SPECIAL REPORT:
SHAKING UP YOUR SALES MEETINGS

22 WAYS TO ADD IMPACT, VARIETY AND SUSPENSE TO KEEP YOUR SALESPEOPLE ENGAGED

By Chris Lytle

As the years go by, many sales managers develop a routine and their sales meetings become numbingly predictable. There is nothing wrong with ritual and routine, but when salespeople know exactly what's coming they are able to tune in and out of the proceedings.

You want salespeople to be more knowledgeable and committed at the end of the meeting than they were at the beginning. This checklist is designed to inspire you change up your routine to do something different to keep them engaged and maybe even a little off balance:

1. **Invite a guest speaker**
    - Your CEO, VP of Marketing, Plant Manager or Chief Engineer can all add insights and can be good choices.
    - A local college football coach always has a good 30-minutes of a motivational talk that will lead to a good discussion.
    - A professor of business from the local college or community college could brief your team on the current economic conditions, business principles, marketing or finance. Being able to "talk business" instead of simply talking features, benefits and pricing makes members of your sales force more of a resource to your customers.
    - A satisfied customer will build belief in your people and take your salespeople through the buying process her company had to go through to make the purchase.
    - Bring in a sales manager from another unit of your own company to lead the meeting or ask a sales manager from another company to do 30-45 minutes for your team. Ask any guest sales manager to talk about best practices that their sales teams use.

2. **Use video**
    - Look into renting a sales training video or something on business etiquette
    - There are hundreds of titles available at Biz Library or Mind Perks. Google them. There is even a book devoted to business lessons from the great movies: ***Movies for Leaders:***

Management Lessons from Four All-Time Great Films.
www.moviesforbusiness.com

- Go to You Tube and search for motivation, sales speeches, sales training, business lecture, college course business and see what happens. Now that's content!
- You can find clips on You Tube of these movies featuring salespeople. Of course you can rent or download them, too:
  - *The Big Kahuna*
  - *Boiler Room*
  - *Glengary Glen Ross*
  - *Jerry McGuire*
  - *Diamond Men*
  - *Tommy Boy*
  - *Death of a Salesman*
  - *Tin Men*
  - *City Slickers*
  - ____________________ (your favorite goes here).
- Set aside a longer session to watch a classic like *The Music Man* and hold a discussion about what Professor Harold Hill does right and wrong as he sells band instruments in River City, Iowa.

3. Have a "facts frenzy" meeting

- Require salespeople to bring in customer trade publications, search business websites and get articles and editorials from business magazines and newspapers.
- Go through the articles for 45-mintues to an hour to find relevant articles to clip and send to prospects and customers.
- Become known for what you know and not just what you sell.

4. Move the meeting offsite

- Ask a customer or local business to let you meet in their conference room or boardroom.
- Meet at you bank's conference room or board room.
- Go to a local university and meet in a classroom. (This, of course, is a good place to have a professor be your guest lecturer.)

5. Hold a Master Mind session

- Ask your salespeople to bring a problem or issue to the meeting and get a solution from the group instead of the sales manager. This requires trust and openness, but it can build teamwork and shorten the learning curve. You want to foster a climate in which salespeople have to be willing to "raise their hand and ask for help."

6. Attend a live local presentation as a team. Pick a seminar or lecture and go.

7. **Hold a debate.**
    - Select two teams, Give them a topic a week in advance and ask each team to be able to argue both the pros and cons of the subject. Debates make salespeople look at both sides of the issue and be able to argue either side. They foster preparation as well as listening and thinking on one's feet.
    - Some suggested debate topics
        - Resolved: We should lower the price we charge to customers
        - Resolved: We should raise the price we charge to customers
        - Resolved: We should charge for the consultation we do before we make a sale
        - Resolved: We should not respond to RFPs that we don't know are coming.

8. **Give a Pop Quiz**. See what your salespeople know about current events, your products and services, the people in your company, your competition. Guaranteed: they don't know everything they need to know. Trade papers. Grade each other's. Announce the winner and runner up. Award a prize to the winner.
    - Salespeople need to be up on current events to be able to make small talk which builds rapport. Do a quiz on local business, politics and sports to see how aware your team members are of current events.
    - Quiz them about their product knowledge on new and old products and services.
    - Quiz them about the history of the company.
    - Quiz them about the competition.
    - Quiz them about the last training session or sales meeting.

9. **Hold a Practice Session (Video feedback)**
    - Use a sales meeting to practice the first three minutes of your most important presentation of the upcoming couple of weeks.
    - Practice you're the last two pages of your presentation including the close.
    - Watch the video and let the person look at three things he likes and one thing he wants to get better at.
    - Let the observer point out three things the salesperson did well and one thing to improve upon.

10. **Make a Book report**
    - Assign a book or a chapter of a book and ask everyone to read and report on one or two key usable points they extracted from the reading.

11. **Use a learning game or experiential exercise.** Experiential learning gets salespeople to participate in an exercise, discuss what they learned and then apply the learning to their job. Unless you tie the learning to the job, you are just playing games and taking up time.
    - Games Trainers Play (McGraw-Hill Training Series) - Paperback (May 1, 1980) by Edward Scannell and John Newstrom
    - *More Games Trainers Play*

- *Still More Games Trainers Play*
- Sales: Games and Activities for Trainers - Paperback (May 1, 1997) by Gary Connor and John Woods
- Games That Drive Change - Paperback (July 1, 1995) by Carolyn Nilson

12. Hold a Brag session or story telling meeting.

- Ask a person to walk people through a successful and significant sale. The salesperson should talk about the sale from getting the lead to getting the order. There should be a discussion of what went well and what roadblocks had to be overcome.

13. Take a Field Trip

- Go to a library and read sales books for an hour and discuss what you learned for another hour.
- Visit a customer facility and get a guided tour to see the facility through the customer's eyes.
- Go to your own production facility and get briefed by the people who make the products (not just management).
- Check out an exhibit at a local museum or art gallery to get people to observe something completely outside of their current viewpoint.
- Attend a local sports team practice to watch how a coach teaches the fundamentals. Hold a discussion of what needs work in a salesperson's fundamentals.
- Meet for breakfast at 6:00 AM or 6:30 and have your business meeting shortly after that.
- Go to a fine dining restaurant with your team. Afterwards discusss the experience you had from the greeting through the dessert to paying the bill to the good-bye at the end. Hold a discussion shortly after that about customer experience and how your customers could be treated better or differently based on the meal you had.

14. Change the room set up

- Use a round table and, instead of standing at the front of the room, sit with the team and let them carry the discussion.

15. Hold a brain storming session (Standing not sitting around a flip chart).

- Bring in flip charts or white boards and pose a question. In the next seven minutes, I would like you to come up with ten things that makes our company a better choice than Competitor A for a customer.
- Going for quantity gets more ideas and makes people think past the obvious one or two lines. Having a time limit keeps them focused. Having a flip chart as the focus of the meeting and standing creates a different dynamic and energy than sitting around a conference table.
- Having several flip charts and groups of 3-5 people around them creates a sense of competition and gets more than ten ideas.

- Reporting out on the list and then discussing the seven or ten best ideas is a way for everyone to keep thinking about the issue and gaining product knowledge.

16. Use the sales meeting to get something done instead of learn something

- Write three thank you notes or notes of appreciation.
- Plan the most important meeting you have that week with a coach (another salesperson asks questions).
- Do some pre-meeting research on a customer or category of customer.

17. News articles

- Pass out an article from a trade publication or website and discuss the implications of the article for your sales force and their customer.
- Create and action plan for bringing the article to the attention of more prospects and customers.

18. Memorization

- Use the meeting to fashion answers to the most commonly heard customer objections or concerns and memorize the answers. Salespeople should leave the sales meeting with a written answer and have practiced the answer at least seven times during the session.

19. Action planning

- Ask salespeople what they are going to do as a result of new learning and submit an action plan. This action plan should detail the behavior they are going to implement, the prospect or customer they will try the new behavior with and the date by which they will do it.
- You simply need to get a copy and a tickler system and follow up to find out what happened, praise the salesperson for trying a new behavior and coaching the person by asking what went well and what might he or she do differently.
- Follow up an individual's commitment to action with another coaching conversation:
    - Here's how that might go: "John, on your action plan, you said you would use the pre-meeting assignment with Mr. Barnes at the ABC Company." Then continue asking questions.
    - Have you done that yet?
    - What results did you experience?
    - How did it feel using this skill with that prospect?
    - How did he/she react?
    - What would you do differently if you could rewind and do it over?
    - Have you used it with anyone else?
    - Going forward, how will you use and modify this new skill?

- This is coaching, not training. The secret of coaching is to draw people out and not pour your ideas in. Remember, the "rule" of coaching is to ask seven questions before you give an answer.

20. **Send out meeting agenda two to three days in advance with the sales meeting objective.** Give the salesperson a pre-meeting assignment—something to read, watch, listen to or do before the sales meeting. This action becomes their "ticket to the sales meeting."

21. **Nominal Group Process**—In small groups 3-5 people, ask salespeople to discuss a topic and come to some conclusions.
    - Report those conclusions to other groups
    - Note the differences in the reports
    - Create a list of ideas for action from all of the groups.

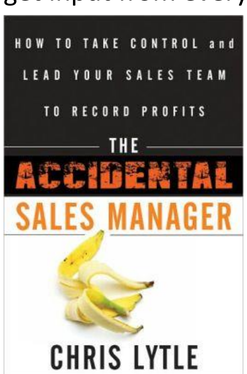
22. **Meet on Go-to-Meeting or Go-to-Webinar or WebEx** and hold a meeting where a salesperson shares his winning proposal page by page or someone shares a letter or voice mail script that landed a first meeting.
    - Share desktops and documents for others to use
    - Identify best practices from things that are currently working

Here's your "cheat sheet" for leading a discussion after a guest speaker, video, audio, article or field trip:

Ask a question and then let the salespeople carry the discussion.

- What are one or two key points that you took from the presentation?
- How does this apply to you directly?
- Is there something specific you can do about this information?
- Is there a particular customer or prospect you can apply it to?
- What might be the consequences of implementing this idea?
- What other support or training do you need in order to be confident in applying this idea
- When will you take that action?

I suggest you do this as a whip-around. In training a whip-around is an instructional strategy designed to get input from everyone at the table or in the room. You pose a question and let everyone have a minute or two to think. Once someone volunteers an answer go right around the table in one direction getting input from all of the others. People may pass.



You now have 22 ways to add variety and even excitement to your sales meetings. Which one will you implement first?

Excerpted from *The Accidental Salesperson: How to Take Control and Lead Your Team to Record Profits* by Chris Lytle (Wiley, 2011)