



The Evolution of Sales Training

By Jennifer J. Salopek

Are great salespeople born or made? Back in the 1950s, when salesmen (nearly always male) made their debut in popular culture and Willy Loman became a household name, little training or support for their endeavors existed. Effective salesmen were born, and had to bring their own innate traits and abilities to the job. What little training there was focused primarily on product knowledge, and if you didn't sell enough widgets, you washed out.

As our knowledge of human learning has multiplied exponentially over the past five decades, the business world has realized that great salespeople—while still bringing some common innate characteristics—can be made. Sales training has come into its own as an important, and lucrative, category of the performance improvement field, now representing an annual investment of \$4 billion to \$7 billion by American companies alone.

In the past five years, the field has experienced a rapid evolution that follows closely upon the heels of technology developments, completing the transition from training to performance improvement, and representing very different kinds of interventions from the early years. The whole environment in which salespeople work has changed, because buyers are more informed, sales cycles are shorter, enterprises are more global and dispersed, and competition is fiercer than ever. Sales competencies, skills, and techniques have become much more sophisticated, and consumers of sales training are asking for more from their vendors. Several prominent sales training vendors share the stories of their own evolutions below.

Nature versus nurture

We took our question, Are great salespeople born or made? to Jim Mikula, author of *Sales Training* (ASTD Press, 2004). Now general manager of Cornerstone Development in Montrose, Colorado, Mikula notes, "You must set standards for the word 'great.' However, key attributes for salespeople are that they are outgoing, gregarious, critical thinkers with high emotional intelligence. The world of sales ranges from highly technical to low-end retail. The making of great salespeople has to do with the complexity of the sales job at hand."

Although he believes that key skills can be learned, John Asher, chairman and CEO of Asher Training in Washington, DC, says that natural talent and aptitude are crucial to the making of a great salesperson. He encourages clients to have their salespeople complete an aptitude assessment, and provides an assessment tool online.

Linda Richardson, chairman and founder of the Philadelphia firm that bears her name, says that fewer than 10 percent of salespeople are naturals: "Training is very important for salespeople," she says. "It provides an opportunity for continuous refinement, creates repeatable successes, and can help a company take a promising salesperson from very good to superb."

Kendra Lee, president and founder of Denver-based KLA Group, agrees. "Although some people have an inbred ability to sell, I believe that sales is a science that can be mastered."

Are there universal competencies that must be developed to make a great salesperson? Lee says no. "There are three ways to sell," she explains, "that are driven by what you are selling, who you are selling it to, and how well known your product is. The competencies required are different based on the approach those factors require."

By contrast, Asher believes that all great salespeople need five key competencies: natural aptitude, product knowledge,

key skills, motivation, and process support. In the world of consultative sales, which accounts for about 80 percent of sales transactions, according to Asher, those key skills are listening, focus, and perseverance.

Richardson, creator of consultative selling, says that, while there are key core competencies, "Generic sales training is a waste of time. Skills must be used in a specific context, and an integrated approach is critical."

Psychological Associates, based in St. Louis, Missouri, was founded in 1958 by two holders of doctorates in psychology from Washington University. Joseph LaMantia, senior vice president of performance consulting, explains his company's philosophy,

"Everything we do gets down to observable behavior. We have created a research-based behavioral model based on our beliefs that high-performance sales behavior can be identified and taught." The Psychological Associates model presumes that these four key strategies, operating in an environment of trust, make up high performance:

- Know where you're going.
- Ensure people have what it takes.
- Develop and enable them.
- Help them stay on track.

Key skills and techniques

How do we ensure that salespeople have what it takes? Richardson believes that skills in

presence, questioning, positioning, and asking for feedback enable the multistep process known as consultative selling. "Consultative selling is an approach—a philosophy that does not push a product, but seeks to understand client needs," she says. Its steps include

- preparation
- process
- solutions
- objectives
- closing.

Andrew Kimball, CEO of QBIInternational in Larkspur California, says that the evolution of consultative selling is representative of a sea change that's occurred in the key skills and strategies of successful salespeople. Kimball, who's been a provider or consumer

JUST QUBE IT!

ACCELERATE TIME-TO-LEARNING

Your
Content

Our
Games

Learner
Motivation



The average retention rate of webinars, Powerpoints, and lectures is an **abysmal 4%**.

How do you increase sales force, channel partner, and customer retention of critical product knowledge?

Add QGames!

The Qube is the first customizable, on-demand, game-based learning system:

- Point & click integration with any online training media
- Build games in minutes
- Deploy worldwide instantly
- Multiply retention rates 10x.

For more information visit www.qube.com. Prepare to accelerate!



Qube Learning Systems
1-800-455-8559
justqubeit@qube.com

of sales training for more than 20 years, notes, "Twenty years ago, sales training focused on manipulative tips and techniques. Today, successful salespeople focus on developing the skills necessary to create authentic relationships with their customers."

However, those relationships aren't all it takes, Asher points out. He notes that, as recently as five years ago, commodity salespeople said that their relationships with customers allowed them to charge up to 10 percent more

“ People are all selling essentially the same product for essentially the same price. Differentiation is key. ”

for their product—but no longer. "Now, everything is being commoditized," Asher says. "People are all selling essentially the same product for essentially the same price. Differentiation is key."

"Product knowledge is just table stakes," agrees Tom Snyder, vice president of strategy and business development at Huthwaite. He goes on to say that, although there is a set of common competencies that represent sales excellence, not every salesperson needs to know all of those things: "It depends on where the salesperson encounters the customer in his buying cycle."

As Kimball notes, sales

competencies comprise knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In *Sales Training*, Mikula writes that great salespeople must have four kinds of knowledge—product, company, customer, and industry—and two crucial skills: disciplined thinking and effective communication. Disciplined thinking means avoiding what Mikula calls a "to-do list mentality;" rather, the salesperson's job is to figure out what makes the most sense for the customer. As to effective communication, this is vital today because buyers have so much information thrown at them; they have little time and attention to sort out garbled messages. That condition, combined with our increasing reliance on email, makes effective written communications skills a critical part of the sales arsenal.

Two of the learning areas that could use more attention, says Mikula, are etiquette and respect. Although those concepts may sound old-fashioned, they can be the keys to breaking down barriers to new customer groups and to being taken seriously in an extremely competitive world. "Companies should be reviewing politeness and good manners with their salespeople, as well as training them on showing respect for their prospects through preparation and professionalism. Companies cannot take those things for granted," he says.

Ch-Ch-Ch-Changes

Along with the changing nature of the marketplace, client demands often affect vendor offerings and create new areas for differentiation. We asked our

sources what clients are asking for that they didn't five years ago, and how their products and services have changed as a result.

The reasons clients even approach sales training vendors have completely changed, says Snyder. "The training industry was born of a set of gurus, and what they were selling is hope. Now, the gurus have all gone off into the sunset, and customers are asking about ROI; they want to see results in an objective, quantifiable way."

"The applications and specificity of sales training have changed significantly because the context has changed," says Richardson. "Clients want integration of everything. Training must be customized so that participants can replicate the skills the very next day to implement their company's strategy." Richardson also has seen her business affected by globalization, noting increased client requests for training virtual sales teams and instruction on cultural diversity for Americans working in other countries.

The firm has accommodated these requests for customization, flexibility, and options by focusing on expanding its e-learning offerings. There is now an online course that accompanies every instructor-led course Richardson offers. Known as QuickSkills, the courses offer clients the opportunity for rapid, inexpensive customization of e-learning.

However, Linda Richardson says that the hottest thing—number one among client requests—is continued support in the form of coaching. Richardson's staff provides monthly

Real-life sales challenges
Immediate application
Intensive coaching and feedback

Richardson QuickSkills™ Interactive Web-based Sales Training



Richardson can help your team move deals faster and win more often. With **Richardson QuickSkills™ eLearning**, your team has access to a library of over 70 Web-based modules based on our proven, world-class curriculum. Packed with intensive coaching and feedback, this comprehensive eLearning curriculum in sales negotiations, sales management, customer service, sales presentations and much more, will help your sales team build relationships and close more business.

R RICHARDSON
THE POWER TO SELL

For more information about Richardson's comprehensive Web and blended sales training solutions, please contact us at 800.526.1650, or visit us on the Web at www.richardson.com. Act now and you will receive a complimentary article, "eLearning: An Effective Way to Build Sales Skills"; by emailing us at elarning@richardson.com. Please use promotion code TD1006.



follow-up coaching calls to salespeople at many client organizations, helping to ensure the retention of skills taught in their sessions.

For Kendra Lee, the biggest new part of her business is lead generation and new business development. "Five to six years ago, everyone was still on the dot-com high. Businesses had money to spend, and leads were coming to salespeople instead of their having to pursue them. Many sales reps lost their selling skills, and many very experienced salespeople retired," she says. Now Lee and her colleagues are starting back again with the basics for many

salespeople, as well as addressing a nontraditional audience: support teams. "Many of our clients need additional resources but can't afford to hire more salespeople, so they're turning to nontraditional areas and engaging support teams in selling," Lee says.

Andrea Sittig-Rolf, creator of the Blitz Experience, a training program for sales professionals of all levels who have the need to prospect for new business, reports two trends affecting her business: customization, in which clients want training scenarios to be realistic for their sales force; and greatly increased client

requests for ongoing support after the training. In 2007, for one client, a major desktop PC maker, Sittig-Rolf will be conducting the Blitz Experience quarterly and following up with a webinar once a month.

Psychological Associates has recently unveiled a new blended solution known as SPQ4 that honors customer requests for more practice and trackable results. The system features both online simulations for practicing universal engagement skills, as well as an electronic process for creating dialogue about specific goals between manager and representatives.

"The focus is on more immediate execution of new skills, and strategizing on a piece of new business that trainees have to close," explains LaMantia.

Clients come to QBIInternational looking for something different; product training games, through engaging interactivity, thoughtful instructional design, and competition, can dramatically increase learner motivation and long-term retention rates. No longer does his firm have to make the case that training games can be valuable, says Kimball; his clients share a recognition that "the future of sales force readiness is easily customizable learning games."

Huthwaite's clients are looking to position and align their sales training efforts within the

context of larger strategy, says Snyder. He notes that, in the past five years, there has been an increasing desire for overall change management consulting among his firm's clients.

Trends shaping the marketplace

The transformation of the sales training field and marketplace has been driven by four major trends, says Dave Stein, CEO and founder of ES Research Group in West Tisbury, Massachusetts, who identifies these trends in his book, *The 2006 Sales Training Vendor Guide*. They are:

Evolution of the buying methodology. Buyers are much more educated than they were even three years ago, and salespeople

are entering the buying cycle at a much later point. Salespeople are no longer the gatekeepers to information about their products. Typically, buyers have done lots of independent research before contacting the sales organization.

Evolution of technology.

Technology-enabled tools, such as customer relationship management systems, have missed the mark when it comes to supporting salespeople, Stein says. "There has been a loss of focus on the needs of the salesperson; these tools don't help salespeople sell more effectively, and turn prospects into customers." However, Stein sees the pendulum swinging back with the creation of some new tools that boast a high rate of adoption by salespeople.

Why are you taking my sales people out of the field this time?

He's heard it all before...

"Consultative sales training."

"Strategic account management."

"Customized workshops."

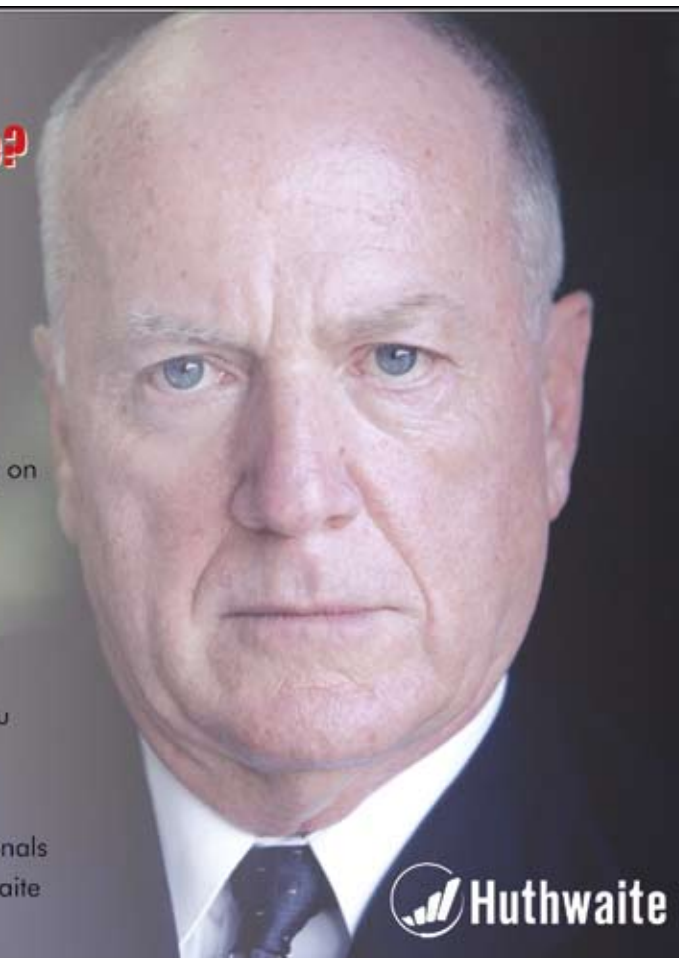
"Documented ROI."

Yet his sales people still struggle to differentiate, rely on discounting and lose too many customers to the competition.

What are you going to do differently next time?

Given the challenges of today's market, how will you ensure that time invested out-of-the-field will produce in-the-field results?

To find out how learning and development professionals can help drive lasting behavioral change call Huthwaite at 800.379.6845 or visit www.huthwaite.com/I&d.



 Huthwaite

Evolution of the selling

methodology. "There is irrefutable evidence that adopting and institutionalizing a well-founded sales methodology first is critical to the long-term success of training," Stein says. Without that important framework, sales training is disconnected and ineffective: Stein's research reveals that 90 percent of all sales training programs result in a 90- to- 120 day increase in sales productivity, but, after a year has passed, fewer than 20 percent of companies continue to demonstrate an increase.

Selling methodology must be aligned to, and take into account changes in, the buying methodology, and must clearly delineate the difference between process and technique. "We must understand

our customers' perceptions and needs, and be able to articulate in clear terms how our product or service delivers business improvement for our customers," Stein says.

Evolution of the sales performance improvement solution.

The sales department has been the last to get attention with regard to performance and measurement, Stein says. "The sales performance improvement solution is...an ongoing project of both dramatic change and incremental improvement where the salesperson is exposed to a variety of training, tools, and methods. It is a process of surrounding the salesperson with a cohesive environment for performance improvement options," he writes in the book.

Clearly, a rich and varied

patchwork of learning experiences is crucial to making a great salesperson. The vendors that follow offer a wealth of performance improvement options with which you can surround your sales force and transform them from very good to superb. ■

Jennifer J. Salopek is a contributing editor to *T+D*; jsalopek@covad.net

CEOs choose The Blitz Experience™ for quick ROI.



That's why they're CEOs.

"...Does it work? I know it works! Not only have we trained thousands of salespeople through the years, we are also a customer of The Blitz Experience™, and we have benefited from the skills and techniques taught in the class." Tom Ziglar, CEO of Ziglar True Performance

The BLITZ
Experience
...are you ready for the magic?

What is The Blitz Experience™?
Created by Blitz Master Andrea Sittig-Rolf, founder of Sittig Incorporated, The Blitz

Experience™ is an activity-based sales training program that empowers salespeople to schedule qualified appointments with key decision makers the day of the training.

Results? Absolutely.

A pipeline full of new opportunities at the end of the day! Companies such as Hewlett-Packard, Washington Mutual, Microsoft, ING, and Zig Ziglar True Performance experience an immediate ROI and continue to use The Blitz Experience™ to enhance

the performance of their sales force and increase their bottom line.

Get your copy of Andrea Sittig-Rolf's latest book, outlining the successful methods used during the Blitz Experience™ at www.sittiginc.com/books.

Contact Sittig Incorporated today at **206-769-4886** to schedule your Blitz Experience™ or visit our website for more information www.sittiginc.com.



Sittig
Inspiring Success
Incorporated

Sales Training Advertiser Listing:

Asher Training

www.ashertraining.com

1300 Pennsylvania Ave NW Suite 700

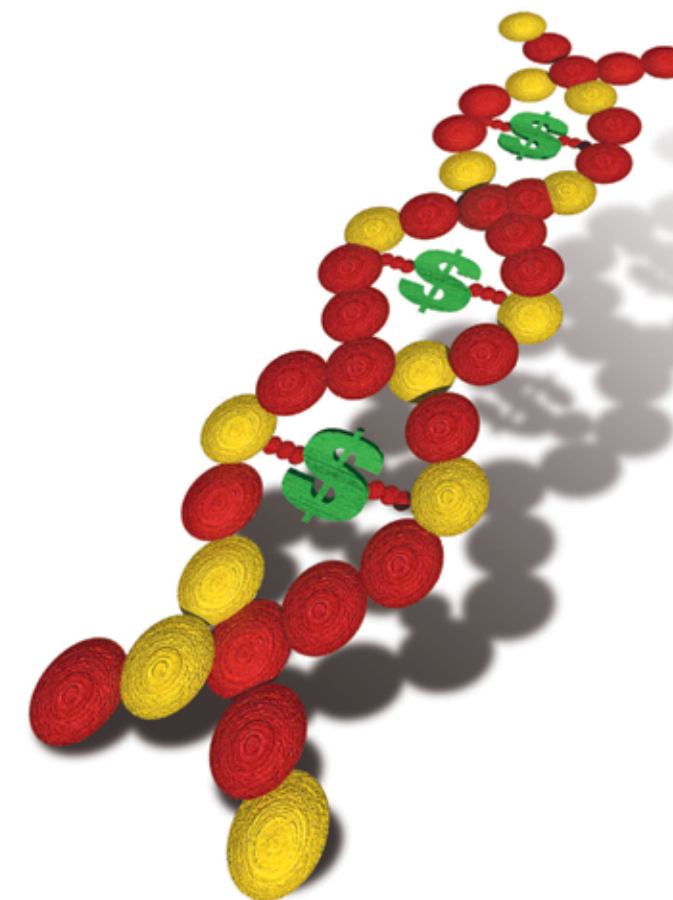
Washington, DC 20004

(202) 204-3057

John Asher, Chairman and CEO

Asher Training specializes in sales and marketing seminars, facilitation of strategic plans and business development process assessments. Their trainers have improved the skills of more than 8,000 sales managers and salespeople. In addition, they conduct sales and marketing assessments for businesses of all types, comparing current processes to best practices.

Our most popular sales seminar series is "Selling Excellence." This two-day sales and marketing training session concentrates on the marketing function (including how to pursue new targets of opportunity) and the selling function (emphasizing skill practice as a training tool). Available to private corporations on a flat-fee basis, or individuals from multiple companies with a per-attendee fee, attendees walk away from the session with actions they can immediately take to dramatically increase sales and improve processes. "Selling Excellence" is based on extensive research of more than 150 references, feedback from numerous training courses conducted, and the experience and skills of Asher Training's people who have excelled in business development.



Sales Gene Discovered. Do your sales people have it?

**Super Sales People are born with a natural aptitude for sales.
Our aptitude test uncovers the Super Sales Gene.**

Learn the secret that top-producing sales teams across the country have known for years — how to identify natural sales talent. Let us show you the secret to effectively measuring drive, motivation and compatibility for sales positions by using the CPQ sales aptitude assessment.

Contact an Asher Training representative today by calling 202.204.3057 for a complimentary assessment and demonstration.

1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20004
202.204.3057 www.ashertraining.com





AsherTraining is also the largest independent distributor of the CPQ—a world-renowned sales aptitude assessment used by thousands of companies for hiring and developing sales talent over the past 25 years.

Huthwaite

www.huthwaite.com

22630 Davis Drive
Sterling, VA 20164
(703) 467-3800

**Tom Snyder, Vice President
of Strategy and Business
Development**

Huthwaite's business is sales performance improvement. We were the first—and only—company to employ behavioral research and analysis to benchmark sales excellence in the field. We combine that knowledge with the fundamentals of organizational change and world-class training to improve the performance of sales professionals. In short, we help clients diagnose challenges, define success, prepare for change, implement sales performance solutions, and support ongoing improvement. Ultimately,

our goal is to help our clients achieve specific business outcomes that are best addressed by improving the sales function.

KLA Group

www.klagroup.com

7779 S. Glencoe Way
Centennial, CO 80122
(303) 741-6636

Kendra Lee, President and Founder

KLA provides top-notch consulting and training to people in all departments across the organization that touch the customer and affect sales results, including:



Not satisfied with your sales? Let KLA Group help drive your results



www.klagroup.com

Phone: +1 303.741.6636

KLA Group works with all departments that interact with customers to speed sales and improve customer interactions. For over 10 years we have driven notable sales increases with our clients that range from small entrepreneurial companies to Fortune 500 enterprises worldwide.

How can we help you?

Training

- Comprehensive sales training curriculums
 - Lead Generation
 - Engaging Support Teams
 - Consultative Selling
 - How to Sell
- Tailored design and delivery to fit your needs

Consulting Services

- Assessment and Analysis
- Process Design
- Custom Development
- Reinforcement and Mentor Coaching

For case studies representing our capabilities in these areas of expertise, contact us at info@klagroup.com

*Helping drive sales results through lead generation,
new business development, and consultative selling*

KLA
group

k n o w l e d g e ■ l e a r n i n g ■ a c h i e v e m e n t

- sales
- marketing
- learning and development
- customer service
- customer support
- technical teams.

KLA specializes in the high tech industry with innovative processes and offerings that successfully apply to other industries. KLA has a broad range of high quality *standard* and *customized* programs and services for individuals at all levels of professional development across the client organization. With all programs and services tailored to the client's own organization, each gives high value and measurable results for the investment.

Whatever the level, KLA offerings help individuals within the organization grow to new heights. KLA programs and services provide measurable and sustainable skills that can be used immediately.

Psychological Associates

www.q4solutions.com

8201 Maryland Avenue
St. Louis, MO 63105
(314) 862-9300

Joseph LaMantia, Senior VP of Performance Consulting

For five decades, Psychological Associates has helped sales organizations become more successful by offering unique tools, such as our milestone Dimensional® Model of Behavior™, that build more productive customer relationships.

We pioneered the development of interpersonal skills to improve

business outcomes. ASTD has cited Psychological Associates as "among the first to recognize the link between behavioral science and sales performance."

From not-for-profits to *Fortune 500* companies, we provide consulting, assessment, and training services that motivate people to achieve their maximum potential.

QBInternational

www.qube.com

900 Larkspur Landing Circle
Suite 115
Larkspur, CA 94939
(415) 464-8880

Andrew Kimball, CEO

QBInternational's Qube Learning System has been recognized by the Gartner Group as the first customizable, online game-based training platform in the world designed by salespeople, for salespeople. The Qube includes four components: QBooks for rapid content development and delivery; QGames that can be linked to any form of training materials to engrave knowledge into the learner's brain; Challenge Arenas to increase learner motivation and engagement; and a QDashboard to provide managers with instant data about who has learned what at the individual, team, and organizational levels.

Richardson

www.richardson.com

1818 Market Street
Suite 2800
Philadelphia, PA 19103
(215) 940-9255

Linda Richardson, Chairman and Founder

Richardson is a leading global sales training and consulting firm. We are unique in the depth and breadth of our comprehensive blended sales training curriculum. For 25 years we have delivered training, coaching, and consulting to our clients to build world-class teams. We provide our clients with the skills, processes, and tools they need to win. Clients turn to us for solutions to all of their sales performance needs based on our:

- track record of measurable results with industry leaders
- comprehensive integrated sales and sales management curriculum
- deep and efficient customization of core programs
- fully blended solution
- building-block, level-by-level curriculum for all phases of the sales cycle
- coaching methodology to achieve behavior change.

All of our programs have been designed by Richardson based on our experience, research, and best practices of top performers. Therefore, your sales team gets a building-block curriculum for ongoing development with a consistent approach and language, while meeting the needs of each division.

Sittig Incorporated

www.sittiginc.com

P.O. Box 2423
Redmond, WA 98073
(206) 769-4886

Andrea Sittig-Rolf, President and Founder

The Blitz Experience™ is an activity-based sales training program that empowers salespeople to schedule appointments with qualified decision makers during the training, resulting in a pipeline full of new opportunities at the end of the day! Companies such as Hewlett-Packard, Washington Mutual Bank, ING Financial Services, and Zig Zigar True Performance have experienced immediate results and a fast ROI

as a direct result of sales that were the outcome of appointments scheduled during the Blitz. Salespeople learn and practice on real prospects and techniques, including

- how to get past gatekeepers
- how to overcome common objections and get the appointment
- how to leave effective voicemail messages that get a response
- how to increase connections with decision makers leading to more appointments, leading to more sales.

The Blitz Experience™ is the perfect sales tool to launch a new product, enter a new market, promote an event, or simply

increase and maintain proactive, consistent sales activity. A fun and productive way to add structure to the necessary, but often dreaded task of cold calling, The Blitz Experience™ is endorsed by sales professionals at all levels, including even veteran salespeople. This program has a way of converting cold calling and traditional Blitz program skeptics into ambassadors. ■

Are your salespeople all pulling in the same direction?



Focus their power, using the power of SPQ⁴:
The Sales Performance System that drives success

- Align every sales effort with your goals
- Enhance their ability to execute
- Ensure accountability and results

SELLING TO THE POWER Q⁴
A Dimensional® Performance System

PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATES®

Psychological Associates: Cited by ASTD as "among the first to recognize the link between behavioral science and sales performance"

Learn more at www.q4solutions.com

Booth 1402