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# Correcting Millennials Work Performance

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**Abstract:**

Millennials are the fastest growing segment in the workforce today. There are many different stigmas and ideas about this current work generation. They have lived with the Internet their entire lives. Papers claim this workforce is so connected that they need to be constantly stimulated. This paper looks into the stigmas to see if they are true and whether our training program should be Computer Based Training (CBT). A segment of our learners, predominantly aged 22-28 is having trouble applying the sales techniques we teach. Unsure if this is a training issue or a generational issue, we sent out a six-question survey to see how the learners feel about our training. Answers were more favorable than not to hands-on in classroom training. Our learners like the hands-on, collaborative part of our training. In conclusion, we stuck with our in-classroom training based on what the survey participants voiced to us. A key aspect is now being more hands on and incorporating more real-life situations for them to connect with.

Keywords: Millennials, collaborative, in-classroom training

**Background**:

The department being reviewed is the sales department of a multi-million dollar online home furnishings store. The store sells items ranging from headboards to home generators to faucets and sinks. The culture of the company is one with a lot of young professionals and encourages unique solutions to complicated problems. Everyday consumers utilize the online store but there is also a program for individual businesses and large organizations.

Businesses can utilize the program through sales account managers. The account manager acts as a point person for everything related to their customers account. This can range from troubleshooting a service issue, making purchases or lending an expert opinion. Starting in October of 2016 the training department setup what is called the "Sales Process Training"(SPT). The purpose of this training is to provide all sales representatives with a framework for a better sales process. We provide sales techniques and common phrases for the sales representative to implement on their phone calls.

The reason for SPT was because the business department saw a gap in what the representatives were being taught and how they were performing. Sales managers, the training department, data analysis department and the representatives themselves are the main stakeholders.  Over the last five months management has reorganized key metrics of the representatives. Below are the most up-to-date metrics for the representatives:

1. **Number of calls per day: 35+**
2. **Number of Quality Calls (QC): 6, QCs are defined as a conversation lasting 3+ minutes**

3. **Number of presentations: 1, presentations is defined as an overall summary of a sale**
4. **Number of closings: 1, defined as a sale is made that day**

**Problem Statement:**

The performance issue being outlined is whether account managers are putting into practice the new sales process. The design plan is looking into a group of sales representatives that are having trouble implementing the techniques learned in the trainings. The specific group that is being observed is representatives from the Millennial or Y Generation. Every two weeks the training department arranges for a new class with a specific sales topic to be discussed. Prior to the class, all managers are briefed on the topic and are expected to implement the teachings. The SPT provides training to 173 account managers.

The performance issue at hand is not a skill-related issue but more a knowledge-related issue. This instructional design will try to solve why the account managers are not putting the process into practice. This performance gap is the difference of moving up within the sales department. If a sales representative practices a proper sales strategy/technique they will hopefully get promoted quicker.

**Needs Assessment:**

A needs assessment has been done in a few ways. The first is a survey was sent out to the representatives to gauge how well they think the training is going. Within the survey we got to see whether representatives are implementing the sales process. The second assessment involves listening to these sales representative's calls before and after a sales training. Lastly, we sent out a pre and posttest to the representatives to measure if they are using the sales techniques. The pre- and posttest questionnaire was sent out to the subjects asking the following questions:

1. Out of every 10 phone calls how many of them do you use a strategy or technique learned in the Sales process training?
2. On average, how many open-ended questions do you ask of a customer on a phone call?
3. Out of every 10 phone calls how many needs do you recite back to your customer per call?

After the training program has ended, we will send out the above assessment to see if there is any change in the answers and we will listen to their phone calls on days following the end of the training.

**Project Scope:**

The first step in the process is to provide a survey to the account managers to see what their understanding of the sales techniques is. The next step is to do the sales process training. After the sales process training, the representatives recorded calls will be listened to and determine whether they have followed the practices taught. At the end of the Sales Process Training, a Survey Monkey questionnaire will be sent out to the reps to help the trainers make adjustments to the trainings.

**Research:**

The performance problem is so company specific the literature on this issue is limited. The research had to become broader to connect the literature to the performance gap. The employee performance problem being reviewed has an underlying theme:

millennial learning styles. The representatives learning styles will dictate the instructional strategy.

Hardy and Upshaw (2015) define Millennials as the "…birth years ranging from early 1980s to early 2000s" (p. 13). With the most recent hiring class 100% of the new hires were born between 1980 and 2000. The reason for looking into this group is because the training team has noticed they have had hard time incorporating our trainings.

We asked ourselves: What do we need to change about the learning? Should it be more focused as an online training? Will our strategies and techniques stick with them more if trainings are done online? Twenge (2009) thinks so, "Instruction may need to be delivered in shorter segments and perhaps incorporate more material deliver in media such as videos and interactive format" (p. 398). We were unsure if our lessons were resonating with the learners because it was not online/technology based.

The millennial generation has a perception of being online constantly and prone to want to learn quickly and through online medium. As stated by Bencisk, Horvath-Csikos and Timea (2015), "They [millennials] are always online on any technical device virtually with no stopping" (p. 93). There is no doubt this generation is much more connected than previous ones. Since this generation has grown up living their life online, a computer-based training might be a good idea.

At the same time their collaboration within the classroom has been showcased throughout our trainings. We think if training is online we cannot give them the proper feedback about the techniques and skills being taught. As Angeline (2011) noted: "Multi-tasking is second nature to Gen Y employees … they expect managers to not only listen to their ideas but to provide prompt feedback and rewards for their achievements” (p. 252-253). We would have to incorporate quick activities and provide an avenue for the learners to share about their experiences.

To see how closely aligned our representatives are with these perceptions we had to assess their work performance and learning styles. An email was sent out to forty sales representatives requesting their participation in a six-question assessment. Of the forty, sixteen responded agreeing to participate. The survey asked the following of the representatives:

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| **1. How many calls do you strive to make in a day? If you can't think of a number immediately, consider how many calls a day you would consider a "successful day"** |
| **2. Which of the Sales Process Training techniques do you feel aren't successful/are you generally hesitant to use? Why is that?** |
| **3. Which techniques do you find yourself using the most?** |
| **4. What is your learning style (How do you learn best? In a classroom with a teacher, with practical exercises, on your own time, etc.?)** |
| **5. Do you think the SPT has been successful being delivered in a classroom setting?** |
| **6. Are there other methods or additions to the training that you feel would better suit your needs and prepare you for your job?** |

**Analysis Report:**

Below is the information collected from the survey:

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| **Question 1: Average calls made per day** | **Answer: 46.5(averaged)** |
| **Question 2: Hesitant Sales techniques to implement** | **Answers: (6) Seven Second open**<br>**(2) Continuing/starting a phone call**<br>**(2) Agreements**<br>**(1) Customer research**<br>**(1) For DIVE sales training**<br>**(1) Objections**<br>**(1) Products**<br>**(1) Recapping**<br>**(1) Other** |
| **Question 3: Techniques used the most** | **Answers: (7) Seven Second Open (SSO)**<br>**(4) Open-ended questions**<br>**(3) Value Statements**<br>**(1) DIVE**<br>**(1) Other** |

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|---|---|
| **Question 4: What is your learning style?** | **Answers: (5) "Practical exercises"**<br>**(6) "On my own"**<br>**(3) "In a classroom"**<br>**(2) "Visual learner"** |
| **Question 5: Has SPT been successful?** | **Answers: (12) in a positive manner**<br>**(4) Unsure or "IDK"** |
| **Question 6: Other methods of training?** | **Answers: Out of 13 answers 7 of them suggested in some form collaboration**<br>**4 answers were non-collaborative**<br>**2 Answers suggested product training** |

Based on the information gathered from the questionnaire for the most part the subjects approve of the SPT. The idea the subjects would have suggested more online learning or based learning does not seem relevant to this group. Similar to what the literature says, the Millennial Generation likes the idea of collaboration and being independent. As noted in the boxes above on question four of the survey we asked about the subjects learning styles. Six out of the sixteen subjects wrote down not verbatim, but they learn best when on their own. The training teams' lessons are good guardrails and starting points for the account managers. When we see answers such as "doing it on their own" that's a positive. We want our trainings to be a place of practice then take what they learn to the floor.

More than half of the representatives describe their learning styles as "doing it on their own." One subject said, "Tell me to do something and then throw me on the floor and let me practice." While another survey taker said, "I learn best by listening to examples and doing it myself. First with some supervision and gradually becoming more independent."

This generation is more technologically advanced than previous workforces. One would expect technology to be a theme in their learning styles. Surprisingly, the answers provided were not in the thinking of being online or technology based. Purposely any mention of online learning was left out because we wanted to see if they suggested it. When asked about the classroom setting, the majority of survey takers were satisfied with it.

One subject said classroom trainings have been successful. They stated, "people pay a lot more attention to it that way rather than on their own time where they can ignore it or buzz through it." Another answered, "Yes, it is a good refresher of the training we first had but in more detail because we have more real-life experience in sales." A couple of respondents disagreed with previous subjects. Some deemed the trainings were "redundant at times" as well as "long classes make it hard to concentrate." The last answer was in reference to a switch from hour-long trainings to three hour-long trainings.

Lastly, the final question that was centered on learning styles was question six asking about methods or additions to the trainings. For this question, only thirteen out of sixteen people responded to it. Out of the thirteen responses, some form of collaborative activity was suggested. One respondent stated, "Have us run the training would be very helpful. We encounter a lot of things that may go unseen and have our own set of questions on how to improve that apply to us directly." This response, although unlikely, shows a need for the learners to be as involved in training as much as possible.

The idea that the majority of the survey takers prefer a learning which is interdependent makes sense. In Howe's and Strauss's (2009) book "Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation" the authors note, "they [millennials] are beginning to manifest a wide array of positive social habits that older Americans no longer associate with youth, including a new focus on teamwork, achievement, modesty and good conduct" (p. 2).

**Training Interventions:**

Taking in all of the information, the training team will better align our goals with the representatives' needs. Below are the instructional goals for our lessons:

1. **Out of every 10 phone calls the representative should use the SSO 5 times**
2. **Given a phone call with a business customer, the representatives should list 5 open-ended questions**
3. **For every 10 phones calls the representative should recite 3 top needs of their customer per call**

**Lesson 1 Outline: 45 minutes-60 minutes**

**Objective(s):** Out of every 10-phone calls, the representative <u>**should use the Seven Second Open (SSO) 5 times**</u>

**Materials:** Pencil, paper and PowerPoint Presentation

**Introductory activity (5-7 minutes):** We will go around the room and ask the learners what their standard opening sales line is. This is a good icebreaker because the trainer(s) get a gauge in regards to where the learners are in their phone communication skills.

1. Tell us about what your opening line on calls is?
2. Have these lines been successful for you?

**Procedure (40 minutes):**

1. Introduce what the definition of a seven second open is
    a. What do you think we mean when we say "seven second open?"
    b. Does it actually have to be only seven seconds?
2. Go through slideshow on engaging with customers
3. Trainers' role-play as customer and sales representative, to show the representatives what their openings should sound like.
4. Listen to 3 previously recorded phone calls. Stop calls after we heard the openings. Discuss with the learners what we heard and how to make it better.
    a. Did you like that representatives opening?
    b. If no, what would you have done differently?
    c. How can we make that opening better?
5. Activity: This is going to be done individually. Learners will login to their computers. Research 3 accounts they could apply what they learned in training. Take 2 minutes to create 3 new opening lines and go around the room and share what their new openings will be. After the training go back to their desks and use the new opening lines.

**Closing (5-7 minutes):** For the last portion of the lesson we will close with discussing how the learners will apply their new sales opening line(s). Then ask them to tell us one takeaway they got from the lesson.

1. What is one takeaway from this lesson that you will apply to your job today?

Our request to start the process “today” sends a message of wanting to change their habits/behaviors immediately.

**Lesson 2 Outline: 70 Minutes**

**Objective(s)**:

1. Given a phone call with a business customer, the representatives should **list 5 open-ended questions**

2. For every 10 phone calls the representative should recite **3 top needs of their customer**

**Materials:** Pencil, paper and PowerPoint Presentation

**Introductory activity (5-7 minutes):** Go around the room and ask how implementing a new opening line went. Do a quick recap of what the previous lesson was about and tie it to that day’s lesson.  Afterwards, we will call on a few learners and ask them what are some standard questions they ask their customer. This will help transition into the new topic.

**Procedure (60 minutes):**

1. Explain to the learners the importance of using open-ended questions and how it allows them to get more information from their customers as well as recapping the call with the customer to confirm their shopping needs.
    a. How does asking open-ended question benefit you? The customer?
    b. Do you feel you ask enough open-ended questions right now?
    c. Who can explain to us what an open-ended question is?

2. Show them the question funnel and explain how it works. Go through slideshow on asking open-ended questions.
3. Listen to 3 previously recorded phone calls. Stop calls after we hear the portion of the call where they should be asking a question. Discuss with the learners what we heard and how to make it better.
    a. Was the question we heard open-ended or closed?
    b. How did the phone call go after they asked their question?
    c. Is there a different question you would have asked?
4. Activity:  Have the learner's pair up and 1 person has an image of a house while the other has a blank piece of paper. The person with the blank piece of paper has either an O or C at the top of the page. That person can only ask either open or closed-ended questions.  The person with the image can answer any question the other participant asks. The purpose for this activity is to see if the pairings with the O or the C draw the house in the shortest amount of time.
5. Discuss the activity
    a. What was the purpose of this activity?
    b. Was it harder asking open-ended or closed-ended questions to figure out what the image was?
6. Request learners take 2 minutes to write out as many open-ended questions as possible.

**Closing (3-5 minutes):** For the last portion of the lesson we will close with discussing how the learners will apply their new sales opening line(s). Then ask them to tell us one takeaway they got from the lesson.

The structure of the class and the activities chosen were picked because of the literature reviewed and the surveys and questionnaires answered by the subjects. This lesson is trying to be heavily based on getting the learners to think about different scenarios with their customers. The lessons have some of Piaget's constructivist theory. They try to help the learners build upon their knowledge of the job. By asking them to bring their job experience to the lesson is a way for us to have positive dialogue about the strategies and techniques they use.

**Instructional Materials:**

1. **2 PowerPoints:** All of the presentations are going to be done using two power points. They will hold all of the information the learners will need to know about the topics being discussed.
2. **2 Questionnaires:** 1 of the questionnaire was already sent out to the learners to find out their thoughts about the SPT and what their learning styles are. We will use this information to help develop and build out our presentations. The second questionnaire will be our pre and posttest to see where the learners stand about their current job strategies and techniques. This too will help us decide which material will be pertinent to their learning.
3. **House image for question activity:** This activity although is not directly related to sales is a strong activity to enforce the lesson. This activity gets the learners asking questions, which is the main focus of one of the lessons. It helps determine which question is the best question to ask in a particular situation.
4. **Computer and audio system:** This will be used when listening to recorded phone calls of representatives. Allowing representatives to hear what their

colleagues sound like and say gets them thinking introspectively. Playing recorded calls is a technique to help representative change their behaviors.

**Development:**

The review of literature expressed varying opinions in regards to the best training for millennial learners. The sales techniques and strategies taught need to be explained and played out. Our message could not effectively be spread via CBT. We will include classroom discussions; call listenings and activities will occur every session to help the learners put it all together.

PowerPoint is going to be the main tool used. Each presentation is setup to follow up and add on to the previous lesson. Each teammate will create a PowerPoint on a specific topic. Once the presentation is made we will get together as a team and edit the presentation to be on point with our departments message. Within the training we will listen to recorded calls of various representatives. The tool used to do this is a recording system call Calabrio. With each call we will tie it to what we are discussing in the class and request the learners to break it down. The activities for the lessons will vary based on the topic. However they will generally run about 25 minutes with discussion afterwards.

**Evaluation Plan:**

There are a couple of ways in which we will evaluate the success of the trainings. First a survey was sent out to sixteen representatives to see how they viewed the new SPT and whether they have been implementing the techniques. We will also send out a questionnaire at the beginning and end of our trainings to see how their answers change or stay the same. Additionally, we will listen to their phone calls and compare what they have written on the questionnaire to what we hear from them. If we hear the strategies and techniques taught in class, we can deem that as successful. Lastly, but more difficult, we will look at their revenue. If there is any revenue increase from the beginning of the training to present day we can claim the training has helped representatives gain revenue.

**Kirkpatrick Levels:**

Our training process falls in line with Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Training. Levels 2,3 & 4 have a theme of listening to representatives' call to follow up on their learning.

1. The survey sent out is a good starting point for our team to measure how engaged people are with the training process. Specifically question number five asks the representatives what their feelings are about our training program. Question number two asks representatives about implementing the techniques learned. This question also helps us find out if representatives feel comfortable with the training and trust the program.
2. We will use the capability to listen to recorded phone calls. This allows us the chance to hear if what we are teaching the learners is being put into practice. This piece of information is crucial for us. If the learners are implementing the program, then we can feel comfortable to continue what we are doing. If not, then we can tweak our training to help with any common issues we hear in the recordings.
3. The reason for our training program is to help change a specific behavior on the sales floor. We are trying to create consistency on the floor. We believe the representatives should have a framework for their jobs.

4. A questionnaire is being sent out to the representatives at the end of the training. We will also be listening to their calls and looking at their revenue generated. We will use our initial training objectives as a backdrop to their implementing the training.

**Conclusion:**

The training team has found a suitable training program for our account managers. Our learners want to be in an atmosphere that promotes a unique learning experience. The millennial generation may be “wired” 24/7 but our learners have voiced being face to face as an important aspect to their individual learning. The training team has decided to stick with what we are already doing but implement a more hands-on activity-based learning environment.

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