



The Exact Expertise to
Ignite and Sustain Performance™

LSA Global | White Paper



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Why Skills-Based Training Implementations Fail

Over the past 10 years, we have worked with several hundred organizations both large and small to help them improve the performance of their customer-facing organizations. In doing so, we have found many who have implemented one sales methodology or customer service process training program only to find themselves a couple of years later looking for a replacement program because the one they've got is perceived as inadequate or worse—people not following the process or using the tools and management and executives turning a blind eye to such disregard, because in many cases, they weren't really behind the training program to begin with.

This serial implementation of new skills programs, regardless of type or audience, is expensive and a major distraction to the constituency (be it the sales force, customer service, consulting, etc.) and lowers overall productivity of the organization. While the expense outlays related to training can be easily measured in financial terms, the true cost as measured in terms of customer satisfaction, excessive discounts given in the sales process, employee morale, turnover, etc. are difficult to tie directly to an ineffective training implementation, but there is a connection.

It could be argued that any professional services or sales methodology is just as good as the next. While I don't believe that's true in an absolute sense, for some organizations, one could work just as well as any other. So, if that's the case, why do some implementations fail and others become a remarkable success? There are many reasons for these failures and every one of them is avoidable if you're serious about getting the return on your investment.

There are three major timeframes of your training implementation where the wrong actions or approach can cause the program to fail:

Prior to training deployment - Things that cause training to fail even before it's been deployed include:

- **Lack of true executive sponsorship** – training is all about doing something in a different way than it's being done today, and it is insufficient for senior management and executives to give only “lip service” sponsorship to a new way of doing things. Executives need to get on board and actively “walk the walk” of how the new process will be followed, what they expect from it, and how they'll support it.
- **Lack of integration to what's already in place and working** – so many training vendors arrive with their “off-the-shelf” materials and expect the learners to adjust to the new way, without any consideration for existing nomenclature, processes, tools, or systems. This approach creates an instant barrier to adoption and is a leading cause of training failure and can only be solved if the training provider spends time up front to understand the organizational environment and tailors the training curriculum to leverage existing tools and processes.





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- **Inadequate engagement of front-line managers** – no individual will invest the time, energy or effort to change their behavior unless they're convinced their manager really expects them to. Here's an actual quote from a front-line sales manager who said to his team, "Hey, I tried to get you out of that training next week, but you really have to go." This immediately sends the message that we need to check off your attendance, but we're not really taking the training seriously. This will undoubtedly lead to a lack of adoption of any new process or skill. Instead, it's best if the managers are engaged earlier, so they understand exactly what will be trained and it's made clear that, without their explicit support, the training will fail.
 - **A best practice in this area** is to spend time in advance of the actual training event to review the content and exercises, as well as teach the managers how to coach the exercises that will be conducted during training.
- **Content or practices that are not globally appropriate or consistent** – if you're a multinational firm, make sure that the training you're planning will work around the world before you begin the deployment. If it requires tailoring or adaptation, make sure your training provider has proven experience in doing so.

During deployment

Deployments can occur in a variety of formats, from small group sessions of 15-30 people to big-tent sessions with the entire sales force or services group. Regardless of format, it's best to avoid these mistakes, which frequently causes training to fail:

- **Training content that is too complex or not relevant** – this seems simplistic, but too many training programs are cookie-cutter in nature and assume a "one size fits all" approach to learning. If they fail to make the content relevant to the specific audience being trained, it negatively impacts adoption. It's critical to understand the audience, their experience level, and the context in which they're expected to apply the new skills and then tailor the training to those factors.
- **Training that isn't "real life"** – asking the learner to practice a skill in a way other than they will during the course of their normal work (or using a case study instead of a real-world example) is frustrating and unproductive. If the learner normally works as part of a team, exercises should be team-based. If they normally work on the phone, the learning should support that as well.
- **Content that is all about "what" the learner should do** - so much training tells the participants what they should do differently than they do things today, but fails to tell them "how" they should do it. Instead, exercises should be geared towards practical application of a skill and help the learner. There should be adequate behavioral mentoring and coaching of each exercise and, if time allows, the chance for each participant to practice their new skills multiple times throughout the training experience.
- **Instructors who are not practitioners in the skills being taught** – professional skills-based learning that is taught by "facilitators" – no matter how good they are – will not register as particularly valid to the learners. It is far better if the person(s) leading the training event has actually done the job and is proficient in the skills that they're trying to train on.





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- **Practitioner instructors that rely on “war stories” from their experiences a few decades ago** – these individuals, who were clearly successful in their day, but now out of touch with current markets or practices can frustrate the learner. This doesn't prevent those with plenty of gray hair (the author included) from being very effective trainers, it's just critical that the content be current and in alignment with the topics being covered.

Post Training Deployment

Any new skills that are never measured, reviewed, or reinforced will surely fall into disuse very quickly. One of the fastest ways to waste your money is to train your people on a new process or skills set and then never talk about it or ask about it again. Therefore, following the training itself, avoid these activities which contribute to failed implementation:

- **Managers who fail to coach the new techniques and skills** – while this is greatly mitigated if managers are engaged prior to the workshop, it can still happen that managers give only lip service to the new way of doing things. These managers are throwing your money away, so if they struggle with how to measure and test the new skills and tools, you should implement an ongoing manager and executive coaching program, so they understand exactly what to look for and how to quickly test and coach the individual's use of the tools.
- **Failure to cross-pollinate with other processes** – almost any customer-facing process (sales, consulting, marketing, customer service) can have touch points to all the others. If the language and toolsets are applied inconsistently across business functions, it can lead to confusion, both internally and with the customer. Instead, look for ways to adapt and deploy whatever tools and skills on which you train one part of your organization across various customer functions so you can gain even greater leverage from your initial investment.
- **Failure to develop champions and internal instructors** – your training vendor would love to have you spend money with them ad infinitum, but that's not the best approach for you to have a sustainable program in your organization. Instead, develop internal champions and have them certified by your training vendor to teach and coach the content you've licensed. This will enable you to inculcate the concepts, tools and techniques on an ongoing basis and continue to drive adoption throughout your organization.
- **Not making the tools readily available** – people will give up if they can't find the tools they've just learned easily! Make the tools available immediately after training, in whatever form or location makes the most sense for your organization – whether it's on a portal or in a file cabinet... whatever works for you!
- **Lack of accountability for adoption** – people who are not accountable for adopting the new processes or techniques can easily avoid doing so. Institute a program of accountability with rewards for best usage of a tool and/or best collaboration with the customer, etc. to reward adoption.

Unfortunately, there's no silver bullet to the effective training of your teams and individuals. It takes time and understanding of your organization, the current level of your people, the objective of the training program itself, and the necessary measurement and reinforcement that is an absolute requirement to changing behavior in human beings. A training provider who promises results with an off-the-shelf program and/or a cookie-cutter approach may seem like a good deal, but it may also result in you starting a new evaluation for a replacement vendor a few years down the line.





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The best approach is to plan the training carefully, establish a baseline for where you are and where you want to be and gain the necessary management and executive alignment before you ever deploy the training. After the training itself, measure and reinforce to achieve the true behavior change and performance improvement you seek.

About LSA Global

Since 1995, LSA has helped organizations create and maintain competitive advantages through people. Over 85% of our business comes from repeat clients and our customer satisfaction rating is 97.5%. Our clients tell us that we are different. Our clients tell us that we save them both time and money. Our clients tell us that they appreciate access to experts across many areas

Our Leadership and Management clients report that we decrease their costs by up to 50%, while helping increase speed-to-productivity by 60% and decrease unwanted attrition by up to 40%.

Our Sales clients confirm that they have grown sales by 40%, increased units sold by 42%, increased average pricing by 12%, and closed over 50% of their pipeline.

Our Project Management clients inform us that, by regularly completing projects that meet or exceed expectations, they have become an anomaly in the world where most projects disappoint or fail.

Our clients succeed in the marketplace through increased revenue, decreased costs, and higher productivity. They maintain that our rigorous assessment, implementation, and measurement capabilities bring them tangible results. As an organization, we are fiercely devoted to supporting their success.



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