



The Value of Sales Training

by Hal Slater

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In this paper we will look at how to increase sales performance with training, how to measure the value of that increase and what kind of increase you can expect from training.

Compared to what?

What is your current level of performance? If you are currently performing at the highest possible level, you already know the value of continuous training. You also know that it becomes more difficult to increase performance as you attain higher levels. At the same time, the increased performance yields an increased level of profitability not attainable for the average business. Both the average business and the high performing business have approximately the same overhead which allows the high performing business to take home a significantly greater share of their revenues.

How much training are you currently doing? If you are already conducting training on a regular basis, additional training will obviously have less of an effect than if you are not training regularly. It has been shown, since the 1920's, that the attention an employee receives from the training process has a positive impact on productivity, regardless of what is being trained. This phenomenon, known as the Hawthorne Effect (Mayo, E. (1933) *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization*, New York: MacMillan), is a real benefit from almost any training and its application will be discussed later in this paper.

What resources are you drawing on for your training? While virtually any training can increase performance in an industrial setting, this isn't necessarily true for salespeople. Many people, sales professionals included, operate under the false belief that... "Selling is selling." While there may be many skills and qualities that are shared by all salespeople, this should not be interpreted to mean that salespeople are interchangeable. The skills that account for success in *high ticket* selling are distinctly different than the skills required to succeed in *low ticket* sales. *Transactional selling*, with an emphasis on closing a single sale with a customer, is distinctly different from *relational selling*, which emphasizes ongoing account development and maintenance.

Selling is NOT just... "talking them into it"

Another destructive myth of selling is that selling is just a matter of "talking them into it". This is simply not true. Sales is a carefully orchestrated process that connects marketing to customer service and a failure in the selling process will create failure in both marketing and service. For best results, your salespeople need complete management support in the form of tools, training and useful feedback.

We are frequently called on to design or present a training program, only to find that there is no sales process that salespeople are trained to follow. As such, each salesperson creates his or her own presentation, usually "winging it" based upon what seems like the right thing to say or do at the time. This approach creates inconsistency in performance and in the customers' expectations. As a result, dissatisfied customers and high employee turnover tend to be endemic to many sales intensive industries.

The first step, therefore, in developing an effective training

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program, is to know what you want to train your people to do. Do you have a proven effective sales process? In his landmark work, *SPIN Selling* (1988, McGraw-Hill), Neil Rackham makes the alarming claim that, "... many billions of dollars are being wasted each year, teaching selling methods without one shred of proof to show whether or not they work." (p. 169) We are inclined to agree. Although the research that he and his firm have performed for Fortune 500 companies is too time consuming and expensive for most businesses, most companies have some successful sales performers to use as a model from which to develop a consistent presentation.

Measuring change in a changing world

The most challenging aspect of evaluating the effects of sales training is not the measurement; the before and after results are obvious. After the training is conducted, the salespeople hit the field and the results are in, the real question becomes: *What caused the change?*

Was it your training, or was it external forces like interest rates, discounts, economic news, your competition, the stock market or the weather? Depending upon your industry, any of these factors could have a positive or negative effect.

The Hawthorne Effect

According to prevailing wisdom, any training will do, if it doesn't misinform or turn them off. This is known as the Hawthorne Effect, named after a series of experiments conducted at a manufacturing plant in Illinois from 1927 to 1933. The experiment and its results are considered controversial because of the small sample used and the lack of valid controls on the subjects, but the incident itself is important for two lessons learned. Elton Mayo, the researcher who led the experiment, was one of the first psychologists to attempt to use scientific method to measure the effects of changes in the workplace. The two lessons were:

- 1) Simply measuring changes in performance and the attention it puts on the worker, will cause performance to increase, and
- 2) If people believe that a change will improve performance, it will.

Thus, the Hawthorne Effect is a legitimate tool for increasing performance. Though it has been established that the performance improvement will not last unless the change represents a genuine improvement in the process. This effect can be used to kick-start a good program, giving it enough momentum to provide encouragement while the new patterns take hold and become habits.

In the aforementioned book, *SPIN Selling*, Rackham goes to great lengths to prove the performance value of his techniques. In the process, he establishes that the Hawthorne Effect can provide a short-term increase of over 50% in sales performance compared to a control group. If this is the case, all we have to do is to keep up the training, go back-to-basics and drill, drill, drill, right? If only it were that simple, but we will discuss this point later.

The value of a single good connection

Another possible positive outcome of training is the fact that on any given day, any given person can do something extraordinary. This is frequently called *luck*, and usually occurs at the intersection of preparation and opportunity. Training is that preparation.

When one of your salespeople encounters a particularly good lead after hearing a worthwhile approach, they are often able to feel and act inspired. What may have otherwise been seen as an average situation becomes special because the salesperson has learned how to see that situation in an entirely different light. No aspect of business demonstrates the power of an idea like sales, where communication rules and intangible ideas are all that is ever really sold.

'Trained business' is plus business

One major factor that reduces the risks associated with an investment in training is the fact that, for the most part, any added business you get

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as a result of training has only its commissions and the cost of training as overhead.

Your rent or mortgage will remain fairly stable, your utilities, administrative overhead, maintenance and other fixed costs will stay... fixed. Advertising, or whatever lead generation you use, will stay the same, yet your more highly trained staff is producing more sales. So, if you are buying advertising, training can actually reduce your advertising cost per sale

Training beats advertising for ROI

Most managers must face the following question: How much available capital should be committed to advertising?

In fact, the question should be: What is the optimum ratio of expenditure for advertising to training to achieve the best return on the total investment? Advertising may provide leads for salespeople, but without the proper training, those leads will be wasted. High ticket selling is not a numbers game. In *Managing Major Sales*, (Harper Business, 1991) Rackham states that, "Actions that aim to increase selling effort, such as activity management, have a poor record of success in major account sales." (p.43)

Experienced retailers have seen this, when the floor becomes so swamped with customers that the salespeople are rushing around trying to find the "real buyers" in the crowd and end up selling to no one. This demonstrates that some balance must be achieved between training and advertising.

Advertising can only buy a limited number of sales, at a steeply rising cost per sale. One urban legend tells of a meeting between the once famous New York merchant, Gimble and his peer and rival Macy, both of department store fame. When asked how things were going one responded that he felt as though he wasted half of the fortune he spent every day on advertising, whereupon the other responded, "So do I and as soon as I find out which half, I will stop it immediately."

The cheapest advertising is the best

The cheapest advertising you buy is usually the most effective because those ads, such as classified ads, are sought out by buyers actively looking for your product. Display ads must "cut through the clutter" to compete with others for the buyers attention and capture your share of a given sized market.

Institutional advertising is designed to build market and create more demand. Since it takes more to get a person's attention if they're not already looking, this kind of advertising is a much more expensive proposition and affords less ability to measure or track results. As a result, it usually offers the lowest return for advertisers competing within a limited market.

Training can, with time, ultimately produce an unlimited flow of sales with only incremental cost increases. Advertising can provide a "jump start" with leads and should always be a part of the marketing mix, but salespeople should be helped to self-generate leads through prospecting and referrals. These contacts are usually better than people who respond to ads offering low prices.

Individuals marketing themselves and their companies with well-designed programs to an existing, satisfied customer base are more efficient than splashy or glossy advertising from a stranger, no matter how frequent.

In this environment, successful producers serve as inspiration and role models for the new recruits. Thus, the cost of training is even further reduced as the rate of learning increases. Ultimately, the cost of training will level out before the rate of sales does, thus creating a very profitable environment.

As a businessperson, you are constantly seeking low-risk, high-gain situations on which to bet. In this particular case, the gain is extremely high, relative to the risk. The question, then, is... What are you betting on? The answer is people! In the final analysis your advertising will mostly end up as bird cage liners, whereas your investment in training will accumulate in your people as they become wiser and more effective.

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Training saves money in other ways

So far we have emphasized the obvious impact of training: increasing your salespeople's close ratio. There are other ways that training can be used to improve your business' bottom line. One way is to train to increase your profit per sale. We are frequently asked to provide training in negotiation when what is really needed is persuasion. The salespeople convince their management that the "deal was lost over price." This is rarely true.

"Price" is known among true sales professionals as, "the respectable objection" because it is frequently used to mask real, unspoken concerns. Training can replace discounting with people reading and persuasion. Discounting costs you quite a lot more and it usually will not work anyhow because negotiating cannot replace selling.

In today's fast-moving economy, the ability to introduce new products and services can make the difference between your business' life or death. With a regular program in place, you can train your salespeople to move specific products or services. This can put you in control of your inventory, your cash and ultimately, your future.

Another way to use training to secure the future of your business is to train to increase customer satisfaction. Besides being essential to assuring a steady supply of referrals, manufacturers are beginning to require a high Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) to assure a steady supply of product.

As an additional bonus, your training accumulates in your people and you can cultivate management prospects, which are essential to growth. A culture of training conditions your people to be lifelong students which they will need to be to become good managers in today's high tech economy.

Training increases longevity

The fastest way to get a return on your training investment is to make and enforce the rule: "No leads 'til trained." This will save you thousands of dollars in wasted leads. In addition to those savings, whatever behavior they are focused on in their first 90 days with you will become their "fallback" behavior when they need to produce results. If they are forced to learn by trial and error, that is what they will do under stress. If you show them what constitutes successful behavior, that is what they will do when times are tough.

Besides their inspirational value and function as a role model; good, experienced salespeople bring you cleaner deals. They know the company's capabilities and what to lead customers to expect. This results in more profitable deals whose cost of service is predictable.

Seasoned salespeople create better customer relationships that result in long-term, repeat business. This will bring you referral sales that have no advertising cost associated with obtaining the lead.

What is your 'highest theoretical close ratio'?

Why not 100%? How could a close ratio be too high? The close ratio can be too high when it is the result of *creaming*, or over-qualifying, leads before investing a sales effort in them. Most salespeople are inclined to want leads that have plenty of money and who are ready to buy, now. What they, and anyone else involved in sales, must learn is that there is an optimal level of

qualification and to attempt to qualify beyond that point will send good buyers away. Regardless of the cost of running a lead, in terms of time and effort, the cost of creaming leads is higher

This does not mean you want to prospect out of the white pages of the phone book, either. When the close ratio is too low it means that you are burning up your people and your advertising dollars. Our experience indicates that those organizations who claim to exceed a 60% close ratio are pre-qualifying their prospects to a high degree and in the process, they miss entire market segments in the name of less effort.

What is the magic of 60%



To be blunt, there isn't any. Use the **Value of 1%** calculator to find your *sweet spot* for your investment in prospecting. Enter different values for the prospecting costs and leave the number of new prospects and profit or commission the same. With higher prospecting costs, you can *bump* the number of sales a bit and see how it affects the **Value of 1%**. If you can get better prospects without spending a lot more, it may be worth it.

The first question to address is: "*What qualifies as a lead?*" What do you use for your minimum qualifications? Do you have any? How did you arrive at them? Without defining (and constantly refining) this element, it is difficult to compare the performance of either the salespeople or the lead sources.

The second question to ask is: "*What is your sales process?* Got one? You have to! Whether you know it or not, each of your sales follows a process. The issue is whether or not you have planned the process for best results.

Thirdly, we ask: "*What tools do you offer to support your sales process?*" Salespeople, like mechanics, need tools. These come in the form of literature, referrals, presentation materials and forms. Using these tools requires training. Properly designed, they can not only help make the sale, they raise the bar for the competition, making it harder to compete against you.

How to get there

As the old joke goes, "How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice, practice, practice." Every salesperson must execute every step, every time, on every sale. This means not only teaching them what the steps are, you must explain *why* to assure consistency and you must follow up with coaching because without it, 87% of your training is lost within 30 days (*Managing Major Sales*, p.130).

In addition to a grasp of the sales process, your people must understand their buyers better than buyers understand themselves. People reading skills are essential to masterful selling. People reading makes buying easy by giving the salesperson a "window" on the buyers' needs and fears. This window will permit your salespeople to prevent and avoid objections, rather than attempting to overcome them, which is more difficult in high consequence situations. Likewise, people reading encourages the use of enticement rather than pressure to close the sale.

One of the most challenging aspects of measuring the value of sales training is the changing marketplace. What, at one time, was a thriving inner city location can fall into disrepute as the more affluent segments of society move to their new homes in the suburbs and this can have an inhibiting impact on growth. It also gave us a chance to confirm the value of training for one of our customers, the House of Motorcycles on El Cajon Blvd. in San Diego CA. They are located in an inner city area that is not as affluent as their typical customer, nor is the location convenient to traffic routes. Therefore, it can reasonably be assumed that their growth is the result of creative efforts on the part of the management and sales team.

This year, in response to a challenging post-9/11 economy and a 10% per year growth mandate from their Board of Directors, they chose an intensive concentration on training as their primary strategy. Having used our material and services for over seven years, they turned to us to prepare and present both "fast start" training for new hires and booster sessions for their weekly sales meetings. The result has been a whopping 22% increase in sales and profits, surpassing the growth mandate by more than double.

How to supercharge your close ratios

Find a way to link your marketing to your sales offer. There are two points at which buyers qualify their interests, 1) when they respond to the marketing (your lead premium) and 2) when they respond to your offer (closing incentive). If you can create a lead premium that appeals to the same buying motive as your "buy today" incentive, you will see a synergistic effect on

How we calculated the Value of 1%

We added the increase in lead efficiency to the increase in sales efficiency. Lead efficiency is determined by dividing the investment in new prospects by the sales. The sales efficiency is determined by dividing the total profit or commission by the number of prospects.

the close ratio. We have had excellent results using this formula, producing sales effectiveness rates that exceeded the industry average by over 1800%!

For the Caravelle Beach Club of Matzatlan, Mexico, we were able to link our buyers' response premium and buying incentive by offering a free stay at the resort in our advertising as a gift for hearing about our program. When the presentation was finished, we offered them two free plane tickets to the resort if they were to buy today. This rule was enforced and plane tickets were not available to be-backs. In an industry paying an average of \$200 per lead with an average 8% close rate, we closed 24% on leads that cost under \$30.00.

Here's another good example of linking the response premium to the buying motive to supercharge sales performance. Though I would caution managers to remember it as an example of why you should monitor what your salespeople are saying to your prospects.

Airman Jones was assigned to the induction center, where he advised new recruits about their government benefits, especially their GI insurance.

It wasn't long before Captain Smith noticed that Airman Jones was having a staggeringly high success-rate, selling insurance to nearly 100% of the recruits he advised. Rather than asking him about this, the Captain stood at the back of the room and listened to Jones' sales pitch.

Jones explained the basics of GI Insurance to the new recruits, and then said, "If you are killed in a battle and have a GI Insurance, the government has to pay \$200,000 to your beneficiaries. But, if you don't have a GI insurance and get killed in the battle, the government only has to pay a maximum of \$6000."

"Now," he concluded, "which group do YOU think they are going to send into battle first?"

Companies that reach their highest theoretical close ratio universally provide impeccable customer service. In fact, these companies are notable for their practice of empowering employees to advocate for the customers' interests and put them ahead of the company's. This is a radical concept which deserves a discussion of its own, call me if you would like to pursue it.

Do your salespeople think they've heard it all?

Most salespeople regularly attend training, and motivational speakers' forums, attempting to improve their sales. Since most salespeople today sell high ticket items and most training was written before WWII when low ticket selling prevailed, (for more information on this, read the Chapter One from *Secrets of High Ticket Selling* which is available free at <http://www.advancedselling.com/free.html>) the sales training frequently doesn't meet their needs. Though there might be a slight boost in sales afterwards, the effects tend to wear off quickly.

For intermediate to advanced salespeople, these programs are often repetitive. They really HAVE heard it all before. In fact, most programs reiterate basic sales techniques to bring the poorer performers' levels higher. They don't consider that seasoned sales professionals hear the same messages every time. Keep them in basic training, and serious consequences can occur.

Negative impact of repetitious training.

Making pros repeat the basics implies their performance is substandard. It creates the impression that the job doesn't offer room to advance skill level. Plus, the lack of a challenge generates boredom and a negative attitude toward all training. If you don't put engineers through basic math, don't put your best people through basic sales training.

What is Advanced Sales Training?

Advanced Sales Training must work for seasoned sales professionals. It can not conflict with any prior training. It should challenge salespeople to focus on the buyer's needs



HAL SLATER

When you need a speaker for an experienced sales audience, you want to talk to this man! Hal has the three most important qualities required to guarantee a great event.

and interact more effectively. This challenge can fuel professional growth for several years.

Not just another 'feel good' message

Advanced Sales Training should provide insight into buyers and how to affect their beliefs and actions. Unlike motivational programs, Advanced Sales Training must provide real-world, practical sales expertise, and deep insights into the individual's buying process. This will allow the salespeople to use their natural, familiar style and make only those changes that increase performance.

Creating happy customers

In a survey of 10,000 customers, the American Marketing Association discovered that 63% of customers will not buy from most vendors again. The number one reason cited was the salesperson lacked empathy and understanding of the buyer's needs.

Salespeople who really understand the buyers create more trusting and happier customers. Any modern businessman knows the value of customer retention. Happy customers will return and refer others, thereby reducing the heavy investment of time and money in lead generation and initial contacts.

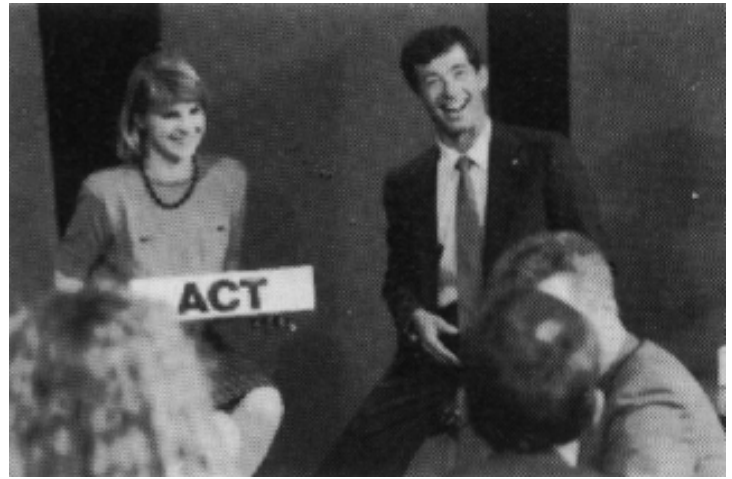
The main thing to teach salespeople is to understand what the buyer needs. Not only will this increase the volume of sales during initial contacts, it will increase return business and referrals.

The difference that makes a difference

When top performers learn advanced new skills which lend deeper insight into each buyer's personal purchasing process, they increase sales volume, and customer satisfaction, and minimize the investment required for each current and future sale.

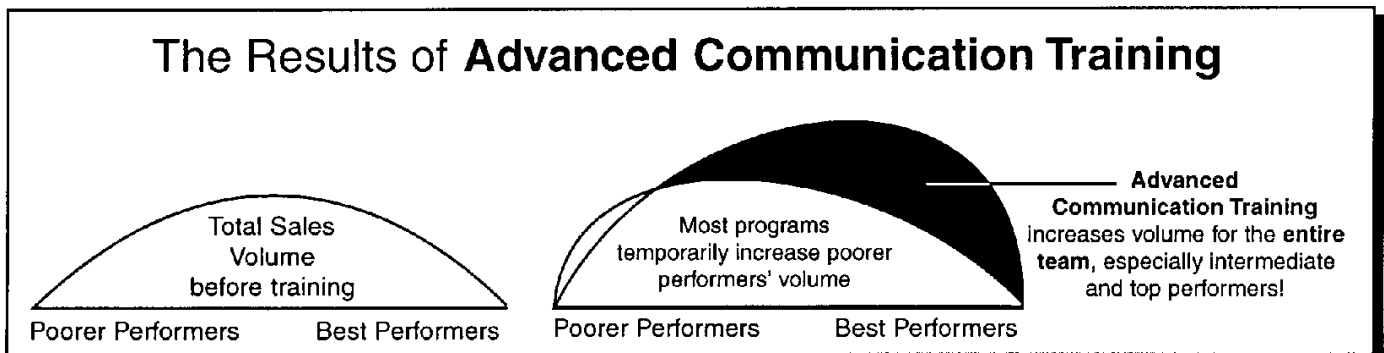
The biggest challenge most sales managers and trainers, who understand the importance of continuous training, face is the need to come up with new information that enhances their existing material. Most of us know the look that experienced people give us when we announce that a training session is scheduled. They roll their eyes into their forehead and sigh with acceptance, and this is *wrong*. Sales training is about people and learning about people should be fun!

Fun, challenging, original, useful, that is a lot to deliver, but your top producers are worth it. We invite you to call to find out how our Advanced Sales Training meets these needs.

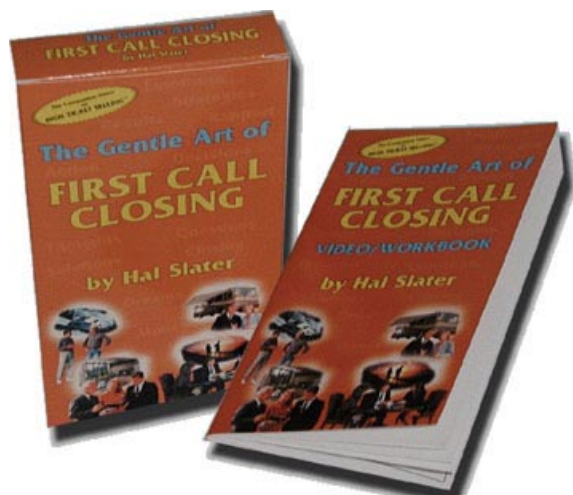


Finding fun, useful and new material to present to your people, as part of a continuous training program, is one of the sales manager's biggest challenges.

Hal Slater is the founder and president of Advanced Communication Training in San Diego. He is available to apply his thirty-plus years of sales, training and management experience to the needs of businesses worldwide.



The Gentle Art of FIRST CALL CLOSING



The following article is a review of Hal Slater's video, *The Gentle Art of First Call Closing*. This video shows a small part of a group training session that Hal Slater does in one of his **Advanced Communication Training** programs. These programs have been executed across North America and Europe and represent the ideal blend of the latest advances in Human Behavioral Science with lessons from 30 years of highly successful selling experience

“It's like ESP. I've never seen anything like it before.”

When I first sat down to watch this tape, I thought I would get the usual step-by-step, “Do as I do and you'll close every sale” routine, but I was in for a surprise. My neighbor, Mike, an insurance salesman, joined me for the viewing. I told him that the tape was supposed to contain 14 original ideas about first call closing. He said, “Oh, no, not another ‘vapor-training’ show where the trainer rolls his eyeballs like Tony Robbins.” I assured him that Hal Slater was a salesman who had learned his stuff through belly-to-belly selling, and was not to be confused with late night cable TV hucksters pitching get rich quick schemes to an audience of out of work actors.

“Why close on the first call?” asked Hal during the introduction. Mike urged me to fast forward to the real meat, We skipped through how people buy and stopped where Slater demonstrates a life-sized file cabinet containing all the reasons that keep people from making a decision today. “Why do people hesitate even when they are convinced?” asks Slater. As I stopped the tape, Mike answered, “Because they don't trust you, and without trust, the information can't filter into the customer's brain.” Good point. Slater covers it a few minutes later. He calls it the “warm-up step” of the sales call. How? With “neuro-Rapport Skills.” Mike's hand grabbed the pause button and Slater's face froze into a jittery grin.

Mike had read about neuro-linguistic programming and interrupted saying, “They've got that wrong. It should be ‘pseudo-rapport skills,’ this isn't real psychology, it's pseudo-psychology.” I calmed him down and advised him to be objective.

Back to Hal Slater. He demonstrates how we can match a customer's body posture, how we can adjust to his tone of voice and tempo. Slater's moves are flawless. He's in total command of his body and almost uses the client as a tuning fork before he starts humming his way to the close. After the demonstration, Slater explains, “Reading people is possible because our minds and bodies are so connected that we cannot change one without the other.” Mike was mesmerized. **Slater's ideas left stretchmarks on his forehead.**

A few minutes later, a member of the audience was called by Slater to demonstrate how to read the buyer's inner strategy. During a brief warm-up conversation, Slater directed the attention of the audience to the subtle head nods his guest used to accent his expressions of agreement. After the audience recognized the subtle head nods that indicate agreement and disagreement, Slater took a bold step. He asked the guest to pick a card from a deck and conceal the face of the card. He then asked the guest not to speak or reveal the name of the card, but to listen to a series of Hal's questions like, “Is the card red? Is it a number card?”

Hal got the audience involved in reading the guest's silent signals in response to his questions. They got astonishingly close to guessing the right card. **“It's like ESP. I've never seen anything like this before,”** muttered my friend with a respectful tone of voice. As the tape moved on, we learned a variety of closing techniques designed to remove any remaining customer resistance. Slater calls his technique CIAO. Like the Italian word for “hello” and “good-bye,” CIAO stands for Confirm, Isolate, Answer and asking for the Order. “The good part of this approach is,” Mike says he is now in complete agreement with Slater, “that if you are able to engineer an atmosphere of agreement with your customer, **you won't get any closing resistance.**”

Mike and I agreed that this is the first video where nonverbal and neuro-linguistic techniques are applied in a practical way to advance the sale, not just to advance the viewer's thinking. **I think that the ideas are worth at least ten times the price of the video.**

Rated W for Worthwhile Capt. Lawrence J. Tuttle, Ret.

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Hal Slater

Hal has the three things you need most in a sales speaker—*real world* experience; a new, useful message; and the platform skills to bring the message home.

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He is the author of two books, *First Call Closing* and *Secrets of High-Ticket Selling* plus a critically acclaimed video on sales, *The Gentle Art of First Call Closing*. His landmark work on buyer behavior has earned the recognition and endorsement of many noted experts.

Hal is one of fewer than two dozen people in Toastmasters International's distinguished history to have earned every one of their Speaking and Leadership awards.

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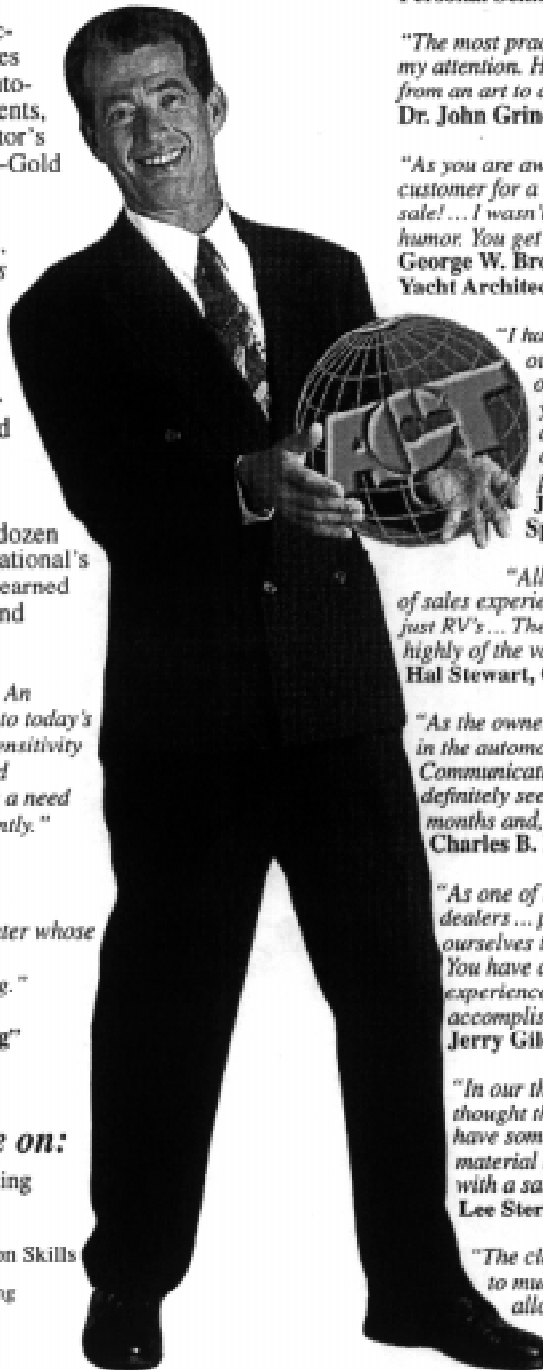
"Hal Slater is a masterful presenter whose original insights represent a quantum leap in the Art of Selling."

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Dr. John Grinder—Cofounder of NeuroLinguistic Programming

"As you are aware, at today's prices, selling a yacht is asking a customer for a huge commitment. You provide the tools to get the sale!... I wasn't prepared for your dynamic delivery, energy, and humor. You get an audience's attention fast, and you hold it."

George W. Brown, Executive Director—
Yacht Architects and Brokers Association

"I have to say, we are extremely skeptical when it comes to outside trainers... Everyone was polled for their opinion... support for the program was unanimous. As you know, great salespeople have great egos, yet they all sensed that Hal is unique with something special to offer... I feel confident in saying that this program will produce lasting results."

Jamie Klein, Project Director—Marriott's Desert Springs Villas

"All of our salespeople have a minimum of twenty years of sales experience and many of them have thirty to forty years selling just RV's... Their enthusiastic response to your program speaks highly of the value of your unique material."

Hal Stewart, General Sales Manager—C&D Motorhomes

"As the owner of several dealerships myself, with over forty years in the automotive business... We brought Hal Slater from Advanced Communications Training in for a number of sessions and we can definitely see results. We have tracked it closely over a number of months and, when Hal holds a session, we sell more cars."

Charles B. McLean, Owner—Seaside Buick

"As one of San Diego's oldest and largest motorcycle dealers... plus the area's largest watercraft dealer, we consider ourselves to be quite knowledgeable on the topic of sales. You have advanced that knowledge and, as a result, our most experienced people are your biggest fans. That is quite an accomplishment."

Jerry Gilding, Owner—House of Motorcycles

"In our thirty plus years of home improvement contracting, we thought that we had seen it all. We were wrong. You really do have something new to offer. All of our salesmen found your material both original and useful. We recommend that anyone with a sales staff look into it."

Lee Sterling, Vice President—San Diego Roofing

"The class teaches one to experience sensory perceptions to much more acute levels than reached previously. It allows you to 'read' or anticipate people's actions or thoughts... I am much more aware of the interviewee's thoughts or feelings..."

Sgt. Bob Corey, Hostage Negotiator—San Diego Police Dept.

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