



SALES MINDSET VS. SALES TRAINING

Picture the announcer in the middle of the ring broadcasting - "In this corner, wearing the red shorts we have the challenger, weighing 217 pounds, winner of this year's collegiate championship, introducing Sales Mindset. Defending the long-standing domination of this event, winner of 35 title bouts, defending heavyweight champion, weighing 224 pounds, in the black shorts, please welcome Sales Training."

Can you imagine two heavy weights like Sales Training and Sales Mindset squaring off in the ring? It might be one exciting sparing match. Both are critical to ensuring sales professionals get to, and remain at the top of their game. Which is most important?

Sales training is a very broad category that includes everything from sales process, product knowledge, dealing with objections, open and closing skills, prospecting, territory management, listening skills, networking, presentation skills, and funnel administration, to name some of the assorted topics. This is not a short list. The sales rep would ignore any of these items at his or her peril. Many would be correct to think sales training would rank right up there, perhaps being the hands-on bet if you were to wager who would win the match.

Sales training provides knowledge around specific topic areas a sales rep needs to be proficient at their job. There is no point going out to sell, not knowing your product, the process to book the sale, how to deal with client concerns, or where you should be going to find a prospect. Most companies invest heavily in sales training, especially with new sales representatives. They can't afford to despatch the company's ambassadors poorly equipped. It is in their best interest to train them well.

Sales mindset is perhaps lesser known, less discussed, and a less visible contender. In fact, many sales forces don't pay much attention to the psychology of selling. Some sales leadership survived their selling careers being told, "Activity is everything", and when the activity wasn't there, the sales manager reached for a bigger stick. Times have changed. Today we have a much better understand of the sales psyche. Focus, confidence and motivation are what I refer to as "below the line" subjects, collectively referred to as mindset. Sales mindset development is a specialized area critical for success.

Sales mindset has evolved from cognitive behavioral psychology. It suggests what we are thinking about today will determine our reality tomorrow. Research has found that successful sales people are more likely to engage in constructive thinking while unsuccessful sales people are prone to think in counter-productive ways. The best sales people are effective thinkers. They think in a way that helps them perform at an optimal level.

So will the red shorts or the black shorts win? In the perfect world, our match would end a draw. Let us assume the recruitment and selection process has filtered for sales competencies. The learning and development teams today are right to begin with sales training. The reps need to understand the company's sales process, the products, and acquire the requisite selling skills.

Once the sales training is covered, the rep has had an opportunity to practice and become proficient. At this point, it is appropriate to turn development efforts to understanding and leveraging sales mindset. Learning how to become an effective thinker and align ones thinking with the thinking of top performing sales professionals can lead to new levels of sales success.

Professional athletes and sports teams have long understood and valued the concept of leveraging mindset. In any competitive environment, it can be a challenge to stay optimistic, focused, motivated and productive day in and day out. Once they have mastered the skills of their sport, they continue to practice and practice. They complement their physical activity with their mental activity to reach new heights. The same holds true for sales professionals.

In summary, there really isn't a winner or a loser here. It is more a question of sequencing. It is safe to suggest the new sales representative begin with sales training, and once the basic activities and competencies are mastered, they move onto developing their sales mindset.

Sales training and sales mindset can combine to be powerful allies in sales success.

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