

Spring 2016

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Recommended Citation

Cummins, Shannon; Loe, Terry; and Peltier, James W., "Using Sales Competition Videos in a Principles of Marketing Class to Improve Interest in a Sales Career" (2016). *Marketing & Entrepreneurship Faculty Publications*. 4.

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Using Sales Competition Videos in a Principles of Marketing Class to Improve Interest in a Sales Career

Shannon Cummins, Terry Loe, and James W. Peltier

Purpose of the Study: This study describes an easily conducted teaching innovation to enhance introductory marketing students' perception of sales and selling. Sales jobs are plentiful; yet, many marketing students do not pursue sales courses or sales careers. Our purpose is to describe a classroom intervention that improves students' intent to pursue a sales career.

Method/Design and Sample: This study tests the classroom inclusion of an actual student sales competition video from the National Collegiate Sales Competition (NCSC) to provide visual as well as verbal learning stimuli. Following a 45 minute lecture on sales, students were exposed to the 20-minute final round winning NCSC video. During the video, the instructor stopped the video 12 times to relate specific aspects of the video role-play to the lecture. Students completed a pre- and post-intervention survey of the Intent to Pursue Sales Career Scale (ITPSC).

Results: Results show that the educational intervention positively impacted students' perceptions of a sales career, salespeople, salesperson ethics, sales knowledge, and intent to pursue a sales career. The largest student perception increases were within the sales knowledge dimension.

Value to Marketing Educators: Graduates with degrees in marketing, business, and other areas often begin their careers in entry level sales positions. Sales skills are transferable and have utility in marketing and other careers. Instructional innovations designed to enhance student interest in a selling career, and that also advance sales training, have tremendous value. The use of an exemplar video from a sales competition is an easy way to accomplish these goals.

Keywords: Sales, Role-play, education, Intent to Pursue, video

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PROBLEM BEING ADDRESSED

Sales and selling can be dirty words among college students. Across campuses, students balance the immediate need to finance a college career with the long-term goal of a post-graduation career. Complicating this equation are students' many preconceived notions of what that career path should and should not be. Unfortunately for many students, misperceptions about sales and selling prevent them from considering this career path that offers a high demand job market and upward growth potential (Bristow et al. 2011; Peltier et al. 2014).

Sales consistently ranks as a high need area in talent and labor demand surveys (Manpower Group 2015; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015); and the high demand-supply chasm translates into an easier transition for job-ready sales graduates (Peltier and Dixon, 2014). The challenge for college educators is

how to bridge the gap between students' negative misconceptions of selling and the abundant and positive career opportunities that exist in sales. College students will not be convinced to study and pursue a short-term or career sales path merely because of a positive job outlook; however, overcoming misperceptions of what a sales career is can be the first step to ensuring a viable career path is not overlooked (Cummins et al. 2015).

PROBLEM'S RELATION TO CURRICULAR OBJECTIVES

Introductory marketing courses are typically a clearing-house for business majors early in their college careers. In this survey course, objectives include exposing students to the areas of marketing (e.g. marketing research, consumer behavior, sales, supply channels), serving as a reality check to student

preconceptions, and enticing further study within specialized marketing courses (Swanson and Wald, 2013). Thus, the course is an obvious first exposure opportunity to challenge student misconceptions and introduce a more realistic picture of what a career in professional selling could be (Bush et al. 2014). Challenging negative stereotypes enables students to make more informed decisions on both their selection of college curricula and eventual career path.

SALES EDUCATION INNOVATION

Expectations for Student Knowledge and Learning

The teaching innovation is designed to challenge existing stereotypes introductory marketing students may hold related to sales and the selling profession. The students are provided with no advance information related to sales; and the innovation is designed to work with any student exposure level to sales and selling. The innovation addresses student stereotypes regardless of their experience level or past exposure to sales, while also attempting to improve their knowledge and perception of sales. The innovation's primary objective is to open students to considering selling as a viable career path. The goal was quantified by measuring student responses on the ITPSC—Intent to Pursue a Sales Career instrument, which includes four dimensions: sales knowledge, sales career, salespeople, and sales ethics.

The Choice of Video Modeling (Digital Recording Modeling)

The innovation relies on the technique of video modeling where students learn through watching other, more skilled individuals, perform a complex task (Vygotsky 1978). In our intervention, the students watched a trained student engage in a sales meeting role-play. Video modeling began to appear in the early 1970s and since then over 200 studies have detailed the use of video modeling in educational settings (Hitchcock et al. 2003). The technique is consistent with many theories of learning including social learning theory, which emphasizes the ability to learn by observing a model or receiving instructions without experiencing the behavior firsthand (Bandura 1969). This type of modeled learning is useful in our context as it offers a lower-risk environment for introductory sales students than what they would experience in actual sales situations. The efficacy of observational or modeled learning can “provide clear information on how to best perform skills” and “strengthens beliefs in one’s capability” (Bandura 1997, p. 94). Importantly, this approach can impact

both cognitive factors (e.g. awareness and knowledge of the sales process) and behavioral factors (e.g. observable actions and consequences such as ability to formulate questions and entertain the possibility of a sales career) when learning new skills. Within marketing, the video modeling technique is consistent with the Behavior Modification Modeling approach, the use of which was first advocated for and illustrated by Nord and Peter (1980). As a sales technique targeting the introductory marketing student population, the use of sales-role-play video modeling offers the opportunity to impact student cognitive knowledge of sales; thereby decreasing negative misconceptions, and influencing behaviors such as enrolling in sales courses and improving intent to pursue a sales career.

Innovation Description, Delivery, and Materials

The classroom innovation is derived from a sales and selling lecture and demonstration based on the National Collegiate Sales Competition (<http://ncsc-ksu.org/>) held annually at Kennesaw State University. Students take on the role of a salesperson for a real company and participate in varied role-play scenarios in this competition. Each role-play evaluates students on (1) Approach, (2) Needs Identification, (3) Product/Service Presentation, (4) Overcoming Objections, (5) Close, (6) Communication, and (7) Overall (see Appendix for Elements and Grading Criteria). There are three rounds plus a wildcard round for students who did not make the semi-finals from round 1. Four student competitors earn the right to compete in the finals, which are digitally recorded.

Two innovation interventions were used in this study. First, the instructor conducted a 45 minute lecture covering topics related to a career in sales, sales ethics, and the selling process, including the required evaluative stages in the NCSC. Second, the 20-minute winning video from the National Collegiate Sales Competition was shown to the students, with the instructor stopping the video 12 times to relate specific aspects of the recorded role-play to the lecture. The 20-minute recording, instructor comments, and student questions took up the remaining 30 minutes of the class. Combined, the lecture plus the award-winning sales role-play recording were designed to enhance students’ perceptions of sales and selling. Table 1 presents the Sales Innovation Process and Intervention. The NCSC winning recording was chosen as it fit with the literature’s assertion that an exemplary video showing a superior level of performance helps to create self-images of future success within the viewers (Dowrick 1999).

Table 1: Sales Innovation Process and Intervention

Sales Innovation Element	Content Goals and Specifics
Intent to Pursue a Sales Career Pretest	Peltier et al. (2014) Intent to Pursue a Sales Career scale was administered to students two days prior to the in-class educational intervention. Content included perceptions of (1) Sales Profession, (2) Salespeople, (3) Sales Ethics, (4) Sales Knowledge, and (5) Intent to Pursue Sales Career.
Sales Lecture	The instructor conducted a 45 minute lecture covering topics related to a

	career in sales, sales ethics, and the selling process, including the role-play stages in the National Collegiate Sales Competition: (1) Approach, (2) Needs Identification, (3) Product/Service Presentation, (4) Overcoming Objections, (5) Close, (6) Communication, and (7) Overall
NSCS Winning Role-Play and instructor feedback	<p>The 20-minute video from the winner of the National Collegiate Sales Competition was then shown to the students, with the instructor stopping the video 12 times to relate specific aspects of the video role-play back to what was discussed in the lecture. The 12 instructor comment areas addressed the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Elaborating ways the competitor built rapport ➤ Transitioning from rapport-building to needs assessment ➤ Use of open-ended questions to assess needs rather than narrowly defined questions ➤ The use of probe questions once a need area/problem was identified by buyer ➤ The use of trial closes linking needs to potential solutions offered by seller ➤ Transition to presentation ➤ Focus on benefits and how they will solve buyer problems ➤ Involving buyer in presentation and trial closes ➤ Uncovering, understanding, and resolving buyer objections ➤ Effective close attempts, reiterating benefits and solutions ➤ Effective communication skills being exhibited ➤ Illustrations of product knowledge

INNOVATION TESTING

The Peltier et al. (2014) Intent to Pursue a Sales Career Scale (ITPSC) was used to assess the impact of the sales lecture and video role-play on students' perceptions of (1) a Selling Career, (2) Salespeople, (3) Sales Ethics, (4) Sales Skills and Knowledge. Students from a large principles of marketing class at a Midwestern university participated in the study. The principles of marketing course is a key curricular entry point for enhancing perceptions of sales (Swanson and Wald, 2013). For many of these students, this is their first exposure to marketing; and thus, the course acts as a gatekeeper to the sales curriculum. For this study, a single 75 minute class period was used and allocated as noted above. Approximately two days prior to the in-class sales intervention, students completed the ITPSC through an online link with a two day window for completion. Students were tasked to complete the survey over the next 24 hours. Students were given extra credit to participate, although identifiers were not linked to results. A total of 180 (82% response rate) students completed the ITPSC pre-test and 160 students (73% response rate) completed the ITPSC post-test.

EVALUATION

Table 2 presents pre-test/post-test results from the Intent to Pursue a Sales Career scores before and after the lecture/video intervention were presented to students. Table 2 shows a comparison of scores for each of the individual items on the IPSC and an average summated score for each dimension. These results provide strong evidence that our educational intervention of a combined lecture and winning NCSC sales role-play recording was successful in positively impacting students' perceptions of a sales career, salespeople, salesperson ethics, sales knowledge, and intent to pursue a sales career (note, less agreement with the salesperson ethics statements means improved perceptions). Specifically, each of the summated ITPSC dimensions was significantly higher on the ITPSC after exposure to our teaching intervention. In addition, significant differences were found for 21 of the 27 individual items in the direction expected. We found the largest increases within the sales knowledge dimension.

Table 2: Pre-Post Test ITPSC Scores

	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)	Sig*
SALES CAREER ($\alpha = .92$)			
Is valuable	3.88 (.88)	3.93 (.79)	ns
Is exciting	3.46 (1.1)	3.69 (.99)	.05
Is interesting	3.54 (1.07)	3.72 (.94)	ns
Is doing something worthwhile on the job	3.60 (.91)	3.76 (.89)	.05
Is personally satisfying	3.57 (1.05)	3.78 (.93)	.05

Gives a sense of accomplishment	3.91 (.94)	4.00 (.83)	ns
SUMMATED AVERAGE SCORE	3.66 (.84)	3.81 (.76)	.05
SALESPEOPLE($\alpha = .89$)			
Are admired	2.75 (.96)	3.06 (.96)	.01
Are perceived favorably by others	2.71 (.96)	2.94 (.99)	.01
Are respected by others	2.92 (.98)	3.20 (.95)	.01
SUMMATED AVERAGE SCORE	2.79 (.86)	3.07 (.89)	.01
SALES KNOWLEDGE($\alpha = .90$)			
I understand the sales process	3.43 (1.0)	3.78 (.79)	.001
I understand sales concepts and how to apply them	3.29 (1.0)	3.64 (.84)	.01
I understand what a sales career is all about	3.28 (1.0)	3.61 (.89)	.001
I understand what a salesperson does on a daily basis	3.31 (1.0)	3.62 (.86)	.01
I know how to structure a sales presentation	2.97 (1.1)	3.51 (.97)	.001
I am confident in my ability to apply sales techniques	3.16 (1.1)	3.46 (1.0)	.01
SUMMATED AVERAGE SCORE	3.24 (.84)	3.60 (.73)	.001
SALES ETHICS($\alpha = .87$) (lower score is more positive)			
Take advantage of uneducated buyers	3.39 (1.0)	3.05 (1.10)	.01
Stretch the truth to make a sale	3.48 (.88)	3.10 (.98)	.001
Make something up when they do not know the answer to a question	2.94 (.96)	2.74 (1.0)	.05
Inflate the benefits of the products they sell	3.54 (.97)	3.36 (1.0)	.05
Misrepresent guarantees and/or warranties	2.74 (.93)	2.74 (.96)	ns
Are more unethical than those in other business fields	2.76 (.96)	2.69 (.99)	ns
Sell products that people don't need	3.15 (.99)	3.06 (.98)	ns
SUMMATED AVERAGE SCORE	3.14 (.68)	2.96 (.72)	.05
INTENT TO PURSUE SALES CAREER($\alpha = .93$)			
I am interested in pursuing a sales position when I graduate	2.41 (1.2)	2.82 (1.2)	.001
Obtaining a position in sales is a priority for me after graduation	2.27 (1.2)	2.56 (1.2)	.01
Obtaining a sales support position would interest me	2.58 (1.2)	2.96 (1.2)	.01
At some time during my career, I will probably hold a position in sales	3.02 (1.3)	3.32 (1.2)	.05
SUMMATED AVERAGE SCORE	2.57 (1.1)	2.91 (1.1)	.01
* One-tailed t-test for directional hypotheses			

HOW THE INNOVATION ADDRESSES THE PROBLEM

Providing students information and a more accurate depiction of professions allows them the opportunity to relinquish their biased views of certain professions, namely the sales profession. This is especially important given the volatile nature of the job outlook for new college graduates. The video modeling and class intervention associated with viewing the recording positively and significantly impacted perceptions previously held by the students in the test group. It is typical that individuals, even presumed intelligent individuals like college students, associate the selling profession and those in the profession, with talkative, pushy, self-interested, and unethical people and behavior (Bristow et al. 2006). The results of this study suggest that watching a student representation of a typical sales meeting conducted by a trained and skilled salesperson along with discussion, has a positive impact toward dispelling these negative perceptions. In other words, the students acquired more accurate information and knowledge on which to make a more informed judgment. This, in turn, allows

students to more seriously consider the sales profession as a viable career path, overcoming misperceptions that might otherwise restrict their pursuit of a high-demand career choice.

Potential Challenges

Challenges to implementing this approach are manageable. The first is the availability or access to a credible sales call recording. This study utilized the NCSC web site competition recordings, which are accessible to the public. Additionally, the University Sales Center Alliance web site (www.universitiesalescenteralliance.org) publicizes a number of other collegiate sales competitions; several of which include sample sales competition video recordings that can be used. Many of the introductory marketing or sales text books also provide access to representative video modeling of different phases of the sales call. Instructors must be careful which videos they utilize as there are many that promulgate existing negative stereotypes, though some have a humorous purpose.

Secondly, and a greater challenge, is the qualifications of instructors to analyze and present an

informed critique and analysis of the sales call recording. Many faculty in the marketing principles course without a background in the sales discipline, or who have done no research in the area, may share the same misperceptions about the sales profession as students. There are three potential solutions to consider. First, instructors may invite an industry expert into the class to review and discuss the video modeling. Second, sales faculty at the university or from other universities in the area can be invited to engage the class. Many sales professionals and instructors are more than willing to contribute their time. Third, instructors can prepare themselves for the innovation by reading the literature (academic texts or research) or consulting with industry or academic professionals. Again, many experts from industry and academia are very open to “spreading the gospel” of professional sales.

Adaptability of the Innovation

Video modeling in other areas of sales may also be utilized with theoretically the same results. Though

there are few videos modeling sales negotiation or sales management skills, these could be useful if they model the best practice behaviors used by successful salespeople or managers.

The innovation may be shortened or lengthened to adapt to the length of the class. While this was not examined in the current study, one could arguably convey the same message and attain the same results in a more condensed time frame. Of importance is challenging the negative stereotype of a talkative, pushy, and self-interested salesperson. Portions of the recording that highlight the importance of listening and asking questions can be targeted for review and discussion. Additionally, discussions in conjunction with these segments, however short, that emphasize the research that reveals that the most successful salespeople are those who listen, care about their clients, present solutions that are of value to their customers as well as their own organizations, and who are highly ethical, can be highly impactful and provide similar results.

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APPENDIX
National Collegiate Sales Competition
Undergraduate Contestant Evaluation Sheet

5% APPROACH (Effectively gains attention and builds rapport)

Professional introduction
Gains prospect's attention
Effectively builds rapport
Smooth transition into needs identification

25% NEEDS IDENTIFICATION

(OBJECTIVE: Obtain a clear understanding of customer's situation in order to prepare a customized presentation)

Uncovered decision process (decision criteria, people involved in decision process)
Effectively determined relevant facts about company and/or buyer
Effectively uncovered needs of the buyer (discovered current problems, goals, etc.)
Asked effective questions that brought to the buyers' attention what happens to company or the buyer when problems continue (helped convert implied needs to explicit needs)
Gained pre-commitment to consider the product/service and smooth transition to presentation

25% PRODUCT/SERVICE PRESENTATION

(OBJECTIVE: Persuasively match your product's benefits to meet needs of the buyer)

Presented benefits-based upon needs of buyer instead of only features
Logical, convincing presentation (displays a strategy to communicate and persuade; clearly understands needs "hot buttons" of prospect and concentrates on those needs)
Used appropriate/professional visual aids
Effectively demonstrated product/service
Effectively involved the buyer in the demonstration
Effective use of trial closes (follow-up questions to determine where buyer is in decision process)

15% OVERCOMING OBJECTIONS

(OBJECTIVE: Eliminate concerns or questions to customer's satisfaction)

Initially gains better understanding of objection (clarifies or allows buyer to clarify the objection)
Effectively answers the objection
Confirms that the objection is no longer a concern of the buyer

10% CLOSE

(OBJECTIVE: Take initiative to understand where you stand with buyer now and for the future)

Persuasive in presenting a reason to buy
Asked for business or appropriate commitment from the buyer, given the nature of this particular sales call

15% COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Effective verbal communication skills (active listening; restated, rephrased, clarified, probed for better understanding)
Appropriate non-verbal communication
Verbiage (clear, concise, professional)

5% OVERALL

Enthusiasm and confidence
Product knowledge

