

SHOP OPERATIONS

by **Steve Ferrante**, CEO & Trainer of Champions, Sale Away LLC

6 ESSENTIALS FOR SUCCESSFUL SALES STAFF TRAINING



There's no question that a well-designed, well-executed sales and customer service training program can significantly improve the performance of an auto service business. Stronger customer relationships and retention, higher employee productivity, improved sales win rates, less discounting and increased profitability are just a few of the measurable benefits.

Yet despite the investment, many shops spend substantial time and money on sales training that fails to deliver real results. The problem isn't a lack of effort or intention. It's that critical elements of effective training are often missing or misapplied.

Sales training doesn't fail by accident. It fails for predictable reasons. In this article, I'll outline six vital factors that must be in place to ensure your sales staff training produces consistent, sustainable success.

1 MATCH THE PROGRAM TO THE BUSINESS AND THE NEEDS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Too often, auto service businesses roll out sales training, either in-house or through an outside provider, only to have participants walk away thinking, "This doesn't apply to my job." That disconnect is more than frustrating. It's a fast track to wasted time, wasted money and poor results.

For training to deliver real value, it must be directly relevant to both your business model and the roles of the people attending. Effective sales and customer service training goes well beyond theory. It provides practical, real-world strategies, processes and techniques that address the actual performance challenges employees face at the shop level every day.

Because revenue is largely driven by customer conversations, special emphasis should be placed on communication skills and process training, particularly around managing incoming sales calls from existing and potential customers. When training mirrors real interactions, adoption rises and results follow.

2 ENGAGEMENT FROM DAY ONE

Any training program is only as effective as the person delivering it. For training to create meaningful and sustainable gains, participants must be engaged with the trainer from the very beginning. Too many otherwise solid programs fail because attendees never fully connect. They lose interest, tune out and disengage long before real improvement can occur.

It's no accident that the first element in my Pinnacle Performance Training credo is ENGAGE.

When evaluating a training investment, the who matters just as much as the what and where. Yet

many owners and leadership teams focus heavily on content and logistics, while giving far too little attention to the person who will actually be leading the training.

In an effort to save time or money, an internal employee is often appointed to conduct training. This creates an immediate challenge. That individual is already viewed, rightly or wrongly, through the lens of their existing role. Most often, they are a manager who may excel at managing, but whose primary skill set is not training. As a result, their message rarely carries the same authority or impact as that of a respected external training professional.

If you don't see, feel and experience strong employee engagement with the trainer on day one, consider it a clear warning sign. Without engagement, even the best content will fail. In short, engagement comes first. Everything else follows.

3 MAKE SURE ALL PARTICIPANTS UNDERSTAND THE 'WHY'

For training to be truly effective, employees must understand why they are being taught what they're being taught. One of the first things I tell every training group is simple: If you want to know how to sell, you better understand why customers buy.

While a well-designed sales process is essential, too many salespeople are trained on the steps without ever

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learning the psychology and strategy behind them. They're told what to do, but not why it works.

When the why is missing, training often produces compliance instead of commitment. Employees follow the process because it's policy, not because they believe in it. Commitment happens only when people understand the principles driving the process and see how those principles influence customer behavior. That understanding is what turns a sales process into confident, consistent performance.

4 BE CONSISTENT

If you want to perform at the highest level, sales and customer service training must be a consistent part of your culture. Too often, training is treated as a one-time event rather than an ongoing process.

A business conducts a training

session. Assuming the content is solid, employees leave energized with new ideas, techniques and tools. Then, reality sets in. Without a structured follow-up plan, that energy fades and performance gradually slips back to pre-training levels. Research confirms this pattern. Without reinforcement, as much as 90 percent of what's learned is forgotten within 60 to 90 days.

Training works much like physical fitness. A great workout today won't keep you in shape if it isn't followed by consistent effort and a regular routine. Results come from repetition, not intention.

Another challenge is the "been there, done that" mindset many owners and managers develop around training. While it may sound simple, the truth is unavoidable: training only works when it is ongoing. The science of learning shows that real skill ownership is built through consistent exposure, reinforcement,

and application over time. That's why world-class sales and customer service organizations routinely invest 100 or more hours of training in an employee's first year, followed by regular ongoing development in the years ahead.

5 STAY THE COURSE

This factor goes hand-in-hand with consistency but deserves its own spotlight. Many owners and managers approach training like a destination, with the goal of getting there and being done. Think of the proverbial kid in the backseat asking, "Are we there yet?"

Training isn't a destination. It's an evolution.

Too often, businesses fall into a "flavor of the month" approach, jumping from one training initiative to the next without ever fully developing, reinforcing or institutionalizing much

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Effective communication between technicians and customers is vital for accurately diagnosing and resolving vehicle issues, particularly regarding mystery vibrations. Many technicians encounter challenges when trying to understand customer concerns that are often summarized as vague descriptions like "clunking" or "shaking."

To bridge this gap, service advisors can initiate a dialogue that encourages customers to provide detailed information about their vehicle issues. Asking pointed questions—such as when the vibrations occur, at what speeds and under what conditions—can yield insights that are crucial for accurate diagnostics.

Encouraging customers to demonstrate the symptoms can significantly aid the diagnostic process. For example, having them describe when the vibrations occur or even showing you the problem in a parking lot allows your team to observe the symptoms in real-time, making it easier to identify the cause.

Additionally, enhancing internal communication between service advisors and technicians ensures that information is relayed accurately and comprehensively. When service advisors take the time to gather all relevant details and pass them on to technicians, it reduces miscommunication and improves the



likelihood of a first-time fix.

Finally, implementing procedures for technicians to quickly follow up on diagnostic results with customers can reinforce trust. Providing clear explanations regarding the findings and recommended repairs not only helps customers feel informed but also fosters loyalty and satisfaction.

A correctly installed driveshaft is crucial for optimal vehicle performance and safety. Improper installation techniques can lead to significant damage, not only to the driveshaft itself but also to other critical components in the drivetrain.

One of the most common mistakes technicians make is failing to align the splines correctly during installation. Misalignment

can cause premature wear, rounding out the splines or even damaging differential and transmission components. It's essential to follow manufacturer guidelines and ensure the right parts are used for the specific application.

By prioritizing clear communication with customers and enhancing internal processes, repair shops can ensure more effective diagnostics and treatment of issues, ultimately leading to higher customer satisfaction and repeat business.

For more diagnostic and installation suggestions, visit TrakMotive.com.

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of anything. The result is shallow progress and stalled performance.

Imagine this. You play for a professional football team. Do you practice regularly? Of course. Do you practice during the game? No. You practice for the game. Now imagine the coach saying, "We've been running these plays for a few seasons. I think everyone gets it. No need to practice anymore. Starting today, we'll practice basketball." The odds of that happening are exactly zero. Yet many business owners and sales managers do the equivalent all the time. They switch directions, fumble momentum and wonder why they keep missing the end zone.

This lack of focus also fuels disengagement. If management demonstrates they are not fully committed to stay the course (with a successful program), then they shouldn't expect their employees to be fully committed as they continue to introduce new initiatives to the mix.

Effective training is an ongoing process of continuous professional development. Just like a professional sports team, your sales and service team must consistently practice, refine and recommit to their game if they expect to win, day in and day out, for your business.

6 MEASURE PERFORMANCE

This final factor may be the most important of all. Very few auto service businesses truly evaluate whether their sales training is working. Without measurement, it's nearly impossible to assess performance, reinforce improvement, or hold people accountable for changing behavior and producing better results.

The most effective way to measure training impact is at the point of sale. As noted earlier, particular attention should be given to incoming sales calls, where buying decisions are formed or lost. The best way to manage phone performance is by recording and evaluating real customer conversations, not relying on mystery shops or assumptions.

Many businesses are already recording calls. If that's the case, you're halfway there. The missing piece, and the more important one, is consistently monitoring and evaluating those calls against an established sales process. Recording without evaluation creates sound, not improvement.

With my tire and auto service clients, we use call-recording technology paired with structured scorecards to measure every element of the Pinnacle Performance sales process, customized to the business. This data allows us to measure exactly how an associate performed, pinpoint precisely weak or missing elements of process execution, and provide the coaching to improve performance in real time.

CONCLUSION

Successful sales and customer service training doesn't happen by chance. It happens by design. When training is relevant, engaging, clearly connected to the why, reinforced consistently, supported with long-term commitment and measured objectively, it stops being an expense and becomes a competitive advantage. Shops that embrace these six factors don't just train better. They build stronger teams, deliver better customer experiences, and produce more predictable, profitable results. ■

*An avid auto enthusiast, **Steve Ferrante** literally grew up in and around his family's auto service business in Massachusetts. Today, he is the **CEO and Trainer of Champions of Sale Away LLC**. A true student of his profession, Steve has over 30 years of successful sales, sales management and sales training experience. Specializing in the tire/auto service industry since 2009, Steve has received national acclaim for teaching independent tire and auto service businesses how to improve customer experiences, produce greater sales results, build a "winning team" corporate culture and be the "Top Shop" in their market. To learn more about the Pinnacle Performance program for your team, visit pinnacleperformancetraining.biz. Steve can be reached directly at **603-681-0787** or via e-mail at steve@pinnacleperformancetraining.biz.*

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