

RESEARCH REPORT

How to Supercharge Sales Training for Maximum Impact

Steve Gielda and Kevin Jones of Ignite Selling and Selling Power Editors



ABOUT THIS REPORT

Selling Power and Ignite Selling conducted joint research to understand which types of sales training sales teams prefer, and which types of sales training get the best results. This report highlights the most intriguing insights from the data, provides some analysis, and offers tips and best practices to help sales leaders get better results from sales training.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

We surveyed approximately 200 B2B sales professionals, including salespeople, frontline sales managers, sales trainers, and sales leaders across a variety of industries. For the purposes of this report, we refer to “frontline sales managers” and/or “sales managers” as anyone whose primary responsibility is to manage frontline salespeople, as well as sales territories. We refer to “sales leaders” as anyone whose primary responsibility is to manage multiple territories and/or an entire sales organization (with the understanding that sales managers typically report to sales leaders).

The survey asked participants to provide their opinions on the following issues:

1. Sales strategy
2. Sales improvement initiatives and tools
3. Sales training methods
4. Collateral and tools related to sales training

ABOUT IGNITE SELLING

Ignite Selling is a pioneer and leader in the use of simulations to deliver sales training experiences that inspire teams and enhance critical thinking skills needed to compete in the market today. For over 20 years, we have channeled our experience in sales, sales coaching, and sales training in building custom-designed programs for Fortune 1000 organizations that improve sales performance. www.igniteselling.com

ABOUT SELLING POWER

In addition to *Selling Power* magazine, the leading periodical for sales managers and sales VPs since 1981, Personal Selling Power Inc. produces the Sales Management Digest and Daily Boost of Positivity online newsletters, as well as a series of five-minute videos featuring interviews with top executives. Selling Power is a regular media sponsor of the Sales 3.0 Conference. www.sellingpower.com

KEY FINDINGS:

Four Best Practices to Supercharge Sales Training

Sales training represents a significant investment, and it's a fundamental tool to turn salespeople into consistent performers. With these points in mind, we wanted to know: What can sales leaders do to make sales training more engaging and effective? Here are four best practices we formulated based on survey responses.

BEST PRACTICE #1

Commit to a single sales strategy and establish clarity around it.

Our survey indicated that many organizations change their sales strategy too frequently. In addition, organizations fail to align the sales strategy to the critical on-the-job behaviors that help sales reps execute their strategy, thus damaging sales performance improvement. Rather than shift the sales strategy too soon, sales leadership needs to ensure the organization understands the intention behind the strategy – and ensure the sales team knows exactly what behaviors they need to be proficient in to execute those strategies.

BEST PRACTICE #2

Pay attention to your method of delivery.

When we asked about which methods of sales training are most appealing and get the best results, here's what we found.

- Peer-to-peer learning (even in a digital age) remains one of the most popular and effective ways to deliver sales training.
- Experiential learning and case studies rank high as enjoyable and effective ways for salespeople to learn and develop selling skills.
- Slide presentations are among the least engaging, least popular ways for salespeople to learn.

BEST PRACTICE #3

Don't overwhelm salespeople with too much sales collateral and too many tools.

When it comes to both collateral and tools to support sales performance, we heard a consistent message: Salespeople often feel inundated. Sales leaders would do well to remember that less is more. Overwhelming salespeople with too many tools and too much content will only lead to apathy – not learning. If you want better results, invest more time making sure salespeople know how to access and use content and tools appropriately.

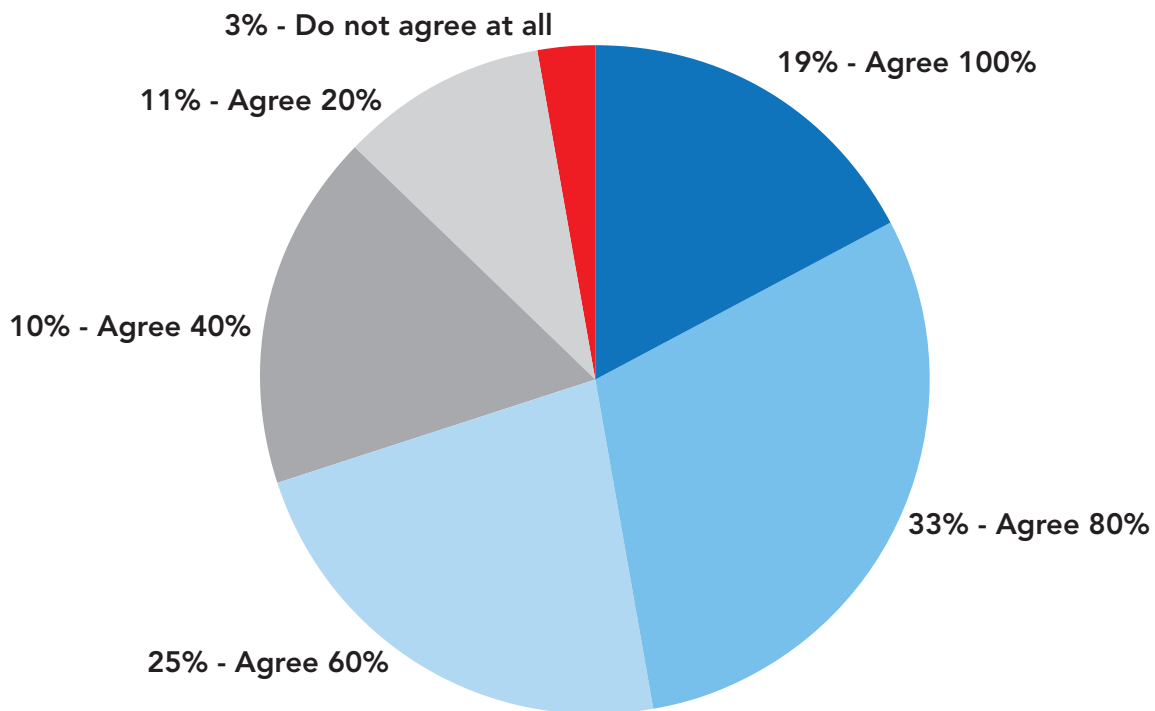
BEST PRACTICE #4

Align your sales training efforts with both sales and marketing.

Sales leaders need to make sure all teams – including sales, sales enablement, marketing, and customer success – have a common approach and proper skills to engage customers. Use sales training opportunities to break down silos and upskill all customer-facing talent for better results.

DATA AND ANALYSIS

HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE THAT YOUR COMPANY HAS OUTLINED CLEAR SALES STRATEGY?



⚠ Over 50 percent “agree strongly” the company has not outlined a clear sales strategy.

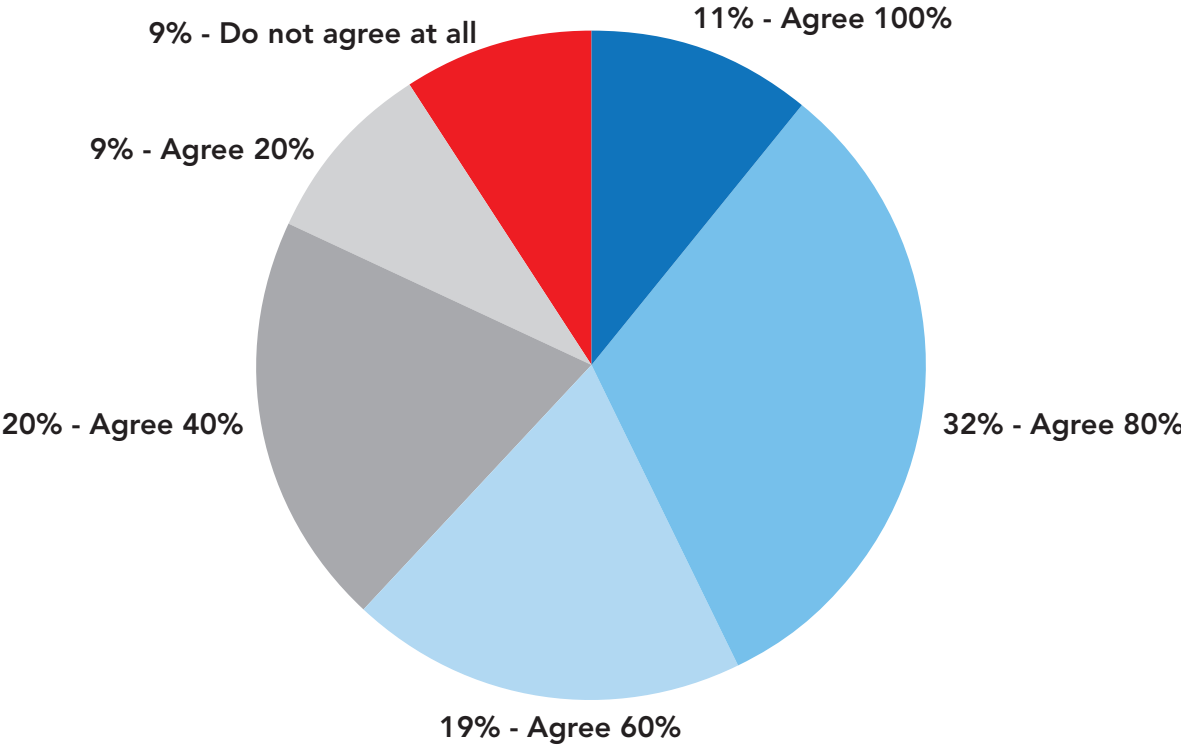
TAKEAWAYS

- An ill-defined sales strategy makes it difficult for sales teams to execute that strategy.
- When salespeople lack target goals, they have no goals to hit.
- Many sales strategies fail because sales leaders communicate the strategy poorly and are unclear about the critical on-the-job behaviors to coach to effectively execute their strategy.

LEADERSHIP TIPS

- Survey the front lines of your sales organization to find out if they truly understand your sales strategy.
- Lean on sales managers to help filter the strategy effectively to the front lines.
- Orchestrate your sales strategy deliberately; meaning, ensure the sales reps can execute the skills needed to implement the strategy. That way, you will get consistent commitment – particularly from frontline sales managers, who need to have both the will and the skill to succeed.
- Reinforce and recommunicate the sales strategy at every opportunity so the sales team will get a sense of continuity.

HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE THAT SALES LEADERS ARE TOO QUICK TO ABANDON OR CHANGE THEIR STRATEGY?



▲ 43 percent of people agree (80 percent or more) that sales leaders are too quick to change the sales strategy.

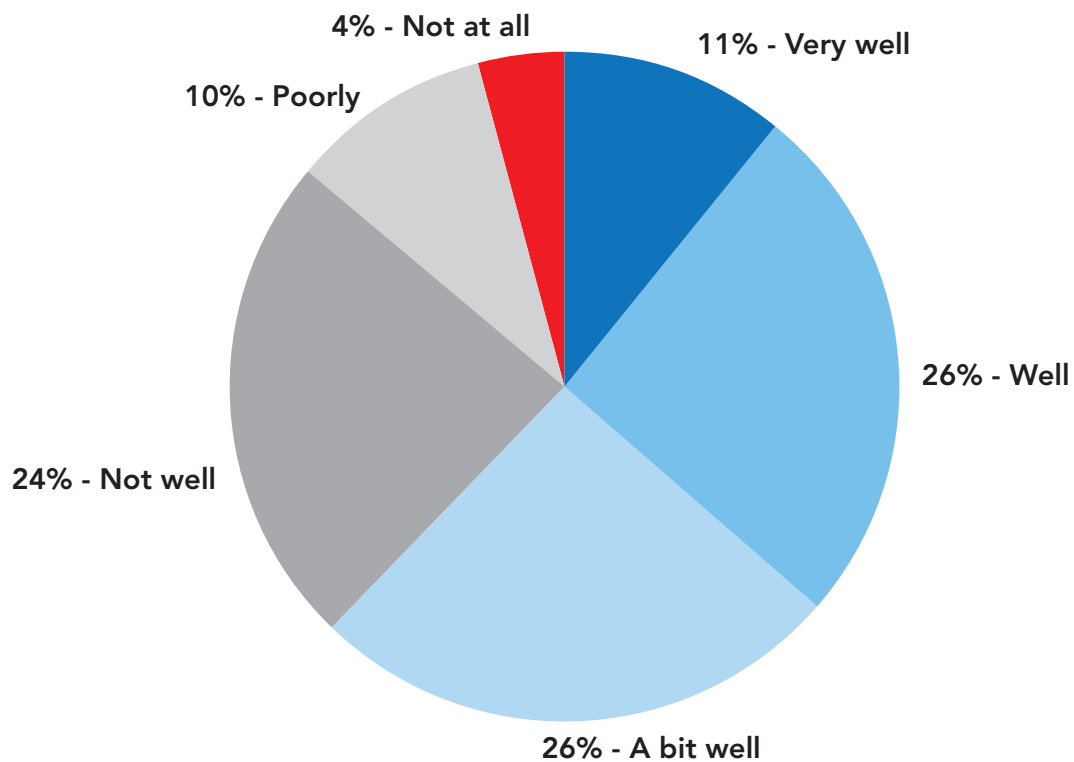
TAKEAWAYS

- Frequent changes to the sales strategy can create frustration and cynicism within the sales organization.
- When sales managers encounter obstacles to the sales strategy, they may respond with frustration; if unchecked, this can escalate to panic.
- Nearly 60 percent of frontline sales managers feel an "80 percent" level of frustration based on frequent changes to sales strategies. This is likely due to lack of clarity: The more people are confused about the sales strategy and their role in its execution, the more frustrated they're likely to be when it changes frequently.

LEADERSHIP TIPS

- Sales leaders need to be creative and adjust to changes in the marketplace.
- Allow time for the sales strategy to work and put the proper enablers in place for the strategy to be executed.
- Use sales training as an opportunity to re-ignite your sales strategy and enhance your teams' ability to execute.
- Communicate success stories when the sales strategy has been executed properly.

HOW WELL DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION "CONNECT THE DOTS" ACROSS DIFFERENT SALES IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES SO YOU UNDERSTAND HOW THEY FIT IN EVERYDAY SELLING?



▲ Only 37 percent of salespeople say their organization “connects the dots well or very well” across different sales improvement initiatives so salespeople understand how those initiatives fit into their everyday routines.

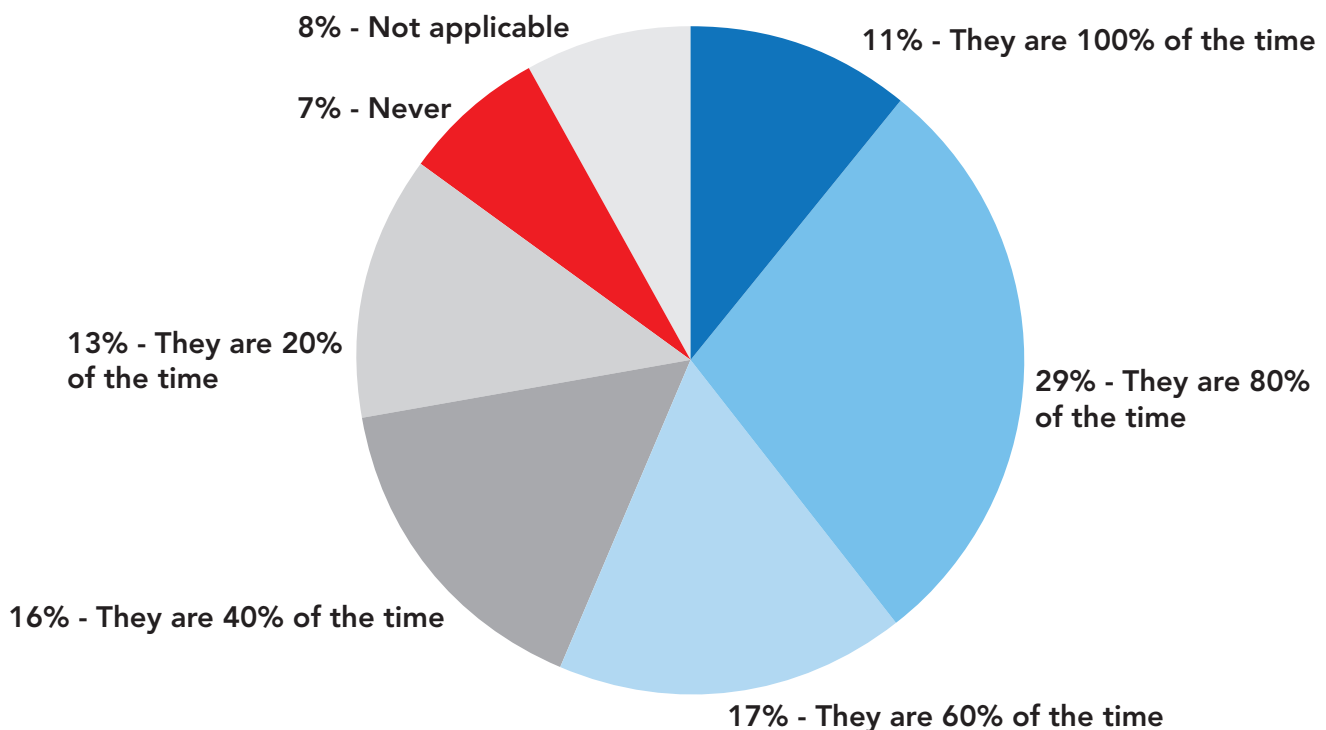
TAKEAWAYS

- Improvement initiatives and new tools don’t necessarily make the organization more connected or productive.
- It’s easy to lose sight all your initiatives and it can be difficult to see how they connect (if they connect at all).
- A new initiative or tool does not automatically create cohesiveness.
- The more tools or initiatives, the greater the chance of a disconnect.
- There could be a communication or perception issue where some people get it and others don’t.

LEADERSHIP TIPS

- Use sales training opportunities to integrate your initiatives and related tools into the client engagement and your standard selling approach/sales process.
- Don’t assume an initiative will be understood and embraced – especially without clarity on how the tools are to be used on the job. Use training to provide realistic context.
- Clearly demonstrate how your disparate initiatives connect across the entire customer lifecycle through capstone events and simulations.

HOW OFTEN ARE SALES IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES FLAVOR OF THE MONTH?



⚠️ 40 percent of all survey respondents say they strongly agree that any given sales improvement initiative can be considered a “flavor of the month.”

RESPONSE BREAKDOWN

- 32 percent of frontline salespeople say this is true 80 to 100 percent of the time.
- Sales managers and sales trainers say this is true at least 60 percent of the time.

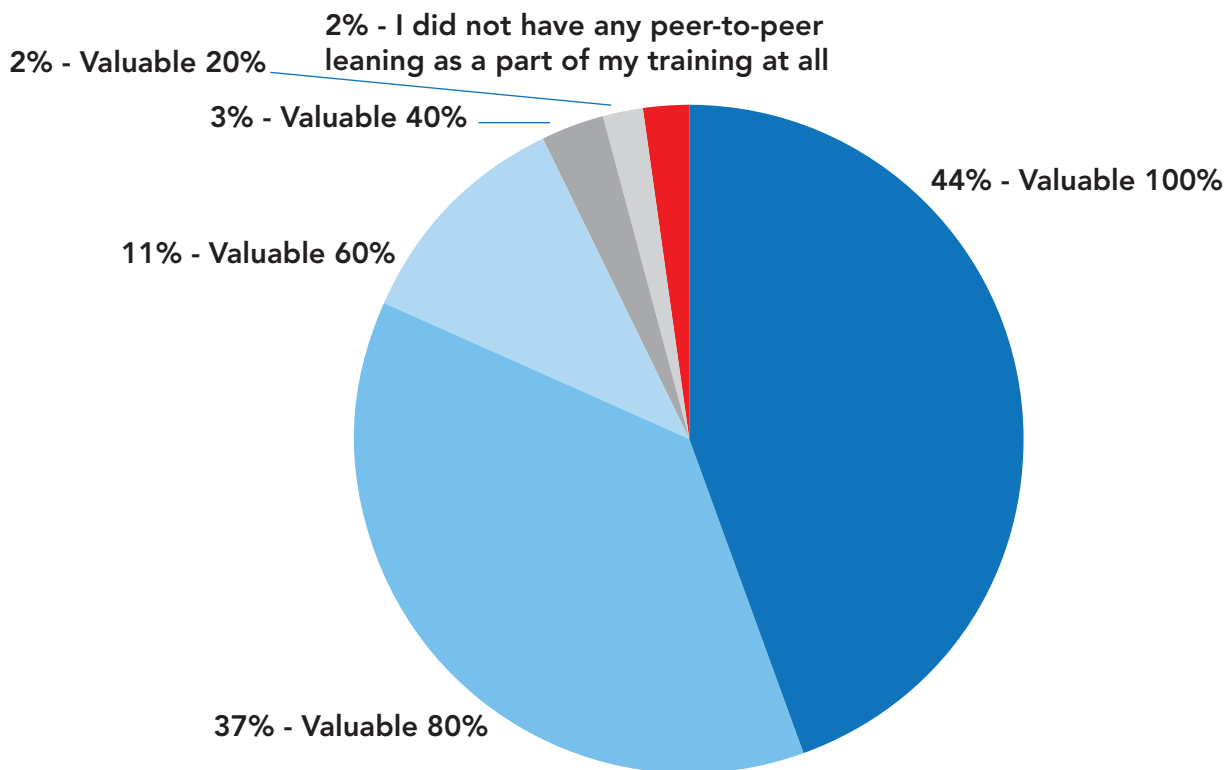
TAKEAWAYS

- The flavor-of-the-month phenomenon often happens when a new sales leader comes on-board and wants to put his or her mark on the organization.
- This often happens when organizations abandon their existing training because the sales reps struggled to apply the skills in the field or sales managers never coached the skills properly.

LEADERSHIP TIPS

- First, if you want to adopt a new sales improvement initiative, you need to fully believe in it yourself.
- Second, you need to get the frontline sales managers on board. They will be the key people to help execute. Give them an opportunity to shape the initiative, be heard, and buy into it.
- Third, ensure your customer-facing people have the knowledge and skill to execute. Underinvesting in strategy execution capabilities and changing direction frequently breed discontent.

HOW VALUABLE IS LEARNING FROM YOUR PEERS DURING SALES TRAINING?



👍 Almost everyone finds peer-to-peer learning highly valuable as a method of sales training.

TAKEAWAYS

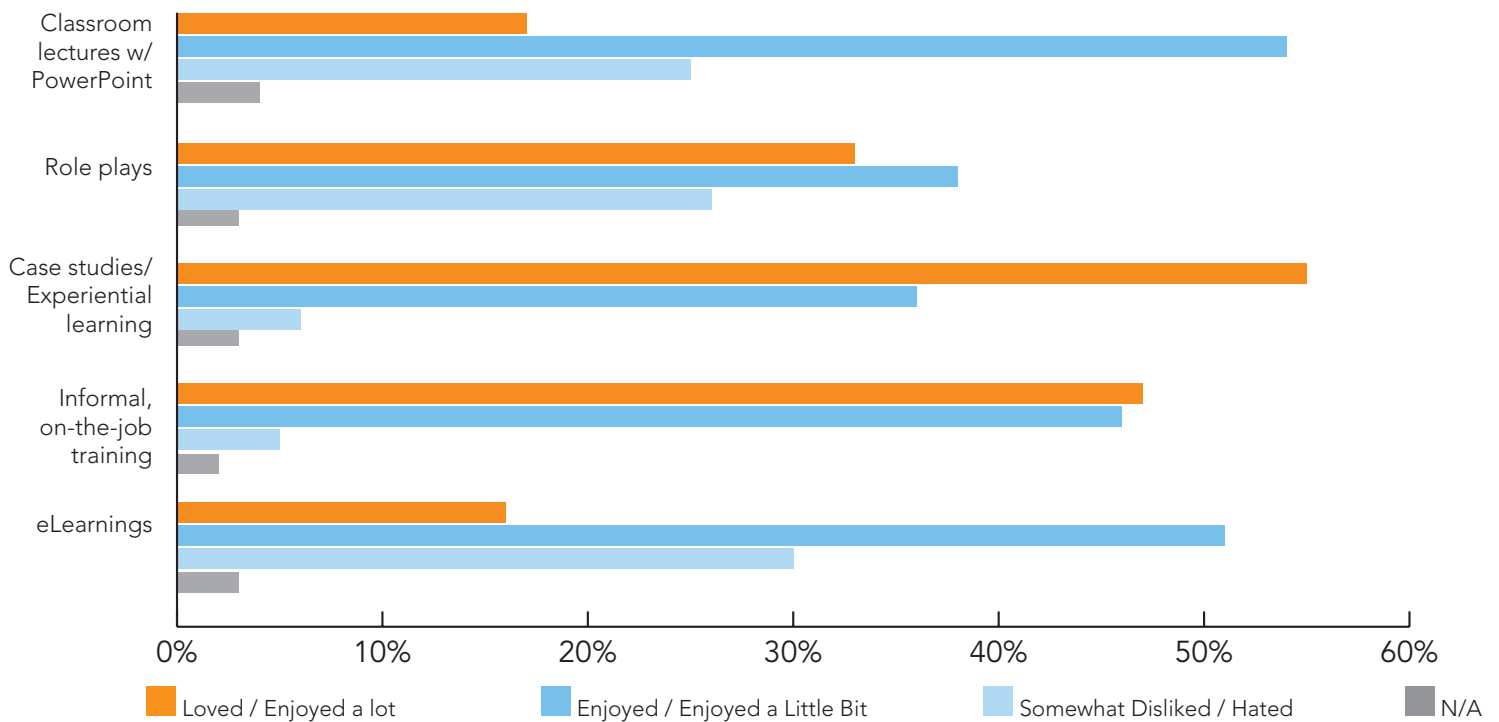
- Even in a digital era, there's a strong case for live sales training sessions.
- When people get together in person for training, they learn a number of unexpected best practices from their peers.
- Peer-to-peer learning creates an environment where traditional wisdom and common assumptions are challenged and behaviors are changed.

LEADERSHIP TIPS

- Consider giving your sales team the opportunity to learn from one another in a live training setting.
- The more realistic environment you provide your sales reps, the richer the learning experience.
- Consider other peer-to-peer learning approaches that aren't necessarily live. Peer-to-peer learning can be successfully executed and facilitated with the help of new technology.

ON A SCALE OF 1-6, HOW MUCH DO YOU PREFER THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF SALES TRAINING?

(0: N/A; 1: Hated, 2: Somewhat Disliked, 3: Enjoyed a Little Bit, 4: Enjoyed, 5: Enjoyed a Lot, 6: Loved)



👍 Case studies and experiential learning are most preferred.

RESPONSE BREAKDOWN

- Frontline salespeople and sales leaders dislike classroom lectures the most.
- All survey participants like case studies and informal on-the-job training.
- eLearning is used the most, but people like it the least.
- People do not enjoy the experience of role plays but find them effective as a way to learn.
- eLearning ranks lowest among sales reps as their preferred method of learning.

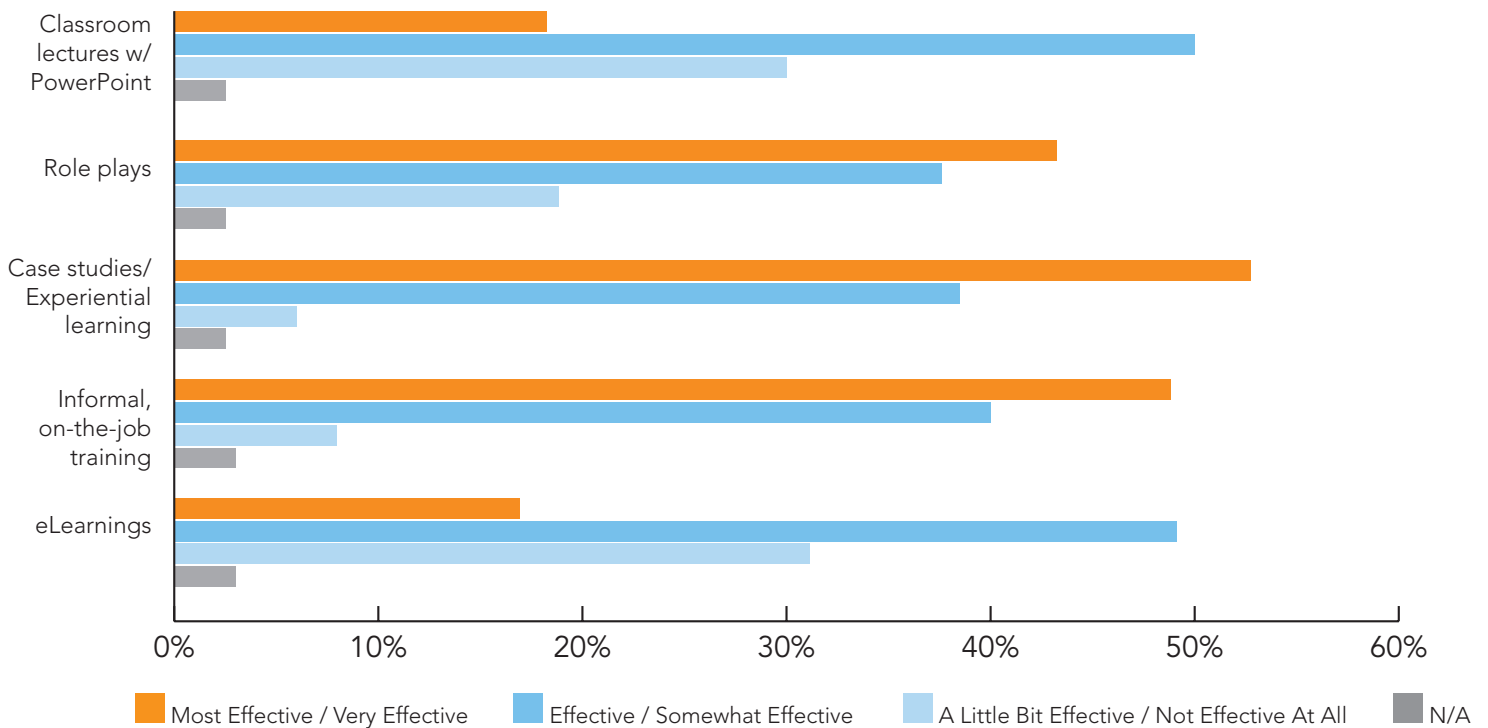
TAKEAWAYS

- The most popular methods of sales training include case studies/experiential learning and on-the-job learning.
- A large majority of users dislike role playing.

LEADERSHIP TIPS

- Role plays are a useful sales training tool; however, just know that salespeople often feel anxious and tense when asked to participate in role playing exercises.
- Consider a simulated learning experience where the focus isn't just on the "role play," but equally on all other elements of the salesperson's job, such as strategic planning, leveraging resources, identifying tools and collateral to use, etc.
- Even though it's generally considered a cost-effective option, the value of eLearning isn't is questionable: It's disliked by most and viewed as ineffective.

ON A SCALE OF 1-6, HOW DO YOU RATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIFFERENT SALES TRAINING TYPES?



👍 Case studies and experiential learning are most effective.

RESPONSE BREAKDOWN

- Case studies and experiential learning is the most effective form of sales training, followed by learning on-the-job
- eLearning is the least effective, followed by classroom lectures with PowerPoint
- Role Plays can be effective but are heavily disliked

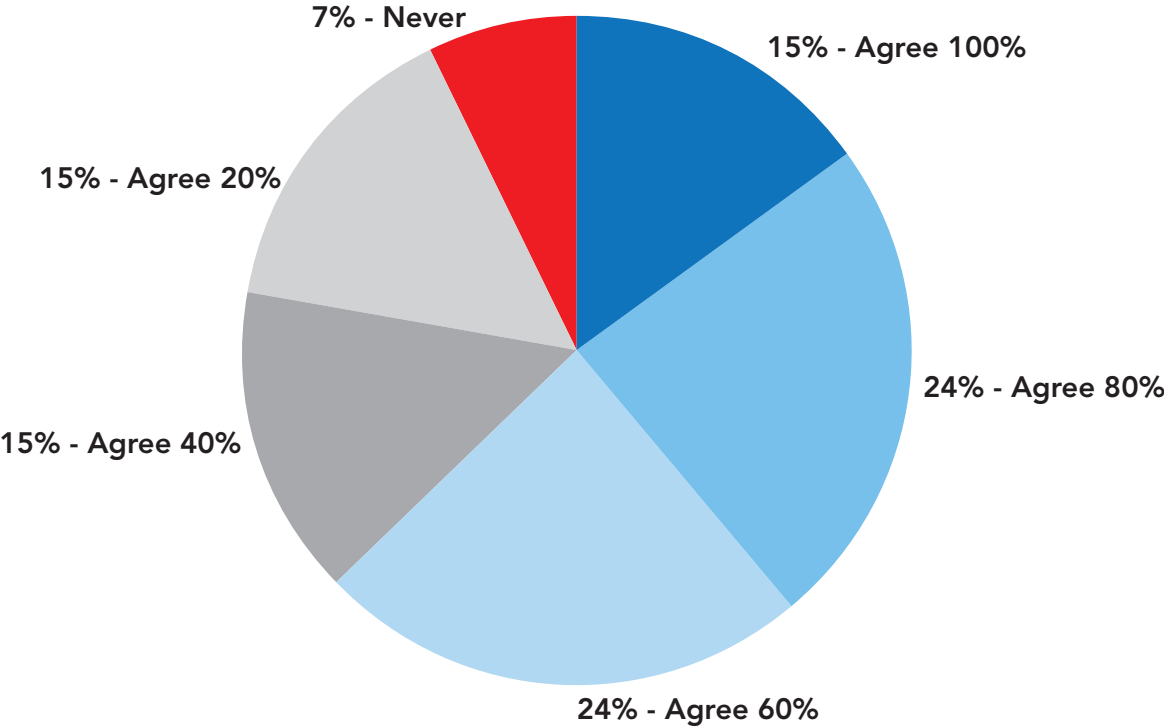
TAKE AWAYS

- Organizations offer lots of elearning. It might be ok for product training, but it's not very effective for developing sales skills.
- It's easy to lean heavily on PowerPoint and lecture, especially in national sales meetings, but don't expect skills to improve as a result.

LEADERSHIP TIPS

- Use the right learning approach for the right training and development need.
- Learning to execute intricate processes and complex customer interactions requires more than simply watching a video. It requires time to internalize the new approach, practice in a safe environment, and then get further reinforcement.
- Consider using elearning for preparation to accelerate learning and reinforce learning, but not for important skill development.

IN GENERAL, HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE THAT COMPANIES (THAT YOU CURRENTLY WORK FOR, OR THAT YOU HAVE WORKED FOR IN THE PAST) PROVIDE REPS WITH TOO MUCH CONTENT WITH THE HOPE THEY WILL INCREASE SALES?



⚠ More than half of all surveyed agree that sales reps are getting too much collateral.

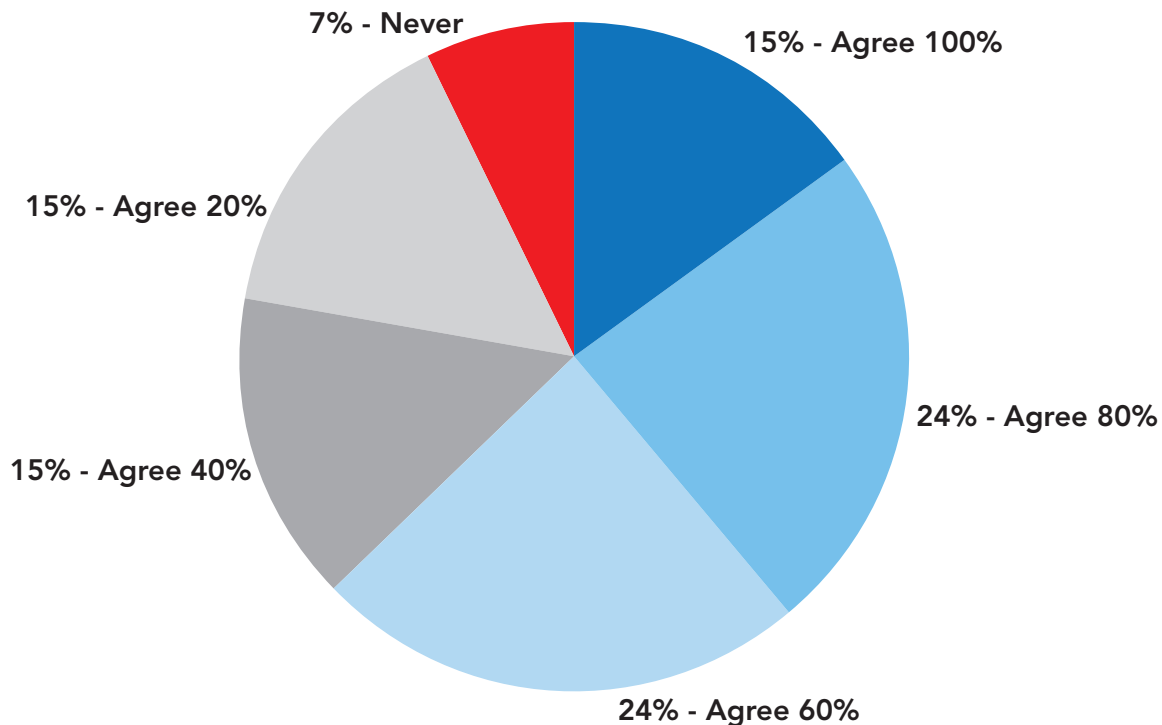
TAKEAWAYS

- Everyone agrees sales reps receive too much collateral – with sales trainers agreeing the most and sales leaders agreeing the least.

LEADERSHIP TIPS

- Sales, marketing, and product teams need to be aligned and coordinated on the quality and quantity of what they provide sales reps.
- Instead of creating a bunch of collateral and throwing it over the wall, invest judiciously in collateral that will serve your team well. Roll it out in a coordinated fashion.
- Provide a simulated learning experience educating the sales reps when and how to effectively leverage the collateral in the context of a sale.

IN GENERAL, HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE THAT COMPANIES (THAT YOU CURRENTLY WORK FOR, OR THAT YOU HAVE WORKED FOR IN THE PAST) PROVIDE REPS WITH TOO MANY TOOLS WITH THE HOPE THEY WILL INCREASE SALES?



▲ 40 percent of sales leaders agree that sales reps are given too many tools.

RESPONSE BREAKDOWN

- Both sales trainers (65 percent) and sales leaders (40 percent) say sales reps are given too many tools.
- Frontline sales managers and sales reps don't agree as strongly that reps are given too many tools.

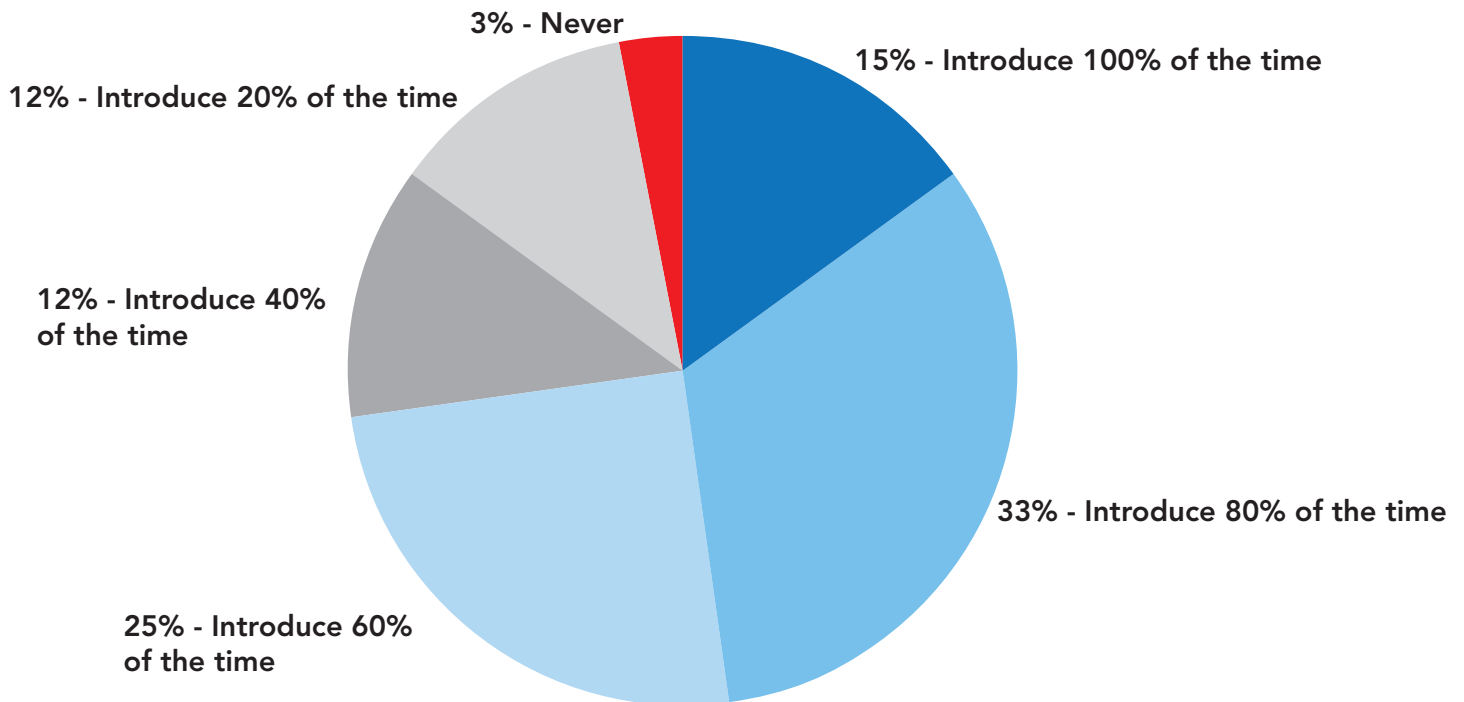
TAKEAWAYS

- Leaders may not understand how to get value from the tools in which they choose to invest; leaders then get frustrated because tools aren't used.
- Articulating the sales strategy is just as difficult as designing the right combination of sales technologies.

LEADERSHIP TIPS

- Audit the number of tools you've introduced to the sales team in the past six to 12 months.
- Find out how many of those tools are actually being used.
- Ensure the sales team knows when and how to effectively use the tool on the job.
- Uncover whether or not sales reps and frontline sales managers actually find value in the tools.

IN GENERAL, HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE THAT COMPANIES (THAT YOU CURRENTLY WORK FOR, OR THAT YOU HAVE WORKED FOR IN THE PAST) INTRODUCE NEW TOOLS WITHOUT THINKING THROUGH HOW IT WILL HELP YOU SELL MORE EFFECTIVELY?



⚠ Most frontline sales managers believe new tools are introduced to the sales team without any regard for how those tools will actually help reps sell better.

RESPONSE BREAKDOWN

- 58 percent of frontline sales managers said this is true 80-100 percent of the time.
- 20 percent of sales trainers said this is true 100 percent of the time.
- Most frontline managers and sales trainers agree (more than 80 percent of the time) that companies introduce new collateral without thinking it through.

TAKEAWAYS

- In addition to tool overload, we're seeing a lack of strategy behind how tools should be used.

LEADERSHIP TIPS

- Instead of giving salespeople too many tools, with no strategy, start giving them better sales training that utilizes the tools you want them to use.
- Make sure your tools are aligned with how you want salespeople to sell.
- Make sure your tools are aligned with other areas of the organization, including marketing and sales operations.