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CEO, HUTHWAITE
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a sales person. The pushy, over-bearing tenacious traits that many assume are a fundamental part of the make-up of a sales person, and hence lead to a perception of a lack of professionalism in the role, are in fact not the behaviours of a successful sales person. The purpose of sales, be it from a sales person or anyone in a company that has contact with a customer, is to create enough value for that customer in the product, the relationship and the process for them to want to do business with the supplying company. This is rarely accomplished by forceful pushy behaviour or sales tricks.

Once this value is created a negotiation can take place, which trades the relative value to either party of certain issues and ensures that both sides feel satisfied with doing business together. This may be very simple –

Many businesses get the balance wrong between the attention given to product development and innovation, marketing and the “selling” skills of its direct sales and customer-facing workforce. A better understanding of this balance and an increase in the professional attitudes and status of sales can only be a good thing for the supplier, the buyer and the general consumer. The establishment of a national academy for sales and commercial skills would be a major step towards achieving improved customer satisfaction at all levels and hence the country’s prosperity in the international and global markets.



MICHELLE MONE
CO-OWNER OF MJM
INTERNATIONAL AND
CREATOR OF ULTIMO,
THE UK'S LEADING
DESIGNER LINGERIE
BRAND

IS THERE A NEED FOR A UK SALES ACADEMY?

The Journal put this question to four prominent leaders from both business and academia

A sales academy focused on how suppliers, their direct sales force and all of their customer touch points create value for their customers is long overdue. There is very little recognition in academia of the value of selling, and unlike marketing it is very rare to find even a module in a business degree that deals directly with the issue of selling in a professional manner.

The old argument that sales people are “born and not made” is simply not correct. True, some people do naturally exhibit the behaviours of successful sales people, but these behaviours can also be learned by many for whom it does not come so naturally. It is also true that not everyone can be trained to be a sales person.

A major problem arises because of the general view of what makes

“I like what I see and am willing to pay the asking price”; or very complex – “there are many variable issues, all interdependent and none of which can be settled in isolation”; or of course anywhere in between. The skills of sales and negotiations are discreet but inseparable and therefore any academy must, I believe, take this into account and raise the standards in both areas.

The question of industry standards for sales is often raised, and a number of bodies have attempted to create these. With regard to establishing a base level of skill and competency in differing aspects of sales and negotiations standards will be important. But this has to be tempered with the creativity and radical thinking that makes a sales person stand out and create more value for the customer than the competition in what is rapidly becoming a “me too” world.

The quality of sales people in a company is one of the key factors in determining its level of success, so having an academy dedicated to the training and development of sales people would be a huge asset to the industry.

Creating and polishing your sales skills and tactics is a very personal thing and takes time to master - an academy would allow for people who already have a natural flair for sales to hone their skills, build their confidence and gain valuable experience. Not only would a sales academy reduce the cost for businesses of acquiring and training individuals, it would also provide a pool of competent, developed and professionally trained sales people from which companies could recruit. It's a fantastic idea and I would give it my full support.



LYNETTE RYALS
PROFESSOR OF STRATEGIC SALES AND ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT, CRANFIELD SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

The need to professionalise the sales profession.

One of the most pernicious beliefs about sales people is that they are "born, not made". This belief is widely held – even amongst sales people – and it has contributed to a lack of professional development in the sales domain. If sales people are born, not made, goes the argument, then you are either a natural sales person or you are not. And, let's be honest, this attitude also induces some complacency about the need to get training and develop new skills.

It is a puzzle why this notion is so widespread. I've never heard anyone argue that engineers or brain surgeons are born, not made. In fact, the evidence is that sales people who are trained tend to perform better than those who are not. Two examples: Huthwaite Consultancy is associated with a technique known as SPIN® selling, which has been shown to improve the sales performance of people who are trained to use it. And here at Cranfield we train hundreds of key account managers and senior sales people every year and the companies that we train consistently report substantial improvements in results.

We know that the sales role is becoming more complex and demanding. The emergence of key account management is placing greater demands on our sales people, and requiring them to have a different and wider skill set.

We need to open our eyes and recognise the need for continuing professional development for sales people, just as we have for lawyers and doctors. Until we do, selling will remain a less well-regarded job, rather than becoming a respected profession.



JAMES CAAN
SERIAL ENTREPRENEUR, CEO OF PRIVATE EQUITY FIRM HAMILTON BRADSHAW AND PANELLIST ON DRAGONS' DEN

The notion of a Sales Academy is interesting. However, to look at this in the context of 'sales' is slightly misleading. I'd prefer to consider the words 'negotiating' and 'debating', which allude to selling skills, but suggest a slightly more rounded approach.

It's a conundrum that most leavers tend to move into a sales or client facing role of some sort, yet little preparation is offered in school for these types of jobs. Gone are the days of blue collar apprenticeships, yet what replaces them? My view is that sales, debating or negotiation training is one of the most useful tools a young person could have when moving into a career, and I believe it could be considered to be a bit of a hole in the National Curriculum.

How do you set up a National Sales Academy? For me I'm not sure this is the way I'd go – I'd truly like to see it integrated into schools at perhaps the A Level stage – it's obviously a skill that's more and more relevant these days and if that is the case, it is logical that the school should be preparing the student for his or her needs ahead.

BITE-SIZED

For the want of a nail

Within your organisation, anyone who interacts with a prospect or customer can either advance a sale or damage it, however small their actions. Sales is not a department – it's a philosophy that should extend across every function, from the top to the bottom of your organisation. Does marketing collateral focus on your people as well as products and service capability? Do proposals include examples of customer issues you can solve? Do your support teams flag potential new business leads, rather than dismissing sales as someone else's responsibility? If the answer's 'yes' to any of these examples, your organisation has the potential to be 'Living Sales'.

Man in the Middle

We all feel like winners when we make a sale, especially when it's under pressure, but what happens when you have to make significant price cuts to please the customer, leaving the margin virtually unprofitable? Learning and implementing the art of negotiation is essential in the current market, and can also improve terms once the economy picks up. Don't just cut prices, trade discounts for improvements in other terms and conditions that will protect your overall position. Analyse and recognise your power in a negotiating situation and consider the long-term plan with potential contractual protections that go beyond the here and now.

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Manchester, 6-8 October
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 London, 10-12 November

SPIN® IN THE SALES PROPOSAL

London, 20 October

SPIN® IN THE SALES PRESENTATION

London, 21-22 October

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