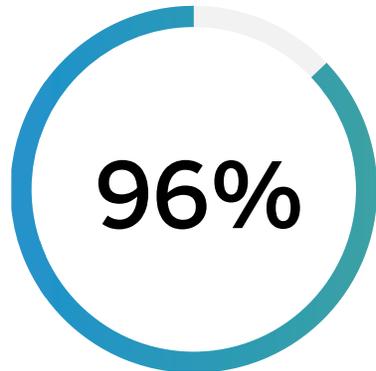
When a salesperson understands their business needs

94%
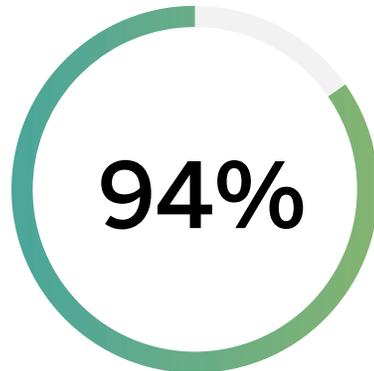
When a salesperson understands their role

93%

If a salesperson shares content relevant to their role

93%
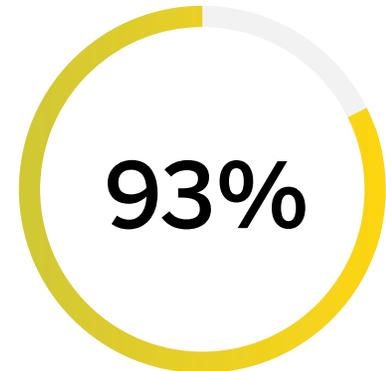
If a salesperson's communication is personalized

That's a lot for your average sales rep to keep up with. It's no wonder that sales remains one of the most stressful jobs. Across industry reports, every year, it's ranked in one of the highest areas of attrition.

But there's good news for beleaguered sales managers, who are trying to hit ever-rising targets while keeping their sales team intact. The right training program can make reps productive more quickly, get the whole team operating at the same level, and even win over some reps who might resist training.

Let's look at six of the most difficult challenges facing sales teams today and address how the right training program can resolve each one of them.

Challenge #1
Your reps take forever
to get up to speed

To hit your targets, you need your reps to hit the ground running once they're hired and onboarded. But are they? The Bridge Group[2] reports that in 2018, it took a rep an average of three months before they were ramped up to full productivity, but some industries report a ramp time of six months[3]. Imagine the loss of dollars, both in terms of paying unproductive salespeople and in the absence of new deals that could be produced during those time periods.

While those ramp-up periods are clearly too long, they're also somewhat understandable. Despite the rising demand for salespeople, the required experience for a new hire is on the decline. In other words, companies are hiring less experienced people, churning them through the standard onboarding program, and then discovering when they hit the sales floor that they're still not ready to sell like a pro.

Unfortunately, your organization doesn't have time for a slow onboarding program that takes months to get your new hires up to speed. You're not only leaving money on the table, you're also demotivating workers who could be gaining momentum by closing deals. If they're struggling to succeed after lackluster onboarding that failed to equip them for success, you can be sure that their engagement and commitment to the company are diminishing. The good news is that training can help. Research shows that better onboarding programs can increase performance by 11.5%.

The percentage of companies accepting two or fewer years of experience has doubled since 2010. The percentage accepting experience of less than a single year has quadrupled.
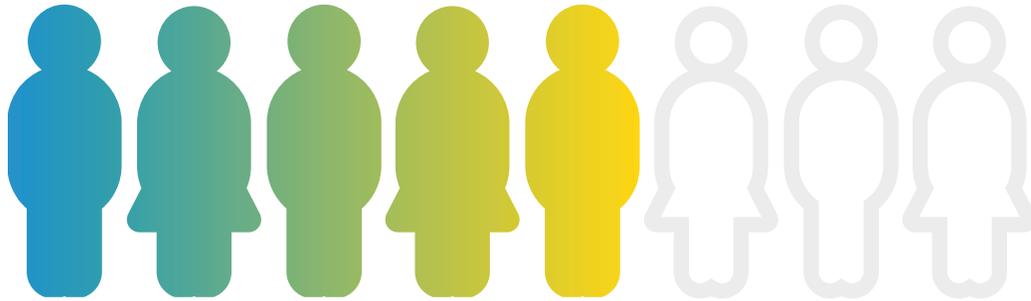
Feel like your onboarding isn't up to scratch? You're not alone; 62% of companies consider themselves ineffective at onboarding new sales hires.

The moral of the story is that the first training your reps get from you should be relevant, engaging, and designed to enable them to meet their first quotas right out of the gate. If that's not happening, the training program needs testing and revamping.

"We were able to launch SAP Litmos in a matter of days, not weeks or months, which allowed us to go to market a lot quicker than we had anticipated. **We have been able to save a huge amount of time, man hours, and cost,** which has added to the list of wins since launching the LMS. Our company performance has improved by ensuring training activities strategically align with our mission, which enables our sales team to be successful."

Nicholas Gregory
Global Sales Enablement Director, Sabre Corporation

Challenge #2
Your team isn't meeting
their sales targets

It's every sales manager's nightmare. No matter what you do, your sales team just isn't meeting its sales targets. When the sales team isn't performing well, a few things might be wrong:

- The team might lack soft skills they need to do their jobs well, like time management, active listening, communication, or empathy.
- Reps might not understand the products they're selling well enough to sell them.
- Your sales team might not be following an effective, well-designed sales process.

Training can help improve reps' performance in all these areas, from practicing soft skills to continually receiving new product courses to ensuring that they're all following the same sales process.

When a new product is released or if reps seem to need help with their sales pitch for a specific product, training modules are a way for you to make sure they have the information they need when they need it.

Sales can also help you onboard (and reinforce) a sales process that demystifies selling by breaking down sales into its component parts. That way your new reps know exactly what they have to do to make a sale and your existing reps can check in for a refresher if they need it.

You can also use experience-driven learning to assign courses to individual reps based on the feedback you get from customers. This personalized learning may help your reps work on specific issues — like their pitch, an upselling technique, or customer experience.

Sales organizations with the highest overall sales training rating (a mean score of 4.0-5.0, out of 5.0) have an average win rate of 58%. The others (a mean score of 3.0-3.9) had an average win rate of just 47%.[4]
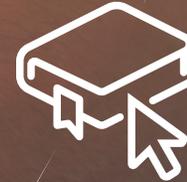
Challenge #3
Your reps are too
expensive to replace

Did you know that it can cost an average of $2 million[5] in lost sales if you hire and onboard the wrong sales rep? If you're a sales manager you probably do. The cost of hiring and training reps is certainly part of that cost, but so is the sales void that exists as they go through the hiring process and ramp up.

It's no wonder companies spend $800 billion a year[1] on incentives designed to keep sales talent from leaving.

Sounds grim, but there's good news: employees value training. According to LinkedIn's Workplace Learning Report, 93% of employees say they'd stay with a company longer if it invested in their career.[6]

In this sense, sales leaders should see training not as an expenditure, but as an investment with a significant ROI.

It's a shift in perspective, but one that is proven to pay off over time. By training your reps you not only save the company money in the long run, you also help them improve at their jobs and develop their careers, which keeps them where they belong — on your sales team.

Challenge #4
Your reps won't take
your training

Let's debunk an old myth: the best salespeople are good at their jobs because they're strong-willed, ego-driven, and mega-competitive. They're self-motivated mavericks who will do whatever it takes to close the deal.

If this myth were ever true, it isn't anymore. Things change too fast. Even the sharpest self-starter can't keep up with the pace of new products, multi-channel communications, and history's most informed customers. When your sales superstars resist training, claiming that they need to focus on selling or flatly refuse to take training at all because they don't need the help, you can thank them for their confidence and then kindly assign them a learning path.

Training is no longer optional. It's a mandatory element of sales success, regardless of past performance or experience level. Even the most senior sales person needs to know the latest product, process, and company/cultural information. In the experience economy, where the customer experience promise must be met at every interaction, neither proven success nor seniority excuse a person from continuous learning.

However, if your salespeople are earnestly complaining about choosing between sales time and training, there are steps to take to alleviate those concerns. First, be sure to integrate the training platform with the CRM system, so that learning is woven into their daily flow of work. You can also encourage them to take advantage of mobile options, so they can learn on-the-go or while prepping in the parking lot of an onsite customer meeting.

Salespeople are naturally competitive creatures, so consider leveraging the gamification capabilities built into your training platform. By adding points and a leaderboard to your training, you can spark friendly competition among your sales reps — or, if you have more than one team — you can pit sales teams against each other to see who can take the most training. You can even offer a prize to the rep (or team) that's learned the most.

Lastly, resistance to training may be a signal to take a look at your content. Is it outdated? Is it hard to access? Does it take too long to complete? Is it too basic for your best reps? There are plenty of easy, affordable options for curating cutting-edge, video-based sales content these days, so there's no excuse to serve up boring, old slideshow courses not designed to drive engagement or retention.

"We have developed a global sales training program that is a 16-week, intensive online learning program with follow-up touch points for the next 12 months. It is highly engaging and utilizes SAP Litmos technology to engage the learner and to deliver interactive, video-rich content that uses a combination of self-authored and Litmos Training content. As a result of the new training program, we've increased sales and productivity by 18 percent."

Michael Vincent
Global Head of Learning, Travel Counsellors

Challenge #5
Your reps don't all need the same training

Most sales teams aren't staffed by reps with exactly the same ability levels. If your team is like most you probably have some of these reps on board:

The star
Most sales teams have a star — that rep who closes more sales than everyone else and crushes their targets every month.

Newbies
The rapid turnover of sales jobs means you're probably ramping up one or more new reps at all times.

Rank and file
These are the solid, middle-of-the-road reps who are plug along at a steady pace and hit their targets.

Stragglers
These salespeople are the ones who need the most help and struggle with their quotas.

These are all very different salespeople with very different needs, and you can't try to train them in the same way.

Say you try to serve up learning targeting your average salesperson, and you serve it to the whole team. It won't help everyone: your stars will be bored; your newbies may be confused; and your stragglers will be overwhelmed.

By adopting a more coaching-based approach to training your salespeople, you can tailor training in the way that plays to a rep's strengths and provides support for their weaknesses. Your stars should be offered development that prepares them for a pathway to bigger and better roles, or teaches more advanced selling techniques, while your struggling reps receive more basic courses on products, streamlined processes, and sales best practices.

While sitting down with each rep for personalized coaching sessions is important, sometimes – in large organizations or companies that employ remote sales teams — that isn't possible.

In that case, experience-driven learning can be used to automatically prescribe personalized learning to reps based on customer feedback and other factors, such as skills gaps or performance goals. This tailored training creates an intelligent learning culture that meets your salespeople's specific needs and helps meet customer expectations.

Challenge #6
Your reps are expected to deliver five-star customer experience

Happy customers are active buyers. But unhappy ones? Not so much.

A lot of factors contribute to customer churn, but one of the biggest ones is poor customer experience. If a company doesn't take the time to engage its customers well, those customers are likely to leave within six to eight months, according to Harvard Business Review[7]. By the time you notice customers are leaving, the damage is done.

The best defense in this case is a charming offense. Your sales reps are the first human contact most of your customers will have with your brand, so they must be trained to provide the highest level of customer experience from the very start.

This can be a challenge when customer experience is as high stakes as it is right now — customers are more informed than ever and it's easy to simply switch to a competitor with better customer experience. On top of that, salespeople haven't always been expected to provide top-level CX; their job has been to prospect, overcome objections and close deals.

Luckily, intensive personalized training can help sales reps learn how to be good brand ambassadors. With continuous learning based on customer feedback, reps can learn how to listen to customer concerns, and offer advice on new products while building quality relationships with your customers.

Acquiring a new customer is anywhere from five to 25 times more expensive than retaining an existing one.[7]

This is a win for your customers and a win for you — improving customer retention rates by even small percentages can increase profits by significant margins.

1 in 26 unhappy customers complain to a company about their poor experience[8]
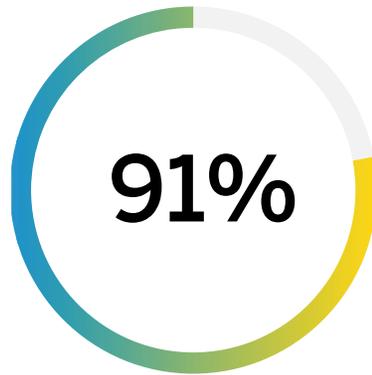
91%

91% of unhappy customers who don't complain simply leave[8]
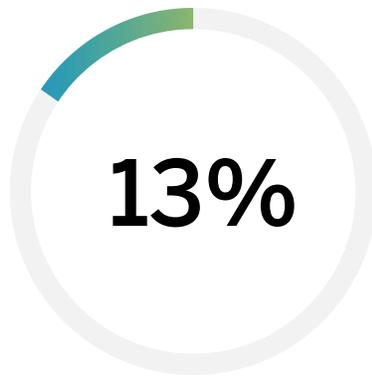
13%

13% of unhappy customers complain about their experience to 15 or more people[8]

"We chose SAP Litmos because of its ease-of-use, course library, and anytime-anywhere on any device capabilities. **One of the greatest things about SAP Litmos is the mobile user-interface.** Whether you're on your phone or tablet, on a bus, hotel or plane, it is always instantly accessible on any device. We see training as vital in creating excellent customer and employee experiences."

Rachel Bebgie
Learning, Development & Wellbeing Director, Corinthia Hotels

Improving experience for reps and customers with training

We left Challenge #6 for the last because it's the biggest one to grapple with. We're living in an Experience Economy, where organizations are compete on customer experience above every other factor.

As your company's brand ambassadors, you need your salespeople to deliver customized customer service to prospects before they even buy — as well as to meet sales targets and excel in all their sales duties. It might seem like a tall order, but your sales team is up to the task, as long as you're offering them learning that aligns with your customers' real-world needs and concerns. Overcome this challenge and not only will your sales teams be more successful, but your organization will be well positioned to stay ahead and win.

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