

Best and Highest Use

“We need sales training.” This is a frequent statement made by senior executives who approach us for guidance (often after several failed attempts at initiating training at their firms). Arguably, most consultants and technical specialists have never aspired to become professional sales people. While there are many Principals and Partners of professional service firms who can be classified as “rainmakers”, most firms understandably recruit and hire based on an individual’s subject matter expertise and technical competency.

“Training” is often sold (and it can be an easy sell) as a panacea promising long-term, significant increases in revenue generation. The logical thinking attached to this approach, which makes it an easy sell, is that sales skills can be taught and process can be instilled in individuals that will elevate them to Rainmaker status. Unfortunately, the reality is much different.

Behavioral research indicates that training an individual to perform tasks which lie outside of their area of natural interests and more importantly, run counter to their innate behavior pattern, will at best create a temporary increase in competency of about 20%. Combine the time, effort and expense (both in hard dollars and the cost of time) of putting together a formal training program with the fact that, for the most part, the “trainees” are most likely reluctant students, and the wisdom of the training approach rapidly becomes questionable.

The answer? Focus on Best and Highest Use of resources. Recognize that it’s unreasonable to expect the majority of your team to change their behaviors significantly in the long run. Allow people to focus on work that is in their natural comfort zone (and taps into their passion) and the results can be stellar.

Here’s a better recipe for success:

- Understand the behavioral/motivational makeup of your team in order to identify the “hidden” Rainmakers in your midst.
- Establish a mentoring program utilizing the experience of your established Rainmakers.
- Consider supporting the mentoring program with an independent “coach”. *This must be someone who understands the world of the consultant. A traditional “sales coach” won’t be helpful here.*
- Re-visit your compensation plan and consider a “two track” plan. One for Rainmakers and one for non-Rainmakers (both with incentives that address their functional roles).
- Conduct a review of your firm’s approach toward marketing and selling. If you’re using a traditional “features vs. benefits” approach to selling complex solutions, you may be arming your team with the wrong tools for the job.
- Be patient. Be committed. If you go into this type of paradigm shift expecting short term results you’ll be disappointed.
- Be prepared. By adopting a Best and Highest Use model, once the tough stuff is over, you’ll have a happier and more productive team.