

SALES TRAINING ADAPTIVE SELLING

Need a secret recipe for success – no thanks! Successful selling is an acquirable skill, but not by trying to copy the behavior of successful sellers. A more promising approach is to build up the ability to adapt to each customer, that is, adaptive selling.

Industry: Financial services – customer advisor training

The customer's problem

An insurance company mainly involved in property insurance was faced with the challenge of extending its life assurance business for profitability reasons. Classical training and management tie-in had not led to the desired success thus far.

Theoretical principles

Successful selling is learnable.¹ But typical sales tips and tricks in the form of "if-then behavioral patterns", as so often communicated in sales training, are not sufficient. If you strictly adhere to them, you will be demonstrably less successful than if you simply follow your intuition.² The reason for this is the complex nature of real cases in sales, which "if-then behavioral patterns" cannot do justice to. It thus comes as little surprise that top sellers have pronounced adaptive behavioral capabilities.³ They succeed in perceiving the customer's expectations and particularities and to adapt the course and style of the sales pitch to reflect the situation.

Against the background briefly described here, effex's task was to establish the customer advisors' adaptive capabilities in selling life assurance policies.

Practical implementation

After initial analysis, effex developed a sequence of training tailored to the customer's needs that not only covered the enterprise's actual cases, but also took the participants' psychological barriers into account.

With the aid of personality typology, differences in the customers' expectations and characters were made tangibly perceivable for the customer advisors. After increasing awareness, the

¹ Nerdinger, F. W. (2001). *Psychologie des persönlichen Verkaufs*. München: Oldenbourg.

² Klein, S. (2001). *Selbstmanagement und beruflicher Fortschritt. Entwicklung, Evaluation und Vergleich eines Trainingsprogramms*. Abgerufen am 27.04.2012 unter: <http://archiv.ub.uni-marburg.de/diss/z2002/0094/>; Sujan, H., Weitz, B. A., & Kumar, N. (1994). Learning orientation, working smart, and effective selling, *Journal of Marketing*, 58, 39-52.

³ Spiro, R. L., & Weitz, B. A. (1990). Adaptive selling: Conceptualization, measurement, and nomological validity, *Journal of Marketing Research*, 27, 61-69.

CASE STUDY
CHANGING BEHAVIOR - KNOWING HOW

participants took part in a number of experiments which made the basic principles of adaptive selling, and its effects on their success, tangible to them. Building up on this, each customer advisor developed a number of variants, using their own sales strategy as the starting point. Its use was trained in the course, then verified on genuine customers, and refined. The training was accompanied by a holistic transfer concept involving the direct superiors of all participants in the course.

Impact

On average, the participants concluded two thirds more contracts in life assurance, thanks to their more pronounced adaptive behavior, than in the comparable period in the previous year. In contrast to this, all customer advisors working for the insurance company increased their sales by a mere 6% in the same period. At the same time, the participants also achieved above-average increases in non-life contracts. This change in behavior was also sustainable with all participants achieving further increases in contracts concluded in the year after attending the course