

Which do we need? More sales education or sales training?

 By [Peter Gilbert](#)

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Although there are an encouraging number of exceptions, tertiary academic institutions around the world have largely ignored sales, dismissing it as a craft or a trade, not worthy of academic attention.



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Consequently sales training is carrying the can, and it is failing. According to ASTD in its 2011 report *Developing Sales Teams that Win* - more than \$15.5bn is spent annually on sales training in the USA. Yet, despite this level of investment, 'conventional' sales methods seem not to be delivering profit at the rates required by most B2B companies - and, as ASTD so elegantly put it - that's "a large investment to attain more mediocre results".

Changing buying behaviours

This apparent dropping off in sales performance seems, fundamentally, to be driven by changing buying behaviours: *"One of the most pervasive challenges facing businesses today is the fundamental change in buyer behaviour. Even the largest, most successful organisations in the world are struggling to respond to and keep pace with the dramatic shifts in buying patterns."* - Harry Dunklin, Head of Sales Readiness, Richardson.

So what are these dramatic shifts in buying patterns? Well - shock horror! - it seems that B2B customers are finally demanding an economic justification prior to purchase!

2010 IDC Research (IT and Telecoms Sector only) tells us that 90% of buyers require a business case for new projects and 81% expect suppliers to provide it.

Long-term collaboration

Today's salespeople need to be financially literate, and understand business and business processes. They must be able to engage with senior executives in a credible dialogue about the financial implications of their solutions, and convey a clear picture of the changes that will need to be made for their solution to deliver on its financial promises.

This leads to a long-term collaboration between supplier and customer, and requires a totally different calibre of salesperson, compared to the stereotypical 'field sales rep'. Little wonder that universities offering sales as a degree course, have recruiters clamouring at the door...

ABOUT PETER GILBERT

A sales veteran with over 30 years of experience, Peter Gilbert is MD of HR Chally SA (www.challysa.co.za), an international sales consulting company specialising in talent management and recruitment. He is passionate about sales as a profession and the identification of real sales talent who can really sell! Email him at peter@challysa.co.za

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