

Leveraging the Intellectual Capital of Sales Trainers

Ethicon Endo-Surgery, Inc., a Johnson & Johnson Company

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Our biggest challenge in sales training is to capture the trainers' knowledge so it can be leveraged in multiple settings. The focus of this case study is to report what we have done to identify the known intellectual capital, implement the programs and processes to enhance the intellectual capital, and put processes in place to monitor the Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 metrics. Rethinking training in terms of intellectual capital was a strategy that helped us make a qualitative leap. Similar strategic changes can be applied to other elements of sales training, particularly ongoing sales rep training, sales management training, product release training, sales leadership training, and sales recertification. The concepts and processes of intellectual capital helped us to get out of the "same old, same old" syndrome, and onto a more efficacious, customer-focused path.

In redesigning our sales training program, leveraging the intellectual capital of our salesforce was a main focus. Our biggest challenge is to capture the sales trainers' knowledge so it can be leveraged in multiple settings. By clearly defining our knowledge, we take the first step toward measuring and monitoring this valuable resource. This case study reports what we have done to:

- identify the known intellectual capital
- implement the programs and processes to enhance intellectual capital
- put processes in place to monitor the Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3¹ metrics on these programs.

¹Donald Kirkpatrick, "Great Ideas Revisited," *Training & Development* 50, January 1996, pp. 54-59.

This case was prepared to serve as a basis for discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective administrative and management practices.

The business justification of our decision to redesign sales training was the:

- overload of information transferred to new sales representatives because of the number of old and new products
- great diversity of new reps and the resulting variance of their learning needs
- continuous pressure to shorten sales training school to get reps into their territories as soon as possible
- continuous pressure to add information about sales and company-wide initiatives in addition to product, thereby increasing what has to be taught
- knowledge that good business practices demand continuous improvement. Sales training is a key process and the way we pass on sales knowledge to new hires. “The only sustainable [business] advantage a firm has comes from what it collectively knows, how efficiently it uses what it knows, and how readily it acquires and uses new knowledge.”² Transferring relevant sales knowledge and continuously getting better at the transfer are two of our best business assets.

Why Should I Read This? What’s in It for Me?

Sometimes you hit the ceiling. There’s just no more room in the sales curriculum, no more time, no more slack. Something’s got to give.

Intellectual capital might give you the tools you need. Proponents of intellectual capital formalize the options for capturing, retrieving, measuring, and monitoring knowledge. The idea is to think about training as the delivery of the “stuff” of sales. Then you ask, does that material have to be “talked at” the student—delivered face-to-face. Can I put what I know into another format that would reduce training time? Can I put what I know into some kind of cheat sheet³ so the salesperson would use it to do the job, but wouldn’t have to learn it? When you think about the stuff of sales as intellectual capital, the options open.

What Was the Previous Program Model? Where Did We Start?

Traditionally, sales trainers are reps who were successful reps and are promoted. Excellent reps are generally excellent presenters. So, it follows that sales trainers design sales training as a series of excellent face-to-face presentations. Our sales trainers did just this.

²Thomas H. Davenport and Laurence Prusak, *Working Knowledge* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1998, p. xv).

³Phyllis Saltzman, “The Comeback of Cheat Sheets,” *Technical Training* 9, November/December 1998, pp. 30-32.

- What is wrong with this?
1. When one just listens to a presentation—is the recipient of a “data dump”—it minimizes the active involvement of the trainees and it’s not the best adult education method. Adult education methods insist on keeping trainees actively involved.
 2. An entertaining, enjoyable presentation is not the same as designing content for someone else to learn. Instructional design for adult learners requires we:
 - tell them what we are going to tell them
 - tell them
 - tell them what we told them.
- This three-step method works.
3. In adult education, the metric of success is what the learner learns, not what the teacher teaches. A good sales presenter focuses on the presentation, not trainee learning. A good trainer does the opposite. So there is a potential conflict of interest here.
 4. Most sales presenters are great talkers. In adult education, we work to get the trainees talking, while the presenter talks less and less. When delivering adult education, the sales trainer must hone listening skills, since these are keys to effective teaching.

Description of the Setting

Ethicon Endo-Surgery, Inc. (EES) is one of the Johnson & Johnson companies. Johnson & Johnson has \$27.5 billion in sales and is the world’s most comprehensive and broadly based manufacturer of health-care products, as well as a provider of related services for the consumer, pharmaceutical, and professional markets. EES’s domestic salesforce is about 500, as is its international salesforce. The company values sales training, understanding that it is the reps’ ability to intelligently converse with clinicians that produces sales. EES sales training is directed toward training reps to talk the talk of physicians, nurses, and other health-care professionals. The objectives are to drive new medical procedures and to increase sales.

Why did we decide to implement this intervention? Executive management mandated that we make significant improvement in the sales training program. We were given a one-year deadline. Considerable criticism had come from sales management indicating that graduates were not sufficiently prepared in selling skills. Minor changes and corrections had always been part of our sales training. But the effort described in this case study was more like “stop the train.” We reexamined every part of our sales training program, evaluating its business value.