Double the number of sales meetings resulting in an order

A behavioural and cultural change project

Project drivers

The bank was looking to the future and seeking to compare best practice in other areas of sales with what was desirable in its own business.

There was increased competition in its marketplace and all indications were that this would increase significantly in the next few years.

The bank anticipated that unless it achieved a major change in its approach to selling it would not only fail to gain market share but lose a significant proportion of its existing client base.

We were called in to:

- assess current practices and skills amongst its people;
- compare these with best practice in other related and un-related industries;
- on the basis of this develop a change process jointly with the bank to take it forward into the new market conditions it was anticipating.

A particular concern

We had discussions with senior managers about the environment it expected its people to be working in, its business objectives and the implications of this for its salespeople.

A particular concern of the bank was to ensure that the sales approach developed was positively accepted and valued by its employees. They wanted to ensure that the positive approach to client care and quality of advice was not lost in a push to increase sales.

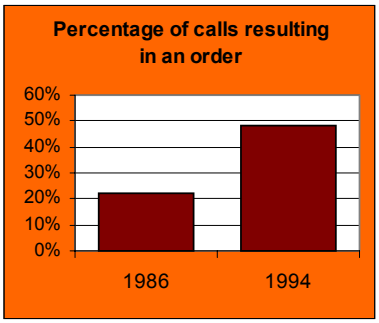
Project approach

The major steps taken were:

- initial research, in 1986, to benchmark performance and to derive the sales model
- joint design work, to create the tailored sales training and coaching courses and materials
- internal trainer training, to accredit the Bank's trainers to deliver the training to employees
- manager training, to equip the managers to provide sales coaching to trained employees
- a pilot implementation in one region
- national rollout
- periodic validation studies and reports, including in 1994.

Results achieved

As the graph shows, the order rate more than doubled – so the question is "Did clients feel there was any decrease in the quality of client service?"



Clients were asked to rate on a 7 point scale, how positively or negatively they felt about aspects of the service they were given, where 7 is positive and 1 is negative. For example:

- *Did they feel pushed or pressured?*
  Average rating 6.5 in 1986 and 6.5 in 1994
- *Did they feel the advice given was in their best interests?*
  Average rating 6.2 in 1986 and 6.1 in 1994
- *How clear were the explanations given?*
  Average rating 6.3 in 1986 and 6.6 in 1994

None of the measures indicated that customers felt that the quality of service had deteriorated.

It was critical that the bank's salespeople agreed the research was thorough, credible and would enable them to improve sales without compromising standards of service. They were involved as 'partners' in the project from the beginning.

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A further satisfying finding was that although nearly 40% of the clients were actively shopping around – comparing the Bank with other suppliers, 80% of them would recommend the Bank as the supplier of choice.

Research approach

We agreed with the bank and a nominated selection of staff:

- an objective system for assessing the quality of call outcome;
- questions which would assess:
  - the quality of service they offered the client during the call;
  - how well the seller was able to guage the reaction and perceptions of the client;
  - how well the bank compared to its competitors;
- a set of behaviours which would enable us to measure how well the sales and service approach of the bank's staff compared to approaches which:
  - the bank believed would be effective;
  - which worked in other industries and
  - which the salespeople themselves thought were important.

We observed salespeople in client meetings after they had explained the purpose of the project to the client and obtained their agreement for us to sit in for the clients and sellers to complete matching questionnaires.

The client's answers were kept confidential so the seller was not swayed in future meetings by the client ratings.

We discussed the results of our observations and the questionnaire with the salespeople we were working with.

Over a period of months we continued this process and then analysed the data.

Spotting 'shoppers'

An additional area of concern for the bank was that staff were complacent about how motivated prospective clients were.

In 1986 staff gave higher ratings to the expected results of each call than were justified by the actual results.

As the following graph shows, in 1994, staff were much more accurate in their ability to spot people who were 'shopping around' and better able to convert these people from lukewarm or cool to warm or definite prospects.

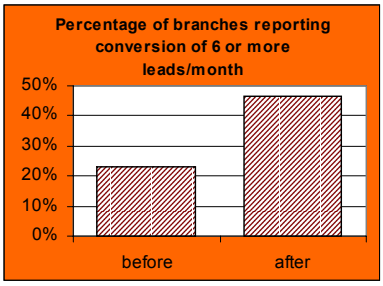
Lead generation

In addition to training specialist advisors the project was expanded to train cashiers.

In the face of increased commercial pressure the bank wanted to improve the level of leads generated and converted into additional business. They saw the role of cashier as central to this ambition.

As the graph below shows they doubled the percentage of leads converted. Undoubtedly some of this was due to factors besides training, but:

- 79% of managers reported that leads were now a better quality
- cashiers also reported that they had gained skill, confidence and commitment as a result of training.



"Ultimately, whatever the form of economic activity, it is people that count most."

Lord Sieff, former chairman of Marks and Spencer.

Whilst there were several intervening factors, both the bank and Huthwaite believe that the training and coaching reinforcement made a major and necessary contribution to the improved success rates.

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