

Increasing Engagement

■ By Denise Fullowan, Cari DuBose and Chuck Corso



Meet the Alamo Training Team:

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Denise Fullowan,
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Alamo Training provides contract trainers, development of interactive real-world based workshops, certification, and simulations.

As trainers, we often hear senior leadership say, “Training is a key component for a sales teams’ success.”

Obstacles including budget, lack of time and resources typically surface as hindrances to providing training. Training teams are then tasked with how to develop effective programs that prepare reps for the field with these parameters in mind.

As sales trainers we should be committed to challenging our teams to provide a wide variety of training in order to engage our employees and ultimately improve their performance. Employee engagement is defined by *Forbes* magazine as “the emotional commitment the employee has to the organization and its goals.”

Such an emotional commitment means that employees are engaged, genuinely care and are passionate about their work and the ultimate aim of the company. They are not just plodding along until their next paycheck or promotion, but are committed to the goals of the organization and want to grow with it. We should continually challenge ourselves by asking, “Is it the importance of engagement or the lack of engagement in your training deliverables?” Learner engagement throughout the learning journey is essential.

Training philosophies should be developed and built on collaboration and gaining buy-in with our senior leaders. Training can be viewed as a long-term investment in the growth and

development of the people who make up the organization. Training programs should be developed for all representatives, regardless of their tenure, and provide the tools to support them in developing skills and knowledge. There will be obstacles along the way so being prepared for them and putting a plan in place to overcome them eases the journey.

Virtual instructor-led training (VILT) has proven to be one successful tactic to overcome the time constraint and budgetary obstacles. Key topics delivered in these virtual sessions include product and selling skills fundamentals, refreshers and advanced level content. In addition, monthly training programs could be offered to develop representatives’ soft skills, such as effective communication, time management, and negotiations.

Virtual training sessions could be developed from existing content and focused on application of the content using interactive elements to engage the learner. Evaluate the learning needs by role and assign appropriate emerging leaders to support the development and facilitation of the virtual training programs. Role-based training design allows you to customize the delivery method, and time requirements to the desired learning outcomes.



Alamo Training Territory Sales Managers: What Makes an Engaging Training Session

“Having shared ideas through table team discussions doctors and pharmacists.”

– **Mike Canali**
Dermatology Sales Team

“Bringing outside doctors and pharmacists give best practices to compliment Alamo Training’s ‘real-world’ training.”

– **Monica “Gaby” Santiago**
West Coast Hybrid Sales Team

“Alamo Training incorporates fun, interactive, group games that keep you engaged and collaborating with your colleagues.”

– **Jon-Stephen Scott**
Urology Sales Team

“Meeting other colleagues on different sales teams and products from various parts of the country created many ‘Ah ha’ moments that I can take back home and implement in the field.”

– **Ben Woratyła**
Women’s Health Sales Team

“I stay engaged by being challenged through competitive experiential learning where there is an opportunity to win!”

– **Ty Johnson**
Urology Sales Team

“Team-building exercises really keep me engaged when going through Alamo Training.”

– **Patricia (Patti) Devine**
Women’s Health

The goal is to provide the right training to the right role, when and where they need it based on their specific needs. This enables learners to quickly acquire the knowledge and application that is needed for their job. Identifying vendor partners can help to develop competency maps and learning plans in a timely cost effective manner.

As sales trainers, we know in a virtual setting, filled with countless distractions, we need to use a wide range of tools and a touch of creativity to keep participants engaged throughout. The design needs to be interesting, relevant, useful and appealing so that adult learners remain engaged. By determining the specific goals necessary to achieve, programs meet the overall desired learning outcome.

Effective training should include meaningful lessons from everyday customer interactions that representatives encounter. Learner preferences and styles need to be considered in the design of the virtual sessions to keep participants engaged. Ultimately behavioral changes achieved from training will improve representatives’ performance and business results. Virtual training sessions that include breakout-room discussions, polling questions, video-based learning, best practice sharing and teach backs will assist in engaging the learner and supporting the learning transfer. Job aids (performance support tools) are distributed after virtual training session to reinforce the learning.

Feedback & Evaluation

Feedback is just as important as developing program objectives and outcomes. Following each virtual training session, an electronic survey could be sent out to the participants to capture their perception of the training program. Kirkpatrick’s model of evaluation is a good benchmark for developing





questions. Responses are tabulated, analyzed and used to make modifications or adjustments to future training programs. Evaluation of programs for the purpose of evaluating the merit or worth of the training and providing a return on investment for the organization is important to Senior Leaders.

Finally, learning transfer is critical to first ensuring the knowledge is applied and transferred to the workplace for the participant.

When it comes to training **Millennials**, their biggest concern is, “What’s in this for me or how does this affect me?” They don’t just want to go through the motions as such, but to know and understand how their efforts can fit into the larger picture. The challenge is keeping millennials engaged if they don’t see how the training will apply to them or the job they will be doing. Because technology is such a big part of this generation, it seems that training should be a mix between both eLearning and on-the-job training.

eLearning is important as it keeps employees engaged, and more importantly, it keeps learning at an individual pace. Gamification should also be incorporated into eLearning, as it is a great way to foster the social collaboration and reward system that Millennials have grown accustomed to.

In addition to eLearning and gamification, training should include informative, yet fun, infographics and visuals for Millennials along with relevant stories to help them relate in a meaningful way. Another important piece of training millennials is having a mentor program. Mentoring is great practice of leading by example and the M/millennial generation relates well to more of a coach or mentor than a superior boss. People can

Trainers must communicate expectations and the “why” behind the training.

better retain knowledge when learning through experience rather than from content taught in a classroom. Once all of these aspects of training are rolled out, the results are outstanding for both the organization and the people in it.

Another common challenge life sciences companies face today is “training” the experienced sales rep. It’s not uncommon in the sales training world that the seasoned and experienced sales rep isn’t sure that training has anything to offer them. These people may not see the value for additional training in the classroom and therefore would prefer to be out in the field selling.

There are ways to better engage these reps and get them on board with sales training, starting with understanding the target audience. It’s important to understand why these reps might show resistance to training. Some common scenarios faced include:

- “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!”
- They’ve been through sales training before.
- Previous training sessions weren’t that beneficial.
- They think it’s a waste of time.
- They feel that they already know the system and what works best.
- They are stuck in their ways.
- Training takes them out of the field.
- They question what the sales trainer can possibly teach them.

Once you gain insight into the basis for their hesitance, it’s important to point out the many benefits from learning selling skills that are consistent with changes in the marketplace. How reps were trained 10-15 years ago probably isn’t the same as it is in today’s environment. Buyers are more



connected, informed and much further along in the sales process before they engage with a rep. New skills and techniques need to be learned that are relevant to today's changes:

- **Engage & Involve the Reps:** If you know ahead of time that there will be some reluctant reps in training, have the sales trainer ask those reps to help with the program. Ask them to share their experiences and best practices to get them involved in training as well as discuss real world scenarios.
- **Heighten Participation and Involvement:** Treat your experienced reps like top professional athletes. Top athletes are usually the hardest-working people in their sport. If you're able to get this concept across to your resistant reps, they will realize that even the top performers can still get better.
- **Be Creative and Unique:** Using the same old training program repeatedly becomes stale and unproductive. Training professionals recognize that skills development and adoption require active engagement and participation by the learners. A proper mix of education, discussions and interactive role plays will encourage rep participation. Such things as team activities, avatar games and competitive contests usually fosters involvement and excitement to the training. ■
- **Ensure Leadership buy-in.** Engage executive leadership from the very start. Ensure that leadership is on board with the training objectives, goals and the results that will be expected from the program. Prior to start of training, have them discuss why it's important and why they want their sales reps engaged.
- **Establish clear and concise expectations:** Effective communication to emphasize the desired goals and result prior to the start of training is crucial so that sales reps understand the value of the training program.



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