



Mario Caraccioli, (left) visitor from Chile, who attended the 11th Annual ASTD Conference in Los Angeles, seen here at a Utah Oil Refining Company installation in Utah. In the center is a refinery engineer and on the right is Sherman V. Lund, Bureau of Apprenticeship, Department of Labor. Mr. Caraccioli attended a Utah ASTD Chapter meeting before going to the West Coast.

Sales Meetings, Workshop Style

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Would you like to get more *training* value out of your sales meetings? If you would, you will undoubtedly be interested in the possibilities involved in the slip-writing workshop, or "written conference" procedure.

THE pep talk can be used just about so long before it loses a lot of its pep, and the "Why-in-the-Hell-don't-you-sell-more" type of sales meeting eventually goes stale. The "I'm-telling-you-how" type is fine until you have told all you know. Then if sales aren't as good as you wish you might try an "I'm-asking-you" approach as a variation or an experiment.

The "unburned fuel" that is wasted by not getting "complete combustion" out of a sales force could be quite a waste. If your men can be brought more fully into the act and their individual resources used more completely, your sales are bound to zoom. This article gives one device or plan for getting all your salesmen to feel that better selling is their business, not the burden of the one man who heads the force.

The workshop type of sales meeting is an excellent training device. It enlists your salesmen as active agents in solving their own problems and opens many doors for you to enter with the new

ideas which may have been unwelcome before. When the salesmen *ask* for help, they are much more receptive to it when you give it. The "welcome" mat is laid out, and spelled in capital letters. Resistance to training is overcome, because by the workshop procedure you have a means of focusing the training squarely on your salesmen's needs.

The workshop kind of sales meeting stimulates creative selling ideas by *pooling* them. A salesman has more reason to invent or originate new methods because you have set the stage so he has a way to use the new ideas. He has a place to put them. Most alert salesmen have dozens of grand ideas "just waiting to be born," if you can only hasten or encourage delivery. Just as customers usually don't buy until they are *asked* for the orders, so your salesmen may hold back on their creative selling ideas until you *ask* them for those ideas. The technique of asking has a lot to do with the response, as you will see on reading further into this article.

THE "written conference" procedure in the workshop makes possible the interchange of the pooled thinking of 20, 40, or 200 salesmen in a very short time. The usual oral conference bottleneck, in which only one salesman can speak

his mind at a time, is removed. Now each man can express his own unique views on slips of paper, uninfluenced by similar or contrary views of anybody in the room, including the chairman of the meeting. This fact keeps many a fine idea from being stillborn, or never delivered at all. Each man has splendid methods of which he is proud, but you may not get around to hearing them in an oral meeting.

Whether the meeting procedure is oral or written, you may face a certain unwillingness of a salesman to share the "tricks of the trade" with other salesmen who may use them to outdo him in a sales contest. If this spirit of secretiveness and competition can be overcome, the good of the company can be put ahead of the good of the individual salesman. This "family spirit," or company loyalty, can be fostered best by the workshop procedure, which gives each salesman a chance to rub elbows with the rest in a busy and purposeful project of working for the common good and for the prosperity of the company.

GROUP spirit grows best in a situation where there is a group job or project to be carried out. Patriotism is higher in war time because we have a job to do, and we cooperate to do it. The common endeavor, or parallel push, involved in a workshop type of sales meeting creates the company equivalent of patriotism, namely firm loyalty and team work for higher sales volume. All are at work in a common cause, because *you* arranged a situation that enabled them to *work* together. This *working* together does

something that no amount of *sitting* together and listening to speeches can do.

If you ask fifty salesmen to write down their "creative ideas," you won't get much. The assignment is too general. Instead ask them to split up the whole problem of how to sell for your company into its main difficulties, obstacles, troubles, or problems. They can name plenty of these (if you will let somebody besides yourself, their boss, take up their collection of slips). And each one of these difficulties is a pigeonhole in which you can then collect the fine creative ideas you couldn't get by means of the more general request.

IN other words, you need to *open up* the problem as a whole and go after ideas for each part, or else you risk getting such a *general* sort of thinking that it is unprofitable.

To do this difficulty analysis step I pass out a bunch of loose slips to each man in the meeting and ask him to put one difficulty on one slip, writing a dozen slips if he has a dozen difficulties. I find it best to get these in "How-to" form, such as "How to see the prospect who has a long waiting line." This channels the thinking into the line most appropriate for the later training, since the "How-to" title is definitely the best kind for the training lessons which are to follow.

Classification of the slips for the difficulty analysis can be done by sorting them into piles on a table top, thus producing the outline needed in your hunt for methods. Incidentally, this outline

makes a fine program for your later sales meetings.

ONCE you have all the difficulties of your salesmen classified, you may use the workshop procedure to collect methods of meeting each difficulty. Each method slip should bear the number of the difficulty, as mimeographed in the list or outline. Each method is one salesman's suggestion for a good way to overcome that particular difficulty. One salesman may have five or ten good suggestions for a given difficulty, thus writing five or ten method slips all bearing the same outline difficulty number. When forty salesmen write their suggestions on a given difficulty, you may have 200 or more slips bearing this number, and each adding something valuable to the collection.

Frequently you can pool *customer* answers to some of your selling difficulties. One of my students did this in a project for training the salesmen of a pharmaceutical house. He got slips from the druggists, doctors, and doctors' receptionists, to help his pharmaceutical salesmen serve these people in the way they preferred the salesmen to serve them. You may get methods from experts in other parts of the work of your firm, on selling problems on which they have special contributions. Also salesmen and salesmanagers for similar but non-competing firms may be able and willing to contribute method slips.

After the first meeting, in which the difficulty analysis is made, you can well devote the time to the methods of meet-

ing the difficulties. One procedure, so simple it can be used in almost any group, is to get the method slips written and collected, then read individual slips and decide by group discussion whether the method proposed is a good one for the sales force to adopt. Each slip is thus treated somewhat as a true-false test, or a wise-unwise test.

If the difficulty analysis turns up a dozen main difficulties, you may wish to schedule a dozen meetings, each one to collect and evaluate methods of overcoming one major difficulty. A procedure which will organize the group effort a bit more is to spend a part of each meeting in writing method slips for next week, and the rest of the time in evaluating ideas that were written on slips last week. This permits a systematic analysis of the whole collection of slips by someone between meetings and brings the evaluations to a much better focus.

THE work of the pharmaceutical salesmen, previously referred to, was compiled in the form of a manual for over 250 salesmen of the firm, nationwide. This was easy, because the difficulty analysis yielded the framework of the manual, the method analysis provided the meat, and the group discussions and evaluations provided the necessary screening or selection of ideas to include.

If you use the men in the actual sales meetings as assistant authors of the salesman's manual, the motivation for the whole project is increased, the man-

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students. It must meet the needs of the industrial supervisor as well as industry. It in no way takes the place of the "Business Administration" courses offered in the local universities or the Graduate Schools. It is planned to meet the needs of the great bulk of employed supervisors who are without a college background.

Finally, the program has been worked out with local industrial representatives who have acted as advisory committees to the state and to the local junior colleges. Degrees have been offered in many fields in colleges and universities throughout the country, but this is the first attempt to offer a degree to the industrial supervisor who probably has as great a need for training and education as any other vocation or profession. Not only can he take a major 20 to 24 units in industrial supervision but special technical courses in his particular field such as aircraft, electronics, petroleum, metallurgy, etc., are included in the curriculum.

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ual is well geared to the minds and personalities of the sales force to be trained, and the manual material is more thoroughly mastered by the group while they work on the manual. You can arrange for the necessary editorial service to maintain quality fit for publication. Such "curriculum laboratory" techniques for group authorship have been used extensively in my classes at the University of Southern California, and have been found to be applicable to selling as well as to other lines of training and education. This plan is also applicable to production training.

If your use of this workshop procedure with your salesmen yields the

results that may be expected from its skillful application, your company may find its sales in danger of out-stripping the production facilities. Neither you nor your top management will object to such a happy turn of events, but you can at least be *ready* for it. The same advantages which the sales department reaps can be obtained by the use of the workshop procedure in the production departments as well. In this article I have merely pointed out the applications to the sales department of some of the procedures I have developed and published elsewhere for the training of employees in general. The plan is ideally suited to the needs of the sales manager, but not limited to any one department.