

DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN SALES

BY STRATEGIC LEARNING, INC.

THE SALES PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT CHALLENGE

The discrepancy between expected behavior and actual on-the-job performance is among the greatest challenges facing business leaders involved in selecting and developing highly-skilled, successful sales professionals.

Too often sales skills and techniques demonstrated in interviews and training are not observable when they are most needed – during challenging or difficult customer interactions. Despite “going through” the best sales training workshops and intense “skill and drill” activities, too many representatives fail to meet reasonable performance expectations in the “real world.” Eventually, sales representatives begin to doubt the usefulness of the training and business leaders consider the gap a sales leadership, training, and selection problem.

Sales leaders and trainers are left with the perplexing question, “If the sales representative demonstrated they could apply the skills during the workshop, why aren’t these skills being used with real customers and especially in challenging sales situations?”

[Selling Power Magazine](#)¹ reports that the average tenure of a Senior Sales Leader is about 24 months and shrinking. Our experience suggests the gap between expectations for improvement from training and actual results are at least partly responsible.

Is it likely that more “skill and drill” will make a difference in performance when representatives have already demonstrated those skills in “real world” situations?

The answer, of course, is no. Once an individual has demonstrated the skill, the most likely barriers to high performance must reside in another aspect of professional development.

If this feels familiar, read on to discover why emotional intelligence is so important to sales performance and the four steps to developing emotional intelligence in sales.

THE SCIENCE OF LOGIC AND EMOTIONAL CAPABILITY

Practicing psychologists in diverse fields have discovered that effectiveness and success are not only a matter of developing cognitive or physical ability. Whether one considers a counselor helping a person through feelings of depression, the sports psychologist helping an athlete to reach peak performance, or the business coach supporting an executive struggling to rebound from a major financial set-back; ***the evidence is clear, emotions play a major part in human performance that is distinct and separate from cognitive or physical ability.***

Research by neuroscientists like Joseph Le Doux substantiates practitioner's experiences and demonstrates that the emotional system of the human brain acts independent of the logic system (or neocortex). Le Doux's research indicates that some emotional reactions and emotional memories are formed without any conscious, cognitive participation. In other words, people have a tendency to make events have more meaning than a dispassionate observer might expect. An excellent review of the research findings are presented in [Daniel Goleman's](#)³ books on Emotional Intelligence. Goleman regards the two distinct mental functions as: the logical factual system and the emotional feeling system. He describes how reason originally freed people from the influence of emotion that sometimes sways logic in making sound judgments.

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Goleman and others now argue that useful models of performance improvement include a more harmonized head and heart partnership to human performance improvement. Combining the experience of psychologists and the research of neuroscientists provides a clear answer to the question about what limits human performance and change.

What stops people from doing what they already know how to do is a failure to apply appropriate self-management techniques in situations where emotions block or limit their effectiveness.

Achieving breakthrough performance improvement requires that business trainers assist individuals in developing emotional intelligence in concert with cognitive and behavioral skills. Using product or technical mastery methods might provide an understanding of emotional intelligence, but developing emotional intelligence is not a cognitive or behavioral exercise. It requires different methods.

TRANSFORMING SALES DEVELOPMENT

Driven by increased competitive market pressures and dramatic shifts in customer requirements, sales professionals have found they must call on different decision-makers and buying groups. Understandably, the new perspectives and requirements held by new buyers often result in sales representatives feeling confused, sometimes inadequate and at our worst moments, angry with customers.

Managing these emotions requires more than additional sales technique training. It requires learning how to manage tension and increase personal comfort in adapting to challenging situations. This adaptive capability can not be acquired using traditional training methods. It requires educators who modify their instructional methodology to include an "inside-out" process that assists salespeople in:

1. Developing awareness of their emotions "in the moment"
2. Managing emotion and developing their "emotional muscle" to enhance effectiveness
3. Sensing and responding to subtle customer non-verbal signals
4. Integrating emotional awareness with authentic behavior

Four steps to developing emotional intelligence in sales:

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4. Integrate emotional awareness with authentic behavior

THE DISCOVERY LEARNING™ PROCESS

Developing emotional intelligence requires a different approach to learning – the *DISCOVERY LEARNING™* process. At its core, the *DISCOVERY LEARNING* process is designed to assist sales and other business professionals in becoming aware of how verbal and non-verbal interpersonal behavior impacts their emotional state and how one's emotional state influences responses – for better or worse.

Training methods focus on learning what to say or how to deliver an effective presentation. The *DISCOVERY LEARNING* Process is designed help learners recognize and consciously respond to their own feelings in ways that improve interpersonal communication and effectiveness.

The most common type of communication training is based on behavioral assumptions. For example, if a sales person utters certain key words, the customer will almost automatically respond in a positive manner. As long as customers respond as expected, the training works. However, the moment a customer responds in an unpredicted or challenging manner, training gets put aside and survival

instincts take over. It can be like watching a play where one actor seems to have lost their place, fails to respond with the 'right' scripted words and throws the other actor into a state of chaos.

Responding effectively to these unanticipated situations starts with the sales representative's awareness of their emotions, and understanding how their own feelings influence their actions.

Developing timely awareness of one's **intrapersonal** communication isn't achieved using typical or standard training techniques. It is achieved through a process of recognizing and overcoming emotional barriers that misdirect intentions. Strategic Learning uses the *DISCOVERY LEARNING* process to facilitate examination of internal conversations that trigger emotional reactions. The first step in developing emotional intelligence is becoming aware of how emotions inform internal communication.

**Do you have any clue
what you are doing? You
don't know enough to call
on this person!**

We all talk to ourselves, and many times this internal conversation (self-talk) has a negative or limiting impact on our actions. This awareness is especially useful for those who have been taught that emotional reactions must be avoided or somehow concealed. People frequently mention that it may be a day or more after a difficult business interaction before they become fully aware of the range of feelings that influenced their actions during the interaction.

By increasing awareness of intrapersonal communication and identifying how emotional reactions impact behavior; people learn the importance of recognizing emotional reactions in especially challenging or confrontational situations and choosing different reactions.

Professional coaches apply *DISCOVERY LEARNING* questions and inquiry techniques to help individuals overcome self-imposed limits. Performance breakthroughs occur as individuals learn to immediately recognize emotions, and respond in an authentic manner. This approach develops emotional "muscle" and improves communication effectiveness.

INTERPERSONAL ALLERGIES



Representatives leverage the value of the *DISCOVERY LEARNING* process as they discover patterns of interpersonal allergies that limit their ability to respond effectively. In a manner that is similar to physical allergies, where the individual's sensitivity is extreme; interpersonal allergies occur when a situation triggers a particular feeling or fear. [Albert Ellis](#)⁴, who pioneered investigation into a rational-emotive approach to psychological counseling, discovered that when certain beliefs and fears are carried to extreme an internal dialogue develops which limits interpersonal behavior.

Often interpersonal allergies are created out of the best of intent. For instance, it is common for sales professionals to believe that they should be accurate and correct in their communication with customers. Providing accurate information is a rational expectation. However, when this realistic expectation becomes an exaggerated irrational expectation, the sales person feels they must always be right.

The professional who holds this type of irrational belief and fears making a mistake will impose limitations on who they call on and how they interact. By trying to limit the potential of making a mistake, they limit their ability to grow and achieve performance breakthroughs.

SALES FORCE EXCELLENCE

Prompted by rapid market changes, hyper-competition, and the need to overcome barriers to growth, some sales leaders and chief learning officers have been looking for effective compliments to the "skill and drill" approach. They know that traditional training techniques are necessary to establish foundational skills, but are insufficient when striving for excellence. By cultivating emotional intelligence in harmony with knowledge and skills, sales people improve their ability to adapt sales skills to create highly valued relationships and trust, despite situational, economic or industry volatility.

Please call or email us to explore how developing emotional intelligence and the Discovery Learning process might be tailored for your needs.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Dr. William Mehnert's background spans academic and business work environments. As a graduate faculty member he taught and conducted research in the field of Counseling and Consulting Psychology before transitioning into the business world. Bill's experience as a Sales Executive and Performance Consultant, coupled with his research in the behavioral sciences, guides Strategic Learning's approach to delivering "best practices" criterion in learning and development.



Glenn Mehnert's career is focused on building mutual influence relationships with customers and peers. For more than two decades Glenn has applied his education in psychology and marketing to real world situations. While he enjoys helping customers find new ways of understanding and creating value for their customers, his greatest satisfaction comes from assisting individuals in achieving high performance and personal fulfillment. His work with customers in a variety of industries at all levels enables him to provide advice and support that goes beyond problem solving and builds winning futures.

LINKS:

1. Selling Power Magazine - <http://www.sellingpower.com/magazine/article.php?i=1317&ia=9110#topArticlePages>
2. Joseph Le Doux - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_E._LeDoux
3. Daniel Goleman - <http://danielgoleman.info/>
4. Albert Ellis - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Ellis_\(psychologist\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Ellis_(psychologist))