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Your Line of Sight to Success!

Deal-Mover Practicums

A Guide to Improving Sales & Sales Competence

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Understanding the Concept

The Practicum™ Process is a field-based, ***"sales deal-focused"*** activity designed to simultaneously enhance individual competence and sales success. ***Deal-Mover Practicum™*** sessions specifically focus on "advancing" sales deals by changing specific sales rep behaviors. ***Shortening the sales cycle, reducing sales costs and improving the "hit-ratio"*** are just three outcomes that result if a sales organization makes Deal-Mover Practicums™ ***"a way it doing business!"***

Practicums™ force sales reps and support teams to consider new activities, skills or methods of selling. Not surprisingly, both the sales reps and the support people often face similar competency issues. So, over time, Practicums™ reveal a clear picture of competency needs, the validity of account planning protocols and tools, as well as organizational sales barriers. Focusing your development on such common issues magnifies the Practicum™ session's impact even further.

To begin with, it is critical that sales managers work to:

- Overcome barriers they face in establishing and maintaining regular field interactions with sales and support personnel, and
- Overcome challenges they may experience in leading frank and open discussions that target account activities and sales rep/support people behaviors.

The active ***participation of senior management is strongly encouraged*** to give teams a heightened sense of importance placed on these Practicums™.

Each Practicum™ involves 3 steps: a ***Pre-Practicum™ Briefing***, the actual ***Practicum™,*** and ***Post-Practicum™ Coaching***.

1. ***Pre-Practicum™ Briefing***: Each sales manager is briefed on his/her role during and after the Practicum™, issues are clarified, details of the account are reviewed, competencies are assessed, strengths and weaknesses discussed. This Briefing typically takes 2-3 hours.

2. ***The Practicum™ Wheel***: This intense face-to-face session consisting of 5 elements, averaging 2 hours, is geared to establishing a clear focus on winning the opportunity/account. Participants are challenged on their level of understanding of their potential customer and the competition they face. They should be able to:

    - Define the sales objective, appropriate sales strategy & tactics selected
    - Articulate value propositions (from both the client and sales perspectives)
    - Define competitive strengths & vulnerabilities
    - Define competitive ranking based on the customer's decision criteria
    - *Define the "Value Banks"* of key influencers
    - List the *"Don't Knows"*

- Offer *Insightful Questions* to answer the *"Don't Knows"*
- List the *Action Agreements*
- List *Evidence* requirements that show progress

During a Practicum™ session, the coach explains to the sales rep and support team that the session is focused on moving both deals ***and*** competence. It is not focused on laying blame or disrupting a deal. Additionally, the coach requests that the sales rep maintain and distribute any resulting action steps, distraction issues raised, and responsibilities at the end of the session.

3. ***Post-Practicum™ Coaching:*** Immediately following the Practicum™ when the sales manager is coached for another 2-3 hours on:

- Team/individual strengths and weaknesses
- Competencies to be coached to
- Status of the account
- Competitive vulnerability
- Issues and concerns
- Developing a coaching plan

Often, a second round of Practicums™ should occur. This helps embed the protocol of connecting deal movement with more competent behaviors.

Generally, the second round is a repeat of the process with the same deals (if they have not closed). The objective is to get managers to takeover running Practicums™ as soon as possible. These can be conducted face-to-face or via distance communication (such as Skype & GoToMeeting). The intent is to sustain momentum and focus:

- Review progress on *Action Agreements*
- Discuss the impact of new information
- Review progress on competitive ranking on customer's decision criteria
- Issues and concerns of team/individuals
- *Evidence* Gathering

A Five-Element Guide to Coaching Success

When leading a ***Deal-Mover Practicum™***, a manager should be prepared to coach the sales representatives through five distinct elements. These elements include:

1. ***Where Are We?*** **–** a *discussion* either prior to or as the Deal-Mover Practicum™ begins, the coach determines the session's focus on a) the sales issues and barriers that are required to move the deal, and b) the skill or behavior where the sales rep must show evidence of improvement (since the last Practicum™, if applicable).

2. ***Positioning*** – during the session, the coach explains to the sales rep and support people (when needed) that the Practicum™ is focused on moving both deals and competence. It is not focused on laying blame or disrupting the deal, the rep, or the support people. Additionally, the coach should request that the sales rep maintain and distribute any resulting action steps, distraction issues raised and responsibilities at the end of the session.

3. ***Deal Moving*** – the coach, sales rep and support people (where needed) discuss movement in a specific "deal" since the last session. They use tools, and provide evidence of new information, direction and conditions - E.g. an organizational chart. It is the coach's responsibility to "unearth" issues that have previously remained unspoken or hidden. Every tool and word can subtly reveal the "condition" of the deal. The *coach* must pick it up! And, the newly identified issues become the basis for action steps. *That's the whole idea!*

4. ***Revealing Competence and Content*** - the coach uses "evidence" from the rich and full discussion concerning movement in the deal and "unearthed" issues to focus attention on opportunities to develop specific competence in the sales rep, and possibly the support people. The coach connects the:

   - *"list of unknowns"*
   - *"unearthed issues"*
   - previously uncompleted actions and
   - current action steps . . . . .

   And the skills and competencies that require attention or work. At this point the coach directly provides tools and advice to assist the sales rep and support people.

5. ***Action Agreements*** – the coach, sales rep and support people (if needed) review and agree on new actions and required evidence of those actions to be presented at the next Practicum™, telephone conversation, or written communication. These actions and evidences must include movement in both the deal and competence. The two must be connected! And, the sales rep should review for the coach what Practicum™ techniques were personally valuable or not valuable during the current session.

 - *PDS v.23*

Initiated consistently, with focus on advancing both sales deals and the sales competencies, Practicums ™ will produce long lasting and profitable results for your sales organization. PDS Group's experience evidences this impact.

Go to http://www.pdsgrp.net/resources/pds_project103.pdf to see Project Summary - ***Large North American Telecommunications Company.*** For further information, and the evidence, contact us in Grand Rapids at (616) 647-3282, or in Blackfoot, Idaho at (208) 785-3622.