



## Teaching A Cat To Fetch

Some sales reps are untrainable. Allocate resources to those capable of improving

By Jim Peduto

**Some people like dogs. Some people love cats. Regardless of your preference, one thing is clear: You can teach a dog to fetch a lot easier than you can teach a cat. Teaching a cat to fetch would certainly be a YouTube worthy accomplishment.**

What does this have to do with training a salesforce? Everything.

We know that only about half of all sales reps are trainable. The other half is not. That means at least half of your sales force lacks the appropriate combination of desire, commitment and motivation to adapt and adopt new techniques. The bottom line is that you may be wasting half of your training budget.

Trying to train “untrainable” sales reps is the equivalent of teaching a cat to fetch. You might eventually be successful, but the odds are against you. If a rep is untrainable, the only question is whether his performance is satisfactory. If it is, you can keep him on board, just don’t expect much. If a rep isn’t performing and can’t be trained, then the prospects for success are limited.

Use this easy-to-follow four-step model to maximize the effectiveness of your training program.

1. Baseline your entire sales force. Conducting a sales-specific analysis of your team, each rep’s competencies, each rep’s sales DNA and the company’s support systems is the only way to determine who to train and what each person needs to learn.
2. Identify who is trainable and who is not. Trainability can be measured. Developing a clear picture of who is trainable is the foundation on which to build your training program.
3. Identify your performers and nonperformers. This step should be easy. All you need to know is who is meeting quota and/or is on plan. For new hires, determine if they are progressing as you planned.

4. Allocate resources as follows:

- Target training to the needs of the trainable performers. You will want to target the skills that they will need to get to the next level.
- Nonperformers that are trainable can be saved and are worth investing in. Focus on the selling skills and behaviors that they need to develop so that they can become productive members of your team.
- Have modest expectations for performers who are not trainable. Training them is typically ineffective and thus a waste of time and money. But since they are meeting your performance objectives, there is no harm in keeping them around. Just don’t have high expectations.
- Nonperformers who are not trainable are not likely to show improvement after training. The options are very limited, and in all likelihood the best option for the individual and company is redeployment.

The best and most successful training is focused on specific skill gaps and competencies of those who are trainable. Remember, it is easier to teach a dog to fetch. 

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