

Practice Makes Profits

AI-driven tools are eliminating
any excuse for not implementing
intentional, personalized
sales training



Sales Training In an AI Era



AI isn't coming to replace human coaching, but it's past time to make it a key component of your skills-building strategy.

BY PAUL NOLAN

Indulge us for a minute while we share some statistics about pickleball. It has been the fastest-growing sport in America for four consecutive years. Participation soared to 19.8 million players in 2024 — an increase of more than 45% from the prior year. The number of players has grown 311% over the last three years, and participation is now highest among 25-34 year-olds.

We're not here to urge you to pick up a paddle (though the game is "lit," as that younger cohort likes to say).

Rather, pickleball's popularity has key aspects in common with B2B sales. There are important lessons that sales managers can learn via a brief dissection of the current state of pickleball.

Spend 15 minutes watching doubles at any multi-court pickleball facility and you'll likely see a wide range of play. On some courts, points last only three or four shots. Players are

uncertain of themselves and are reactive instead of proactive. On other courts, players may hit the ball 20 or more times on one point. There will be a wide array of shots, and players seem to instinctively know where the next shot is going. They stay calm while making quick decisions and think one or two shots ahead of the one they're making. In short, every action is done with intent.

Sales managers, does this sound similar to the variance among your reps as they move through the sales process?

Pickleball's popularity is attributed, in large part, to the fact that it's easy to learn and relatively easy to become halfway decent at it. What you haven't seen when you watch high-level pickleball players execute with confidence and conviction are the hours of practice they put in to produce that performance.

Huh... Sounds like B2B sales.

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The 3.0 to 3.5 pickleball players (most players rate themselves on 1-to-5 scale) are the equivalent of salespeople who do well enough to stay employed, but usually miss quota and can't seem to improve. The 4.5 and 5.0 pickleball players are akin to sales superstars who regularly exceed quota, compete against themselves as much as anyone else, and grab every opportunity to hone their skills so they can perform even better.

It's fun to play pickleball; it's not as much fun to drill. But drilling is where the improvement occurs.

It's fun to make a sale. It's not as much fun to practice your discovery techniques, role play or review why past prospects were lost to a competitor. However, those habits are what lead to hitting and exceeding quotas.

The percentage of workers using AI has increased from 8% to 35% in just two years. However, more than half (56%) say they still don't feel prepared to use AI at work.

SOURCE: JOBS FOR FUTURE SURVEY ON
[AI'S IMPACT ON WORK AND LEARNING](#)

Practice Makes Profits

Asked during a webinar what produces the biggest gap between stellar and so-so sales reps, David Ashe, director of sales development at sales enablement provider Allego, quickly replied, "Coaching. People aren't getting enough help. Most sales reps feel they can do it on their own, but as leaders, we should be trying to help as much as we can."

"I run an inside sales team that is responsible for booking meetings for AEs to close deals. For the greener people that I've worked with in enablement, the biggest gap was giving them opportunities to practice, especially if you have a remote team," Ashe added. "Just like with any sport or playing an instrument, you need to practice, practice, practice before you go out there and do it live."

Most sales managers understand the importance of continuous learning, but for whatever reason — or for a whole

host of reasons — they become resigned to forging ahead with training that is mediocre at best.

In research by Allego and RAIN Group, 67% of organizations rate their sales training as moderately effective or worse. According to the research, the one-third of organizations that rate their sales training as extremely or very effective:

- Boast a nearly 12% lower turnover rate.
- Are nearly five times more likely to agree with the statement that their onboarding gets sellers productive quickly.
- Are 3.5 times more likely to agree their training prepares sales reps to succeed.

So, what keeps the 67% of organizations that are sour on their sales training from joining the 33% that attribute much of their sales success to effective training? In a word, says RAIN Group CEO Scott McDonald, intent.

"Sales training needs to be as intentional on Day One as it is on Day 365. This requires a massive commitment from the organization's leadership to see it through with intentionality," McDonald said. "As is true in most organizations, priorities shift frequently, and without disciplined reinforcement tools and measurements, focus shifts."

A key factor that determines successful sales skill and behavior adoption is an organization's willingness to invest in a transformative process, not just isolated sales training events, McDonald said.

The Shift to AI-Driven Training

The organizations that are intentional about developing a top-level onboarding process and superior ongoing training will perform significantly better than competitors. That hasn't changed. What has changed — what is currently changing dramatically — is how sales training is delivered, and it's mostly a result of advancements in the past decade in artificial intelligence.

Although the origins of AI research date back to the 1950s, it has been less than a decade that AI has had a broad impact on business operations. The introduction of ChatGPT in 2022 brought AI use in business to the forefront for business leaders. It kick-started an AI arms race that has C-suites globally rushing to figure out where to invest in AI and how to train workers to adopt it.

Whether AI lives up to its current hype remains to be seen. In an article published earlier this year in [MIT Sloan Management Review](#), educators David Wingate, Barclay L. Burns and Jay B. Barney argued that AI technology, like personal computers, internet access and blockchain technology before it, will become so ubiquitous that it cannot provide a significant competitive advantage.

"By definition, if everyone has access to the same technology — even if it is new and valuable — it may move the market as a whole but will not uniquely advantage anyone," the authors state.

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“Far from being a source of differentiation, artificial intelligence will be a source of homogenization. Part of AI’s value is that it is digital, and therefore it is fundamentally copyable, scalable, repeatable, predictable and uniform,” they add.

Podcaster, author and NYU Business Professor Scott Galloway, a self-professed “AI optimist,” says it’s not AI that will take people’s jobs, but people who know how to use AI most effectively. “The people who know how to incorporate AI tools into their jobs are going to make much more money.” They will become “ninjas with these weapons,” Galloway told an audience of HR leaders at the UNLEASH World Conference in Paris in October.

B2B sales leaders take note. If AI technology isn’t incorporated into your training process yet, it better be in 2026. David Ashe of Allego says early adopters of AI for sales training are using the technology to build personalized, on-demand training courses, create and instantly score role play, evaluate real conversations with prospects, and develop reinforcement material based on content covered in all these exercises.

[Redcar](#) is a Silicon Valley startup that provides an AI-driven platform for automating and scaling B2B sales outreach. Er Jia Jiang, Redcar co-founder and vice president of growth and operations, told SMM the company uses its own SaaS platform to train its inside sales team.

The company built a library of “golden demos” — actual recordings of top-performing reps whose discovery conversations consistently converted high-value customers. They compare each rep’s sales calls to these gold standards. AI scores each call and recommends areas for improvement, providing reps instant and consistent feedback.

“Think of AI as a smart intern. Interns are flexible and adaptable, and there is a lot of room for customization. It’s all about how you manage them,” Jiang said. “Sales reps need to be trained how to manage AI. In short, they need to get the AI to execute, review their work, and then re-coach the AI.”

The Redcar platform, she said, allows sales teams to essentially create an AI sales coach/agent for each individual rep. At the same time, AI takes much of the load of coaching off sales managers’ plates by doing things such as reviewing and critiquing role play and actual calls, creating training content (quizzes, videos, etc.), and developing skills training and product support material. Equipping each sales rep with their own AI agent will help them become “superhuman.”

Tal Paperin, a [business growth consultant](#) and executive for hire who works from Israel, told SMM that when he was hired last year to lead revenue growth at a Florida-based medical software provider, one of his first projects was to use AI to turn copious amounts of product information into a training manual for his expanded inside sales team.

In many ways, the instant access to data and analysis that AI provides has shifted training from a task that is separate from selling to an everpresent component of the sales process, Matan Korin, vice president of sales at [Ecoline Windows](#) in Canada,

Data Doesn’t Lie

RAIN Group’s research on organizations that rate their training as extremely or very effective compared to those that say their training is only moderately or not at all effective reveals some important differences.

93% of highly effective training organizations incorporate in-person, instructor-led methods, compared to 65% of less effective programs. Additionally, the organizations with effective training leverage virtual instructor-led training and virtual self-study as part of a blended approach.

Highly effective training organizations offer more learning reinforcement activities (1.5x), online coaching (1.4x) and role-play and simulations (1.3x) compared to organizations with less effective training.

Organizations with effective training are 2.2x more likely to have strong leadership support for continuous learning and 5.2x more likely to provide resources that prepare sales managers to motivate and coach their teams.

55.7% of organizations that rate their training highly encourage mentoring or coaching on a regular basis, while only 19% of organizations that aren’t pleased with their training do so.

told SMM in an email exchange. “Tools like Lessonly, HubSpot Academy and Seismic help us integrate learning directly into their work rather than treating it as a separate, isolated task,” he said.

Human/AI Combo: A Magic Mix

As with sales itself, AI tools can greatly enhance training, but a human element should always be part of coaching. Allego partnered with Carmen Simon, a cognitive neuroscientist and the chief science officer at [Corporate Visions](#), on a study to determine whether salespeople respond better to sales training that is delivered through AI or when it is delivered by a human.

Forty-eight B2B sales professionals were asked to simulate a discovery call with a prospect who was considering purchasing a training platform. Half the participants received feedback from a human and half received feedback from an AI assessment tool. All participants knew ahead of their 30-minute experience which group they were in.

The hypothesis going into the study was that coaching delivered by a human would likely offer more social presence, emotional warmth and reciprocal responsiveness, which are known to affect motivation and memory encoding. Those receiving feedback from AI, it was thought, could feel the training was clearer, more consistent and efficient.

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It became clear that sellers don't respond the same way to human and AI feedback. Key findings from the study include:

- Participants expecting AI feedback showed more mind-wandering but higher neural synchrony, while those expecting human feedback felt more relaxed, motivated, and emotionally aligned.
- Sellers who received feedback from the AI coach remembered 50% more content after 48 hours than those who received feedback from a human coach.
- Human feedback, on the other hand, triggered more emotional engagement, even if it didn't improve recall.

"The most successful sales training programs will blend the strengths of both approaches, tailoring coaching to the needs of individual sellers and the realities of modern sales environments," [the AI vs. human training report summarized](#).

"AI coaching will not replace human coaches or sales managers," the report continued. "Rather, it serves as a scalable, structured and low-pressure complement to the relational strengths of human feedback. When used together, these modalities reinforce each other."

How to implement AI into sales training and the sales process itself was the focus of last spring's [Gartner CSO and Sales Leader Conference](#) in Las Vegas. In his opening-day keynote address, Gartner for Sales Vice President Analyst Dan Gottlieb said, "It is a really rare time to be a leader in sales because this epic profession is going through an awakening, and all of you are the chosen leaders to guide its transition."

The AI transformation will occur in days or weeks, not years, Gottlieb stressed, adding that companies that fail to develop a formal AI for sales adoption strategy and that fail to hire with AI skills in mind will be left behind.

Gottlieb urged sales leaders who argue their company is not AI-forward to take matters into their own hands and at least make their departments more AI-focused. AI-driven training platforms are a great place to start.

"This is your moment to get that swagger and set the tone to chase a new productivity frontier," he said. "Improvement doesn't come drastically or immediately. But if you start today, by 2027, you will realize exponential improvements of revenue, cost of sales and AI maturity. Can you imagine if you wait three years to start this?" **SMM**

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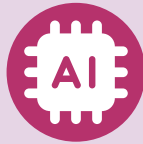
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The Purpose of Sales Training Isn't Sales!

Sustained revenue growth results from tightly focused, collaborative learning that aligns with the human experience.

BY NICHOLAS WEBB

The overwhelming majority of sales trainers operate under the belief that their mission is to conduct sales training. They develop workshops, scripts and motivational content all focused on improving the act of selling. The truth, however, is that the purpose of sales training has little to do with training at all. The only reason sales training exists is to drive measurable increases in revenue.

The purpose of sales training is not to train individuals, it is to improve financial performance. That may sound like a play on words, but it represents a fundamental philosophical difference between traditional training and programs designed for real enterprise results.

Sales Training Is a Process, Not an Enterprise Goal

In many organizations, sales training fails to produce meaningful outcomes. Research suggests that only a small fraction of what employees learn in training is ever applied effectively in their day-to-day work. The result is a poor return on investment that no other department would tolerate. Imagine if your accounting, manufacturing or logistics teams delivered only a 10% return on their efforts.

In most cases, the problem isn't the salespeople or the material, it's the lack of connection between training and the organization's revenue strategy. The good news is training is actually the single best investment an organization can make; the only caveat is it has to be done right, especially in our current workforce landscape.

Don't Win the Battle Only to Lose the War

In our consulting and training practice, we recently worked with a client that had one of the most elaborate and expensive sales training programs I had ever seen. The sessions were impressive, the materials looked professional, and the trainers were highly credentialed. But the program failed because the focus was on closing deals at any cost. Salespeople were taught that success was defined by transactions, not relationships. The result was an extraordinary 60% cancellation rate within weeks of each sale.

When we analyzed the company's revenue goals, it became clear the issue was not closing, it was retention. They were great at selling but terrible at keeping customers. We replaced their traditional program with our Certified Ethical Sales Professional curriculum, which emphasizes trust, transparency and customer advocacy. Salespeople were trained to have



honest conversations about potential risks, realistic expectations and pricing transparency. The result was transformative. Close rates remained steady, but cancellations dropped to the low single digits. This proved that when training is designed around strategic outcomes rather than activity, it generates measurable and lasting financial improvement.

Sales Is Uniquely Human

The second critical driver of revenue performance is human experience design. This idea is so simple it's often overlooked, yet it has an enormous impact. Sales success depends on the emotional state and engagement level of the people who sell. As the saying goes, "hurt people hurt people." In the same way, disengaged or unhappy salespeople rarely deliver great customer experiences. The best organizations are now investing in human experience innovation to improve the quality of work life for their sales teams. When sales professionals feel valued, supported and inspired, they naturally deliver better experiences to customers.

Happy Sales Professionals Create Happy Customers, and Happy Customers Drive Sales

In my book “What Customers Crave” and later in “What Customers Hate,” the data is clear: happy customers are less price sensitive, purchase more frequently, and demonstrate stronger loyalty.

Those same principles apply to employees. When salespeople operate in a culture built on respect, clarity and shared purpose, their effectiveness skyrockets. The path to better customer experience begins with a better employee experience. If you want sales training that truly moves the needle, start by examining the culture that surrounds your sales team. Ask whether your environment empowers people to thrive, collaborate and perform. If it doesn't, the best training in the world will fall flat. Also avoid the idea that salespeople are coin operated. Like everyone else, they want to have their work be part of their personal growth and overarching quality of life.

Apply the Superpower of Hacking Sales

The third and final differentiator among top-performing sales organizations is collaboration and innovation. The best teams have moved beyond traditional workshops and now use collaborative ideation methods such as Sales Hackathons. These structured sessions bring together frontline salespeople, marketers and customer service professionals to co-create ideas for improving systems, tools and processes. Instead of sitting through passive training sessions, participants actively build new strategies and test them in real-world scenarios.

In our experience, these collaborative hackathons are not only productive but transformative. They tap into the wisdom of the people closest to the customer, leading to immediate and practical improvements in how sales are made, managed and maintained. They also create enthusiasm and ownership, turning training from an obligation into an opportunity for creative problem solving.

As Simple As One, Two, Three

So, there you have it. The most successful sales training programs in the world begin with a shift in thinking.

- First, recognize that sales training is not your purpose, revenue impact is.
- Second, understand that human experience design is the foundation of both employee and customer satisfaction, and that satisfaction drives measurable growth.
- Finally, make training a collaborative process that engages your teams as creators rather than passive participants.

When sales training is tied directly to enterprise goals, aligned with human experience, and energized by collaboration, it stops being a cost center and becomes a true driver of profit. The purpose of sales training is not sales training; it is sustained, predictable and meaningful revenue growth. **smm**

Nicholas Webb is the CEO of [LearnLogic](#), a workforce training and consulting firm. He is the author of multiple books on business innovation and success, and a keynote speaker on enterprise, success and future trends.

Building a High-Impact Sales Training System

Align Training with Enterprise Revenue Goals

The first step is to replace traditional, activity-based sales training with a results-driven model. Begin by defining the organization's measurable revenue objectives, such as retention improvement, margin expansion or new-customer acquisition, and design the training experience backward from these goals. Every module, exercise and assessment should directly support one or more enterprise targets. Establish pre-training and post-training metrics that track outcomes such as conversion rates, customer lifetime value and account growth. Treat the sales training initiative as a profit center, not a cost center, with

clear ROI reporting tied to leadership dashboards.

Integrate Human Experience Design

Sales performance improves when human experience improves. Build a culture where sales professionals feel trusted, recognized and connected to purpose. Introduce short feedback loops, peer mentoring and recognition systems to enhance morale and motivation. Integrate well-being initiatives that reduce burnout and support balance, which directly impacts engagement and customer empathy. Training must also include emotional intelligence and relationship-building techniques so that sales interactions move from transactional to relational. Happy

salespeople make happy customers, and happy customers create predictable revenue growth.

Implement Collaborative Sales Innovation (Sales Hackathons)

Embed innovation into the sales ecosystem through structured collaboration. Launch quarterly “Sales Hackathons” that unite marketing, customer success and sales professionals to co-create new approaches for lead nurturing, pricing strategy and retention. Capture ideas, test them quickly and celebrate measurable wins. This iterative approach replaces passive training with an active, creative environment where every participant contributes to enterprise growth.

Calmness Is the New Closing Skill

Performance is no longer just about skill, but state of mind.

BY ROCHELLE CARRINGTON,
EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE BLUEPRINTING

For decades, sales training revolved around one idea: master the technique and the numbers will follow.

Scripts. Objection handling. Closing strategies.

For a while, that worked. But today's business environment has shifted faster than traditional sales models can adapt. Buyers are more informed. Pressure is higher. Burnout is rampant. And the same playbook that once produced results now leaves even top performers running on fumes.

The new era of sales requires something different.

Not just sharper tactics, but regulated nervous systems, emotionally aware leaders, and teams that can stay clear, calm and connected under pressure.

The Real Competitive Advantage: State Over Strategy

Sales reps do not fail because they lack skill. They fail because their internal operating system is not aligned with the pressure of growth. You can teach the perfect discovery process, but if someone's body is flooded with stress, they will not use it.

That's why the most progressive organizations are rethinking sales training altogether. The new question is not "What should my people say?" it's "Who are they when they say it?"

When the nervous system feels safe, the prefrontal cortex, responsible for judgment, empathy and problem-solving switches on.

That is when real influence happens. Not through force, but through presence.

From Scripts to States

Traditional sales training focuses on what to do.

New-era training focuses on how to be.

This does not mean mindset affirmations or motivational slogans. It means learning to regulate the body so the mind can perform. Because mindset only works if the nervous system agrees.

Executives and sales leaders often arm themselves with every tool imaginable — strategy decks, CRM dashboards, accountability trackers. Yet under pressure, they default to control, overexertion or avoidance, patterns rooted not in poor leadership but in unprocessed emotional states.

Once those emotional patterns are cleared, performance transforms almost overnight.

Leaders communicate with calm authority. Salespeople listen more deeply and close without pushing. Teams stop reacting and start creating.



Emotional Training Is the Next Frontier

This inside-out model of performance integrates neuroscience, quantum physics and somatic psychology to help people rewire how they respond to stress.

Think of it as upgrading the internal software that drives every external result. Instead of teaching people to override emotions, the goal is to release them quickly and effectively. The result:

- Shorter sales cycles because clarity replaces tension.
- Consistent revenue because performance is no longer mood dependent.
- Healthier leaders because success no longer requires burnout as the cost of entry.

The Evolution of the Sales Leader

In this new landscape, leaders who can stay emotionally regulated will outperform those who rely on pressure. Calm becomes the new charisma.

Influence comes not from intensity but from energetic congruence, when what you say, feel and project are in full alignment.

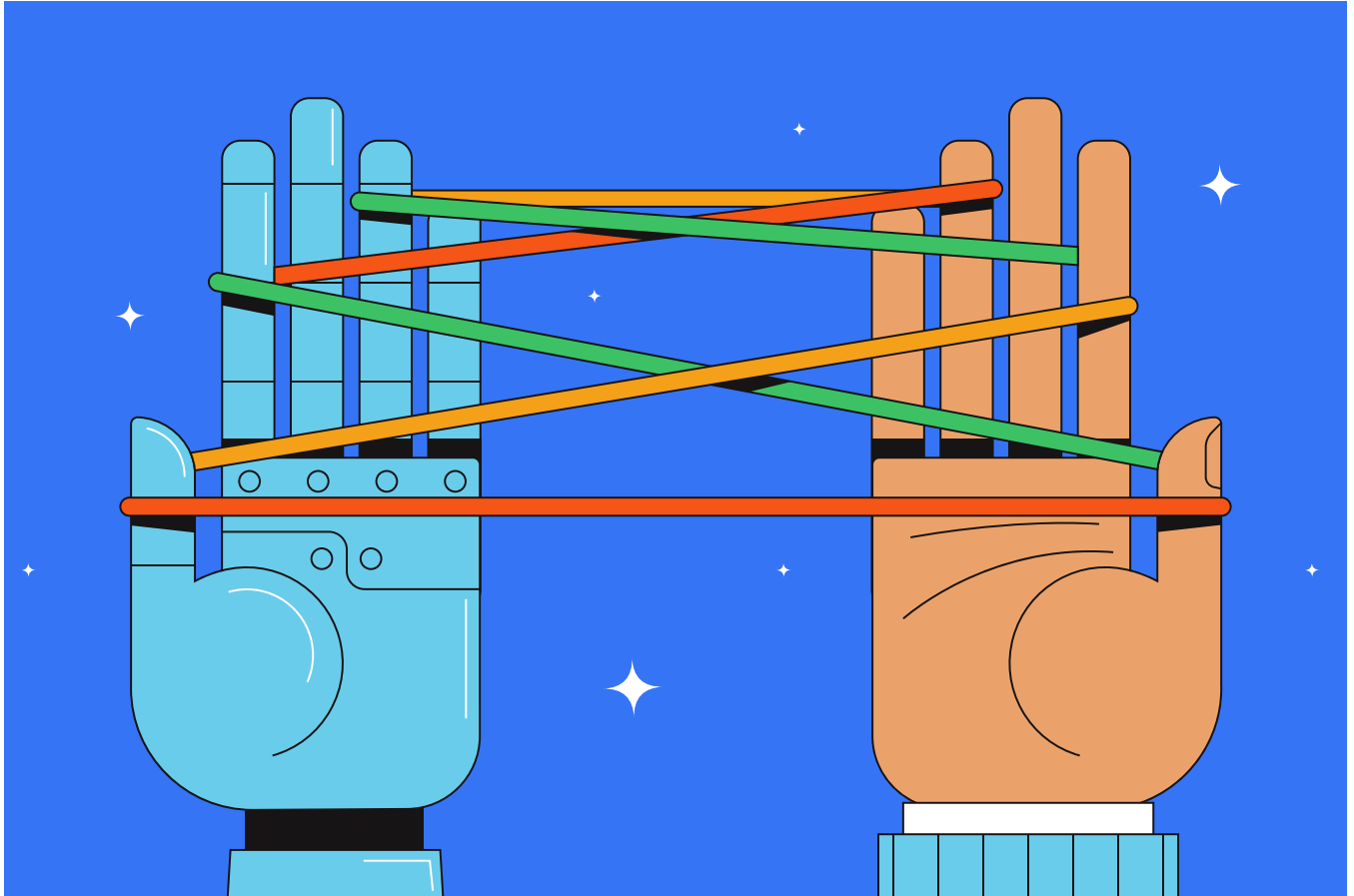
Training for this new era is not about learning more; it's about unlearning the survival patterns that limit potential.

When tactical excellence meets emotional precision, sales stops being a grind and starts becoming a flow state, one where results compound effortlessly because the leader, the team and the mission are fully aligned.

The future of sales training will not just teach people how to close deals. It will teach them how to stay open to possibility, to connection and to the next level of human performance. **SM**

Rochelle Carrington is the founder of [Emotional Intelligence Blueprinting](#), a company that blends neuroscience and quantum principles to help leaders and organizations unlock performance at every level.

AI-Enabled Selling: Training for the Next Competitive Advantage



BY MARY FLAHERTY, RAIN GROUP

Here's a frustration many sales leaders know well: you send your team through another round of training, and two weeks later, they're back to their old habits. The gap between learning and performance isn't new, but expensive.

Knowledge alone isn't enough. Sellers must be fluent in leading the conversations that create value for buyers. AI-enabled selling makes that possible by helping teams practice, refine, and execute at a higher level.

What makes AI different from past training innovations is its ability to pair human expertise with scalable tools for practice, coaching, planning and measurement. It's not a substitute for skill; it's an accelerant. According to [Salesforce research](#), 83% of teams using AI reported revenue growth, compared to 66% of those not using it. But that stat doesn't tell the full story.

Winning teams aren't just buying tools and hoping for magic. They're deliberately building new capabilities.

AI is already reshaping sales roles. What it hasn't changed is the need for sellers who can lead complex conversations and deliver buyer value.

The Evolution Toward AI-Augmented Performance

Sales has evolved — from Rolodexes to CRMs to insight platforms — with each wave expanding what's possible. AI represents the next leap, not because it does the selling, but because it amplifies the strengths of skilled professionals. Those who know how to uncover needs, shape conversations and guide buyers toward value now have more time to do what matters most.

As routine tasks shift into AI-augmented workflows, sellers can focus more on discovery, influence and relationship-building, key differentiators in complex deals.

This shift is already underway, and it's showing up in four core AI capabilities that elevate seller performance.

Four AI Capabilities Transforming Performance

For sales leaders, these are the high-leverage areas to prioritize:

- 1. Simulation-Based Skill Development** – Classroom training builds concepts. AI simulations build fluency. Sellers can now rehearse objection handling, executive briefings and pricing conversations with realistic buyer personas and receive instant feedback. This builds fluency in articulating and delivering value in high-stakes conversations. Repetitions increase, execution risk drops, and proficiency rises faster than with workshops alone.
- 2. Scalable Coaching Intelligence** – Frontline managers are stretched thin. They're carrying quota, running meetings, fighting fires in deals, and somehow still expected to provide thoughtful, individualized coaching for every rep. AI helps by standardizing reviews across calls and role-plays, identifying patterns, and highlighting the few behaviors that drive outsized results. That way, managers can focus their limited time where it counts most.
- 3. Accelerated Message Development** – AI helps teams explore variations of talk tracks by buyer role or industry, enabling faster iteration without sacrificing authenticity. Sellers keep their voice and their judgment while reducing the time to messaging that resonates.
- 4. Performance Measurement That Drives Results** – Skill development becomes visible and trackable. Teams monitor trends, measure coaching impact, and link practice to pipeline and revenue. These capabilities are already showing up in operating metrics and hiring patterns.

If your messaging is unclear, your ideal customer profile is fuzzy, or your managers don't know how to coach, AI won't help. It will just make you fail faster — and at scale.

Market Evidence: Augmentation, Not Elimination

The narrative around AI displacing sellers doesn't match how top-performing organizations are operating. Salesforce research found that teams using AI are more likely to expand headcount than those that aren't.

Across sales, account management, customer success and revenue operations, leaders continue to invest in people because they need professionals who can translate capability into buyer outcomes and lasting value.

That said, I'm seeing companies rush to "AI-enable" their sales orgs without fixing fundamental problems first. If your messaging is unclear, your ideal customer profile is fuzzy, or your managers don't know how to coach, AI won't help. It will just make you fail faster — and at scale. Build strong foundations, then multiply them with technology.

An Action Plan for Sales Leaders

So how do you operationalize this?

• Seller-Driven Development

Give sellers on-demand AI simulations that mirror real challenges, including pricing objections, executive conversations, competitive traps, etc. When sellers come to coaching sessions with specific asks like "I keep losing momentum when procurement gets involved. Can we work on this?" you know development has shifted from a push to a pull.

• The Manager's Role in the AI Era

Most managers were promoted for their ability to close deals, not to coach others. AI insights help pinpoint where coaching has the biggest impact, especially in developing consultative, value-based skills that buyers reward. Managers move from tracking activity to guiding strategy.

• Strategic Coaching Conversations

Use AI insights to identify behavior patterns and turn coaching into higher-level conversations about strategy, reinforcement and advanced tactics. Let sellers handle practice independently, and reserve manager time for meaningful performance gains.

• Systematic Development Rhythms

Build practice and measurement into regular cadences: weekly self-directed reps, monthly development check-ins, and quarterly team calibrations. This reinforces continuous improvement and compounds skill over time.

The Competitive Advantage Ahead

Whether AI eventually replaces sellers or simply makes the best ones better remains to be seen. But teams that treat AI as a performance multiplier are already outperforming competitors who don't.

That gap is real. It's measurable, and it's widening.

You can debate the long-term future, or you can start building the capabilities that drive advantage now. Only one of those choices moves the business forward. **smm**

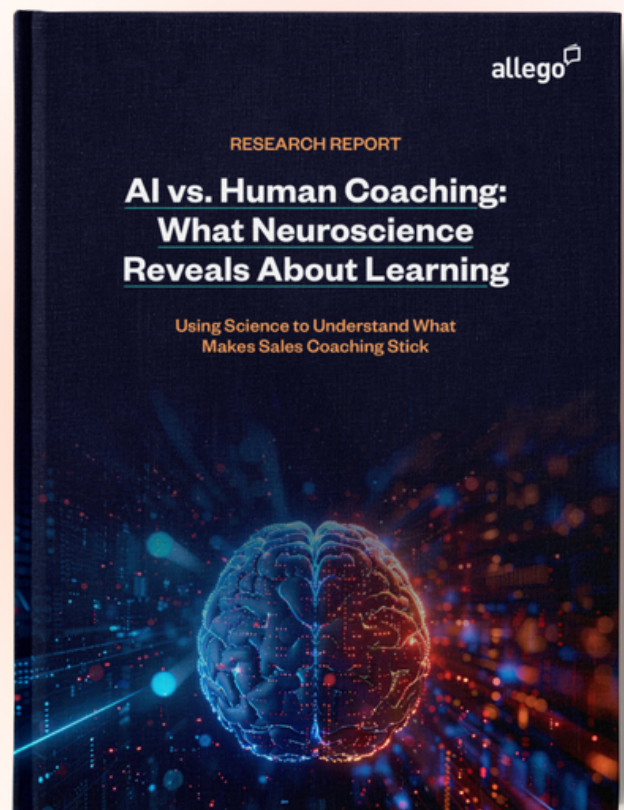
Mary Flaherty is the vice president of research and thought leadership at [RAIN Group](#), a global sales training company helping enterprise teams drive results through coaching, reinforcement, and tech-enabled solutions.

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Moving the Middle

What the Data Says About Developing Your Team



BY C. LEE SMITH, SALESFUEL

Like most sales managers, you have a mix of talent on your team. Your top reps consistently bring in deals, while you spend too much time trying to save lower performers. Then there are your middle performers — the ones who do OK and occasionally surprise you with a big win.

Wouldn't it be great if they could perform like your stars more often? Many of them want to, and with the right support, some of them can.

SalesFuel's recent [Voice of the Sales Rep](#) survey gathered responses from more than 830 sales professionals. Nearly 300 of them achieved less than 90% of quota. Here's what we learned about middle-performing reps and how managers can help them reach the next level.

Where the Middle Says They Need Help

All reps, regardless of skill level, have strengths and weaknesses. Middle performers identified their top challenges as:

- Connecting with the person that controls the budget (37%)
- Handling objections (35%)
- Customer retention (29%)

Handling objections and identifying the person who controls the budget are critical for closing deals. Managers must work with reps, coaching them and even role playing until they grow more confident in their ability. Specifically, managers need to encourage reps to expand their critical thinking skills.

Customer retention is a major concern. We all know it costs much more to gain than to retain a customer. To improve customer retention rates, managers should develop a system for regular customer touches. And reps should be held accountable for their use of the CRM system as a way to maintain strong relationships with existing customers.

Sales Managers See It Differently

In our [Voice of the Sales Manager](#) survey, we also solicited the opinions of nearly 300 management professionals. We asked for their opinion regarding the strengths and weaknesses of their team. The top challenges according to sales managers break out as follows:

- Pre-meeting research/Pre-call intelligence (39%)
- Connecting with the buyer on an emotional/logical level (30%) (This is what top performers do exceptionally well.)
- Providing value/insight to prospects (24%)

Insufficient Attention to Pre-Call Intelligence

The disconnect regarding perceived weaknesses between managers and sellers is significant. In particular, the need to conduct proper discovery — to dig into a prospect's business before a call — cannot be overlooked.

Your reps have information available to them. Top achievers, those who regularly exceed quota, make use of data. Over 61% review their CRM notes and past activities before connecting.

However, only 37% of middle performers are taking the time to learn about their prospects. Even simple things like checking the newsroom section of the prospect's website gets overlooked. If they go into a call without proper preparation, it will be extremely challenging for them to even get to the point where they can handle objections and ultimately close the deal.

"The best salespeople know managing their own time matters, but respecting the buyer's time matters more," says C. Lee Smith, author of "[SalesCred. How Buyers Qualify Sellers](#)." "When a sales rep shows up unprepared, they shouldn't be surprised if they don't get another meeting."

They Lack Clarity

Sales reps perform best when they understand their roles and goals. Unfortunately, many middle performers lack that clarity:

- Only 71% clearly understand their role within the organization.
- Just 55% say they know the one thing they do better than anyone else.
- Only 53% understand what their managers expect and how their performance is measured.

To improve results, managers should communicate expectations more clearly. During one-on-one meetings, ask reps to repeat specific instructions to ensure understanding and alignment. If your reps prefer written communication, have them summarize their understanding of your meetings. The process of writing it down may help them remember the details.

They Don't Value Skills Development Enough

Training is one of the most effective ways to elevate the sales skills of middle performers. However, many of them don't yet recognize its value:

- Only 24% have taken training or coursework to improve their skills in the past year (compared to 37% of high-performing reps).
- 35% rate their sales training as fair to poor.
- Only 14% of them say they need more/better training on how to sell with AI — that's 64% lower than high-performing salespeople.

To address this issue, managers have a number of options. They can offer to reimburse reps for the cost when they sign up for an approved training program. Or, managers can consider hiring a professional sales trainer such as [SalesCred](#).

Among managers who give their teams a five-star rating, 25% use external training programs. Outside experts not only bring fresh insights, they also signal that the company is investing in its people, which can boost motivation and engagement.

They Need Proactive Leadership

Middle-performing sales reps often lack clarity in their roles, confidence in their unique strengths, and access to effective training. Their biggest weaknesses include handling objections, connecting with decision-makers, and retaining customers. To help the majority of their team emulate the behaviors of their high achievers, managers must commit to training, coaching and accountability. For most teams, improving the results of middle performers just 2 to 3% will make a huge impact on the bottom line. **SMM**

C. Lee Smith is founder and CEO of [SalesFuel](#), a company that leverages data on prospects and employees to help sales teams close more deals, develop talent and increase revenue.

A Majority of Workplace AI Use Is Self-Directed

Unsurprisingly, more workers report using Artificial Intelligence in their daily lives than just two years ago (35% compared to 8% in 2023). What is startling is that a high percentage of those who report increased use of AI at work are doing so at their own behest rather than encouragement or direction from their employer.

According to a 2024 survey by Jobs for the Future (JFF), 60% of workers polled reported using AI for self-directed learning. They also stated they were twice as likely to use AI on their own initiative at work (20%) versus at their employer's direction (11%).

JFF, a national nonprofit that provides consulting and strategy services to promote economic advancement and college and career readiness, polled more than 2,700 workers across an array of demographic groups.

Only 16% of respondents reported having access to paid AI tools from their employer or educational institution. About 10% said they were personally paying for the tools, and people of color were more likely to report paying for them (15%).

The impact of AI on careers in the next three to five years is apparent but is just beginning to influence workers' future plans for career and skill development.

77% of respondents said they believe AI will impact the job or career they expect to have in the next 3-5 years.

19% of respondents said they are actively pursuing different careers (7%) or considering changing plans in the near future (12%) due to AI-driven transformation — and 19% said they have already used AI tools to obtain a better job.

Download the JFF report on AI's [Impact on Work and Learning](#).



Right Place, Right Time

How Modern Sales Training Empowers Teams for the Digital-First Customer

BY DOUG BUSHÉE, GARTNER SALES PRACTICE

In today's hyper-competitive marketplace, the traditional approach to sales training — periodic workshops, generic content and static playbooks — no longer meets the needs of sales teams or their customers. The modern buyer is more informed, digitally savvy and expects meaningful engagement at every touchpoint. To keep pace, organizations are reimagining sales enablement with a laser focus on delivering targeted, just-in-time resources and training that empower sales teams to perform at their peak.

Modern enablement strategies are built on the principle of relevance and immediacy, and AI is at the heart of making that possible. Instead of overwhelming salespeople with static content they may never use, leading organizations are leveraging AI-driven enablement platforms that analyze real-time data from CRM systems, buyer interactions and sales performance to deliver the right content, insights and training precisely when and where they're needed.

AI can detect patterns — such as a rep consistently losing deals at a certain stage — and proactively recommend targeted microlearning or coaching. It can also personalize content delivery based on role, region or deal context, ensuring every seller gets what they need to succeed. This shift is transforming

sales training from a one-time event into an ongoing, intelligent process that supports sales professionals throughout their journey with precision and agility.

Data and Digital Tools

At the core of this transformation is the use of data and digital tools to understand the evolving needs of both customers and sales teams. Enablement leaders are harnessing analytics to track buyer behavior, identify knowledge gaps, and anticipate the challenges salespeople face in real time. Armed with these insights, they can deploy targeted training modules, microlearning sessions and playbooks that address specific scenarios, whether it's handling objections, navigating complex deals or introducing new products.

This just-in-time approach is especially critical as customers become more sophisticated in their research and decision-making. Sales teams must be equipped to respond with agility, armed with the latest information and strategies to engage buyers who often know as much about the product as the seller. Modern enablement tools integrate seamlessly with CRM systems and communication platforms, ensuring that



salespeople have instant access to resources, best practices and expert guidance right at the moment of need.

Imagine a sales rep preparing for a meeting with a healthcare prospect. Instead of digging through outdated folders or generic decks, an AI-powered enablement platform analyzes the opportunity context — industry, deal stage and buyer persona — and automatically surfaces a case study from a similar hospital system, a short video on navigating HIPAA objections, and a battle card comparing competitors in the healthcare space, all embedded within the rep's CRM.

After the call, AI-driven conversation intelligence detects that the rep hesitated during pricing discussions and instantly recommends a five-minute microlearning module on value-based pricing strategies. Meanwhile, enablement leaders use AI analytics to spot a trend: reps in the Northeast are losing deals in late-stage negotiations. In response, they launch a targeted coaching initiative and update the negotiation playbook with region-specific insights. These examples show how AI transforms enablement from a reactive, static function into a proactive, intelligent system that supports sellers in real time, aligned to both buyer behavior and business goals.

The impact is profound: sales professionals feel more confident and prepared, customer interactions become more meaningful, and organizations see tangible improvements in win rates and deal velocity. By focusing on targeted, in-the-moment training, companies are not only closing skill gaps but also fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptability.

Moreover, this strategy empowers sales enablement teams to move beyond content creation and sales learning. Their role is

evolving into that of strategic partners curating resources, orchestrating learning journeys, and aligning enablement initiatives with business goals. They are leveraging technology to automate routine tasks and focus on high-impact activities, such as coaching, mentoring and driving adoption of best practices across the sales force.

Of course, the journey to just-in-time enablement requires thoughtful change management and investment in the right tools. Organizations must prioritize user-friendly platforms, robust analytics and seamless integration with existing workflows. They must also foster a mindset of agility and openness to new ways of learning and working.

Looking ahead, the future of sales enablement will be defined by even greater personalization and real-time support. As AI and machine learning continue to advance, enablement platforms will become even more adept at predicting needs, recommending resources and guiding salespeople through complex customer journeys. The ultimate goal is to empower every sales professional to engage effectively with today's digitally empowered customer — anytime, anywhere.

Sales training is no longer a box to be checked. It's a strategic, ongoing process that delivers real value to both sellers and buyers. By embracing targeted, just-in-time enablement, organizations can build agile, high-performing sales teams ready to win in a digital-first world. **SMM**

[Doug Bushée](#) is a VP Analyst in the [Gartner Sales Practice](#), specializing in the evolution of sales and revenue enablement through generative AI.



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Turn Training Data to Actionable Insights

Analytics in L&D software can transform training from a support function into a driver of business growth.

BY BRANA MARJANOVIC

In sales and marketing, knowledge is only as valuable as the results it generates. Yet many organizations still struggle to connect training programs with measurable business outcomes.

Modern learning platforms, particularly the best corporate LMS solutions, are changing that by turning training data into actionable insights. Through analytics, dashboards and KPI alignment, teams can now link learning outcomes to sales conversions, pipeline velocity and overall marketing effectiveness. Training data helps teams make smarter, evidence-based decisions.

The Challenge: Training Without Measurable Impact

For many sales and marketing leaders, training programs have long existed in a silo. They may know how many employees completed a module, but not whether that knowledge improved conversion rates or deal velocity.

Without clear data, teams face questions such as:

- Which training initiatives actually improve sales performance?

- Where are the biggest knowledge gaps affecting pipeline quality?
- How do we link learning outcomes to metrics like revenue or retention?

A marketing team might complete a course on campaign optimization with high completion rates, but no proof that it boosted engagement or ROI. This lack of visibility keeps learning disconnected from performance.

The Solution: Turning Learning Data Into Business Intelligence

Analytics-driven learning platforms, especially the [best corporate LMS](#) systems, bridge this gap by collecting and analyzing engagement, assessment and behavioral data. This transforms training into measurable business intelligence.

- 1. Tracking Learner Progress and Behavior** – Modern platforms offer granular visibility into how employees interact with learning materials. Metrics such as completion rates, time spent and quiz performance help identify trends — like top-performing sales reps revisiting microlearning content on negotiation while others skip it.

Such insights help L&D teams personalize learning and focus on what drives measurable results.

2. Measuring Knowledge Gaps – Dashboards can reveal where employees struggle most. If marketing analysts perform poorly in analytics-related modules, leaders can target reinforcement in that area. By quantifying knowledge gaps, L&D leaders can allocate resources toward training that most impacts business performance.

3. Using Surveys for Deeper Evaluation – While analytics track behavior, surveys uncover perception and real-world impact. Tools like the [survey's training evaluation form](#) make it easy to collect structured feedback after a course.

Surveys measure learner satisfaction, confidence and applicability of skills on the job. When combined with learning analytics, they create a 360-degree view of training effectiveness. For example, if sales teams report higher confidence in objection handling and CRM data confirms improved close rates, the ROI becomes clear.

4. Correlating Learning Outcomes With Performance Metrics – Advanced platforms can connect L&D data with business systems like CRMs or marketing analytics tools to uncover direct links between training and performance. Examples include:

- Product training correlating with higher sales conversions.
- Marketing strategy courses tied to better lead quality.
- Leadership programs shortening decision cycles.

By integrating learning analytics with KPIs, organizations gain a holistic view of how education drives outcomes.

The Results: Aligning KPIs for Continuous Improvement

Companies that integrate learning analytics experience measurable advantages:

- 1. Data-Informed Decisions** – Real-time dashboards show how training affects key metrics, allowing leaders to scale what works and adapt quickly when results stall.
- 2. Personalized Learning Paths** – Analytics support adaptive learning — recommending modules based on performance gaps — ensuring training remains relevant and efficient.
- 3. Cross-Department Collaboration** – When L&D, sales and marketing teams share the same performance data, alignment strengthens. Learning programs can directly support lead generation or retention strategies, while results validate training's business impact.
- 4. Continuous Optimization** – Data-driven learning encourages a feedback loop. Organizations can refine content, delivery and timing based on results, turning training into a continuously improving system.

A Practical Roadmap for Data-Driven Learning

To align learning analytics with business performance, organizations can start by:

- **Defining performance-aligned KPIs** – Identify which metrics (conversion rates, deal velocity, ROI) learning should influence.
- **Integrating systems** – Connect L&D platforms, surveys and CRMs for unified data insights.
- **Visualizing results** – Use dashboards to clearly show how learning impacts business outcomes.
- **Refining continuously** – Adapt training strategies and business processes using real-time feedback and analytics.

As organizations pursue measurable growth, learning analytics provide a clear path from knowledge to impact. By leveraging modern platforms and combining analytics with targeted survey feedback, sales and marketing teams can see precisely how training drives performance.

When learning data, business metrics and employee feedback align, training stops being a cost center and becomes a strategic engine for revenue growth. **smm**

Brana Marjanovic is a dedicated business and marketing blogger with a keen interest in topics ranging from sales and online branding to digital marketing, social media and productivity.

The Metrics That Matter

Adopting a data-driven coaching approach requires a clear understanding of the key metrics you should assess. This allows you to dig into individual performance to fuel more impactful coaching conversations. Here are some key criteria to evaluate:

- **Product knowledge** – Create a proficiency threshold score for reps to show they're knowledgeable experts on your product.
- **Selling behavior** – Evaluating how articulate and enthusiastic a rep is on a call, voicemail or presentation provides an indication of overall confidence in selling a solution.
- **Selling skills** – Tracking sellers' progress in real-time provides insights on each rep's ability to demo, use a sales methodology on a call, challenge competition, handle objection questions and evaluate whether or not the correct terms are used to describe the product.
- **Message consistency** – AI-powered keyword analysis is a great way for sales coaches to get better insight into individual competencies and needs based on live interactions during the selling process.

SOURCE: [MINDTICKLE](#)

Empowering the Next Generation of Sellers

Strategic Tools, Critical Thinking, and AI

BY STEVE GIELDA, IGNITE SELLING

As a new generation of sellers enters the workforce, their needs and expectations around training are shifting. This generation doesn't want to just fill out forms or follow traditional scripts; they want tools that challenge and develop their strategic thinking and help them analyze opportunities from a more comprehensive perspective. They also want technology that supports their decision-making, enhances their skills and accelerates their progress.

In this article, we'll explore how sales leaders can equip their teams with strategic tools that foster critical thinking, engage sellers through modern learning methods, and integrate AI to improve sales outcomes.

Strategic Tools That Drive Critical Thinking

Today's sellers are more advanced than ever. Simply handing them legacy tools like Bluesheets or Greensheets is no longer enough. These tools, while useful in the past, have been replaced by smart CRM systems and, equally true, they have become burdensome to many modern salespeople who prefer frameworks that allow them to make smarter decisions rather than just track basic activities.

Salespeople today demand tools that allow them to apply strategic thinking to their sales process—tools that are designed not to track sales data but to drive thinking about what truly matters in an opportunity. These tools prompt sellers to think critically about things like:

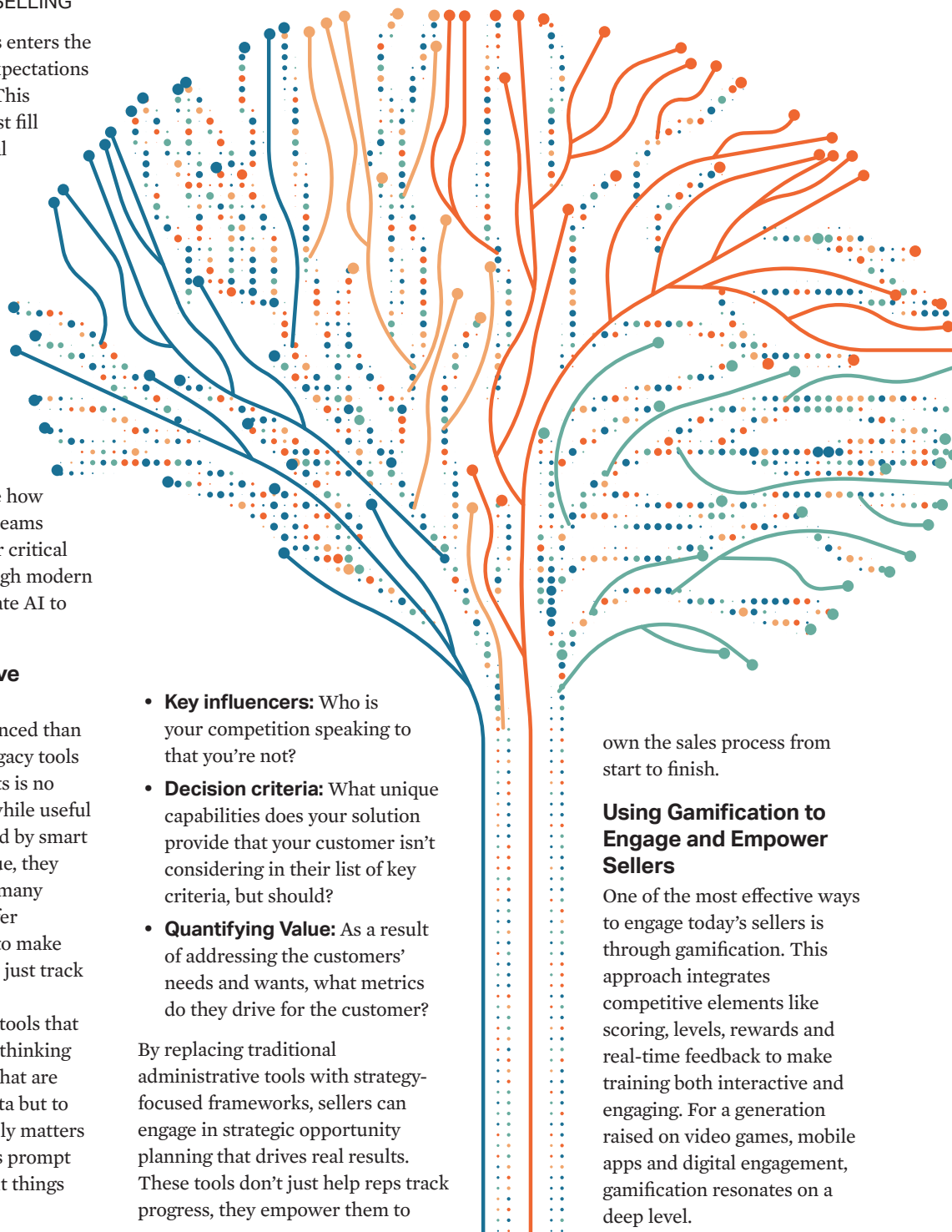
- **Key influencers:** Who is your competition speaking to that you're not?
- **Decision criteria:** What unique capabilities does your solution provide that your customer isn't considering in their list of key criteria, but should?
- **Quantifying Value:** As a result of addressing the customers' needs and wants, what metrics do they drive for the customer?

By replacing traditional administrative tools with strategy-focused frameworks, sellers can engage in strategic opportunity planning that drives real results. These tools don't just help reps track progress, they empower them to

own the sales process from start to finish.

Using Gamification to Engage and Empower Sellers

One of the most effective ways to engage today's sellers is through gamification. This approach integrates competitive elements like scoring, levels, rewards and real-time feedback to make training both interactive and engaging. For a generation raised on video games, mobile apps and digital engagement, gamification resonates on a deep level.



Gamification doesn't just make learning fun; it makes it *relevant*. By incorporating interactive scenarios, decision-making exercises and feedback loops into sales training, you can address multiple learning styles simultaneously, whether the salesperson is visual, auditory or kinesthetic. For example, visual learners benefit from interactive dashboards, auditory learners engage in role-plays or discussion-based scenarios, and kinesthetic learners thrive in hands-on simulations.

This level of engagement not only improves retention but accelerates performance by giving salespeople immediate, actionable feedback. Gamification helps create a learning culture where skills are developed through real-world application, which drives greater application of those skills in the field.

AI As a Strategy Coach for Sellers

AI is more than a buzzword; it's a critical tool for today's B2B salespeople. As more teams integrate AI into their workflows, it's becoming clear that AI is a strategic coach, guiding salespeople through assumptions, recommending smarter moves, and delivering data-driven insights to improve decision-making.

Rather than replacing the human element, AI augments a salesperson's ability to assess opportunities, spot risks and make smarter moves. For example, AI can help sales teams:

- **Identify hidden influencers** – AI can flag potential stakeholders based on behavior or historical data that a rep might overlook.

- **Prioritize opportunities** – AI tools can analyze data to help reps focus on the most promising leads based on predictive algorithms.
- **Challenge assumptions** – AI can point out when a rep's strategy doesn't align with historical success or when they're missing a key detail.

The key here is augmented intelligence — where the salesperson uses AI to validate their assumptions, refine their strategies, and ultimately drive better outcomes. The sellers who can master this tool will be seen as more strategic and more capable of navigating the increasingly complex sales environments of today's marketplace.

As we look to the future of sales, it's clear that today's sellers need more than just basic tracking tools or forms to fill out for their manager. They need strategic frameworks that challenge their thinking, engaging learning methods that resonate with their needs, and AI tools that act as coaches, guiding them to better decisions.

Sales leaders must provide their teams with the tools and resources that empower them to think critically, adapt quickly and build stronger relationships with customers. By embracing strategic tools, gamification and AI, we can help salespeople reach their full potential and drive measurable results.

The next generation of sellers is ready to lead — they just need the right training and tools to do it. **SMN**

Steve Gielda is founder and managing partner at [Ignite Selling](#), a global sales enablement and performance improvement company.

Why So Much Sales Training Doesn't Stick

How do you get information to stick? That is the \$100,000 question regarding any investment in sales training. A company won't shell out thousands of dollars for training each year if it doesn't net 5 or 10x that in increased revenue. Or maybe it will. Either way, it's not a sustainable situation.

In 2007, Chip and Dan Heath captured business leaders' attention with their debut book, "Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die." The book uses a collection of case studies and principles to explain why some ideas or lessons have a lasting impact while others are quickly forgotten.

The Heath brothers surmised that sticky ideas share six traits: simplicity, unexpectedness, concreteness, credibility, emotions and stories (or get

told in a memorable way). The book, with its memorable orange cover and faux duct tape across the middle, remains a primer on how to present information effectively.

Here are three other reasons why your training isn't sticking.

- **The salespeople don't have a compelling reason to improve.** If you present the idea that you're training is simply checking a box, it won't stick, says sales trainer Dave Kurlan in a four-minute video "rant" on why [sales training doesn't work](#). "If we're really doing sales training the right way – if we're expecting a sales transformation – we need different effort. We need different skills."
- **There's too much training and not enough – or any – coaching.** Dumping information in multiple-day

or even longer sessions is futile unless you support it with regular coaching, states Madhukar Govindaraju, the founder and CEO of Numly, an enterprise AI company. "Coaching is a continuous relationship where the coach acts as a constant reinforcer of skills by sharing their knowledge and experience to develop salespeople to become sales superstars," he stated in an [article for Forbes](#).

- **There's no diagnosis ahead of the training.** Doctors don't treat patients without a diagnosis. In education, testing at the beginning of a year sets the table for what students strengths are and where they need extra help. It's no different with sales training. Pinpoint the skills that need to be improved – and realize they won't be the same for every rep.