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# **If You Can Measure It, You Can Change It**

**By Don Brown**

A friend and colleague has rightly noted more than once; “If you can measure it, you can change it.” Make no mistake, I agree whole-heartedly. Also make no mistake, not everyone is *willing* to measure.

An effort by the Journal of Applied Psychology reviewed *forty years* of the published training and development literature. Reviewing articles, books, papers, presentations and dissertations – the authors included only material related to the evaluation of organizational training and change efforts. In this meta-analysis they found that within those four decades less than seven percent had the courage to measure the impact of their human development efforts against bottom line metrics such as sales and profit. What *did* they measure? For almost 80 percent – participant reaction was the needle (did participants “*like*” the event)? Even today, in an era crying for economic accountability, consensus remains that no more than 10 or 20 percent of organizations conduct a thorough ROI on organizational change efforts.

## **...But who’s willing to measure?**

I happen to believe that training does in fact equip today’s workforce to compete more effectively, but my position has always been that a training event alone is not the answer. All too often, clients decry the “flavor of the month” nature of change initiatives – yet ask what we can do for their practitioners *in “a day or less”*. *Not* the case a couple of years ago with one client *eager* to not only break the event paradigm, but to *document just how much* of a change we could effect.

## **What, When, Where and How Much?**

The purpose of the study we conducted for them was to investigate a link between their use of *sales training and behavioral coaching*, and the bottom line variables of revenue, gross profit and “line count” (the number of line items per invoice – a significant cost metric for them). The client was a leading North American distributor of industrial products and services. Bearings, belts, fasteners and fluids are just a few of the *tens of thousands* of parts they represented. Customers of the client organization run the gamut from smaller job shops and walk-in customers, to the largest national accounts, from automotive manufacturing to food processing and durable goods. In this study, inside sales people made up the subject pool.

Inside sales in general is an environment with:

- An average sales cycle of less than 90 days
- An average sale of less than \$25,000, with 50% closing at under \$5,000
- 80% of deals closing in less than ten calls.

Participants in the research were drawn from two regions, one from the eastern U.S. and one from the west. One hundred seventy six CSSRs were involved, and organized into four groups:

Group 1 – **Control** - Received no intervention.

Group 2 – **Trained** - Received 1-Day of sales training.

Group 3 – **Volunteered** - Received 1-Day of sales training, and then at least *volunteered* for behavioral coaching.

Group 4 – **Coached** – Received 1-Day sales training, and engaged in four or more follow-up tele-coaching calls.

## **Participant Groupings**

For each of the 176 participating CSSRs we had 12 months of data. We wanted to know if the training and behavioral coaching that took place in the middle of the

twelve-month period effected any change on *their* output. The primary focus of the data analysis and subsequent interpretation was to look at the data from each group for the *six months prior* to the training and coaching and compare them to the *six months after* the training and coaching. The first question was; did individuals within any group sell more or less after the training and coaching, than they did before the training and coaching? We wanted to know if those that were involved at each level of intervention sold significantly more or less than the control group. This same process was undertaken with data reflecting impact on Gross Profit and Line Count as well.

### **Coaching – the Change Catalyst**

After undertaking a comparative analysis of the results of this research we found:

As a baseline, the control group experienced a revenue *drop* of 3.7% when comparing their sales “post” versus “pre”. These CSSRs, within not only the same organization but out of the same Service Centers, had no contact with our training or coaching and ended up selling 3.7% less in the six month period after their peers participated than in the six months leading up to the events. At the same time, the CSSRs that only participated in the sales training event (with no follow-up) saw their revenue *rise, but only by* 1.1% comparing “after” to “before”. Group 3 members that participated in sales training – and then *volunteered* for the behavioral coaching, but didn’t stay with the process – saw a revenue jump of 10.2% in comparing the “post” to “pre”. Lastly, Group 4 individuals that took part in the 1-Day sales training, volunteered for behavioral coaching, and engaged in an average of eight 30-minute tele-coaching calls – *achieved a 22.4% leap* in revenue when comparing the 180 days after the training and coaching interventions to the 180 days prior to the process.

Perhaps this impact can best be communicated by including the actual dollars and cents involved. Just the CSSRs that participated (they have over 3,000 more) turned in collective revenue of almost \$5,000,000 over the study – these are significant stakes in any setting. Even more stunning, *those that stayed with the behavioral coaching returned 20 times the growth* of those that only attended “an event”!

As a final note, at each higher level of participation in the training and follow-up, *profit went up with revenue*. Not only did CSSRs that participated in the training and follow-up sell more, but also made more money (*up to 10 cents on the dollar more*) from every dollar of sales!

### **So what, and now what?**

It is true, if you can measure it, you can change it – but you do have to be willing to measure it. Measurement brings data, and perhaps data brings risk. The following we know to be true about change:

1. It *is* possible to measure impact – often through *existing* organizational metrics
2. You can *maximize* the impact of change efforts – through behavioral coaching and follow up – the change catalyst absent in most initiatives.
3. It takes *courage* to break the event paradigm in any organization – try it, you’ll be glad you did.



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