

SWOT'S

wrong with this group?

By Nanette Miner, EdD



Marketing and sales managers use it. Project Managers use it. Why not training managers? What is “it?” SWOT analysis. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Long before a new product comes to market, or a huge project is undertaken, smart managers assess whether the effort will be worth the payoff.

Many times, training is undertaken to address a problem that, in reality, could not effectively be fixed with training. Let’s look at an example of a call center with 14 workers on two shifts. Their job - as they knew it - was to answer the phones and book appointments. The head of the division wanted the call center employees to do more suggestive selling when a customer called in. When the employees refused to do so (subtly and covertly) the head of the department decided they needed training in being “team oriented.”

A training consultant was brought in who suggested that a SWOT analysis be conducted. The employees of the call center were brought together in a focus group and asked what they believed to be their strengths and weaknesses as a group; the opportunities presented by suggestive selling, and the threats - both real and perceived.

The following information was gathered:

strengths

- This was in fact a highly cohesive, motivated, dedicated work group
- They loved their work and their working environment

w e a k n e s s e s

- They had not been hired for any more skills than pleasant phone demeanor
- They had no training in asking probing questions or add-on selling
- The customers typically were unwilling to stay on the phone for a “sales pitch;” they simply wanted to make an appointment and move on

- No individual items or services were targeted for sales - it was left to the call center employee to determine when and what to sell
- Employees stressed how difficult it was to sell a product over the phone since the company did not deliver - customers would have to pick up their purchase

opportunities

- The employees were not adverse to the idea of selling, but they needed to be “sold” on why it was important to them

T H R E A T S

- This was a very different tactic to take with their customers; some customers might be offended by a sales pitch during a routine call

Armed with the knowledge gathered from the SWOT analysis, and before training was determined to be the solution, the consultant suggested an experiment for one month. During this time, a specific service that was experiencing a downturn in sales was targeted as the “service of the month.” A short script was created to ensure that call center employees made the sales pitch brief, enticing, and factual. The call center employees were told to use their discretion when selling customers. If the employee felt the customer was in a hurry and would not be receptive to a sales oriented conversation, they could simply make the appointment and terminate the call, as they always had in the past.

Each week the call center employee who led sales for that week was identified and was given a small reward - balloons, movie tickets, an extra paid hour at lunch. At the end of the month, all of the call center employees received 10% of the sales realized during the promotion, based on the hours they had worked that month. The result was an impressive 115% of the sales goal. The lagging service area was given a needed boost of activity and income, and the call center employees had pride in assisting a weak area of their organization and putting a little extra income in their pocket. No training necessary.

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