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# Creating an Effective Digital Sales Development Strategy

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## Everything Has Changed, Nothing Has Changed

Despite other forms of training moving toward more digital approaches, in-person instructor-led training has remained the preferred choice for sales teams. Sales professionals benefit greatly from gathering and learning together, sharing experiences, giving and receiving feedback, and having a sales expert present to provide real-time coaching on real-time problems.

But, the pandemic has changed all that. While many organizations adopted a "wait and see" approach, pausing their traditional in-person sales training temporarily, some have forged a new path—a path that ultimately resulted in a sales training impact that surpassed everyone's expectations.

Through our work with organizations, we have identified 4 keys to successfully design digitally based sales development journeys that drive new behavior.

# The Business Imperative: Nothing Has Changed

The challenge of the salesforce remains the same.

Senior executives see revenue generation as a critical business issue. At the same time, research shows that it is growing increasingly difficult to win sales and each win takes longer.

Critical need to generate revenue

**Over 88% of executives**

Win rates are falling

**Below 50%**

Sales cycles have grown

**By 33%**

# Everything Has Changed, Nothing Has Changed

**The Training Challenge: Everything Has Changed**

During the pandemic, sales organizations faced a dilemma—pause sales training until they can meet in person again, or seek out a new approach to develop the needed sales skills. Sales organizations had good reason to "wait and see."

### In-Person Training Worked

**Salesforce preferred learning face-to-face:**

- Sharing sales experience with other salespeople

- Doing role-plays and simulations

- Networking and sharing resources

- Workshopping actual sales opportunities

**Increased sales performance by 54% or more**

### Sales Executives Uncertain About Alternatives

**Salesforce didn't find value in other options:**

- 85% of salespeople fail to complete training programs

- Few of the skills were ever used with customers

- Programs were boring, repetitive, and not effective

**Digital and virtual training were poor substitutes**

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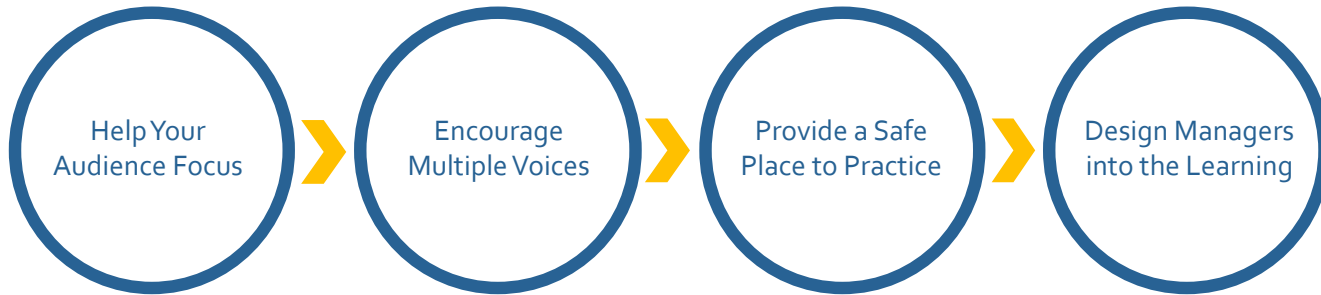
# Everything Has Changed, Nothing Has Changed

The **challenge** remains the same:

**develop the salesforce as a source of advantage.**

The **approach** has changed radically:

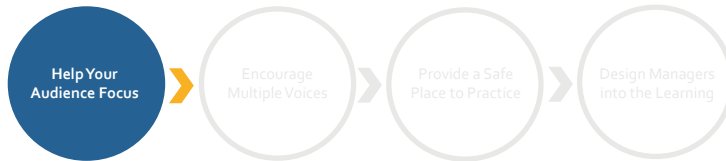**design a new digital approach to build capabilities.**

## 4 Keys to Transformative Digital Sales Development

Organizations that have made the transformation to digital sales development can provide great insight into how to engage salespeople in learning and what leaders can do to create meaningful changes in behavior and performance.

Through our work, we have identified four keys to creating digitally based sales training with proven results.

Help Your Audience Focus  ❯  Encourage Multiple Voices  ❯  Provide a Safe Place to Practice  ❯  Design Managers into the Learning

# Help Your Audience Focus

**Help Your Audience Focus** ❯ Encourage Multiple Voices ❯ Provide a Safe Place to Practice ❯ Design Managers into the Learning

There is a paradox in the delivery of salesperson training: if you can't get and hold their attention, then the actual skills you are presenting become irrelevant.

- Too much stimulation, or the wrong kind, actually reduces the amount of information retained and used.

- Many providers took inspiration from video games, with the thought that the more animation, the better the learning.

However, we now know that all of this flash and sizzle actually distract from learning.

Research shows that irrelevant media actually lowers the amount of information that learners retain. Too much animation, flashing graphics, irrelevant audio, and other media—intended to increase attention—has actually decreased learning.

We design learning with the following principles to help the audience focus:

- Give prominence to the most relevant information.

- Use white space to effectively guide attention to the right places.

- Provide intuitive navigation.

- Use graphics to illustrate and connect to the content.

- Don't mistake learning for a game.

## Help Your Audience Focus

For example, the screen below shows the salesperson's learning "home page." We keep this clean and uncluttered to aid in navigation. The prominent graphs near the top show the progress of their assignments, and a simple click gives them more details.

To begin or resume their learning, users simply select the large blue button in the top menu or select the individual lesson icons.

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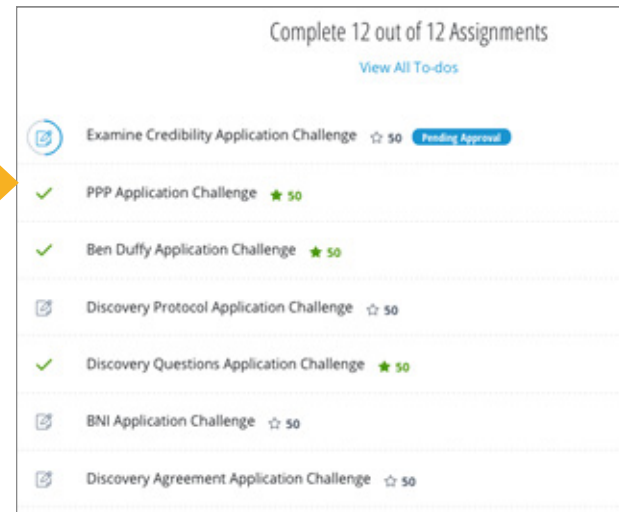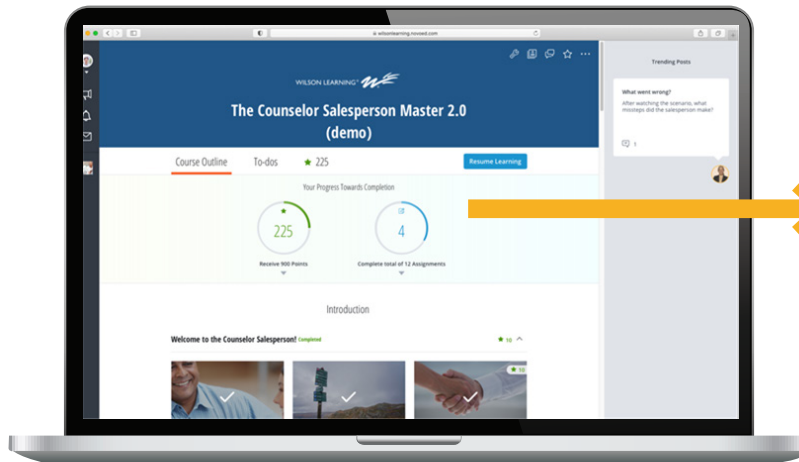
# Help Your Audience Focus

The screen below shows a simulated conversation between a salesperson and a buyer. Notice how the photos communicate both the action and emotions of the characters in a way that supports, not distracts from, the learning.

In addition, the simulation links seamlessly to a discussion among the salespeople on the likely causes of the scenario's outcome and their reactions to it.
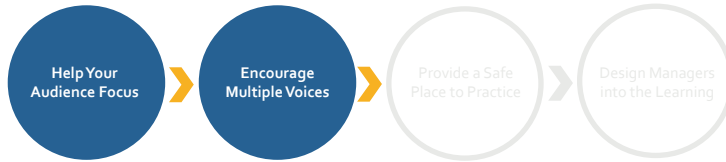
" "
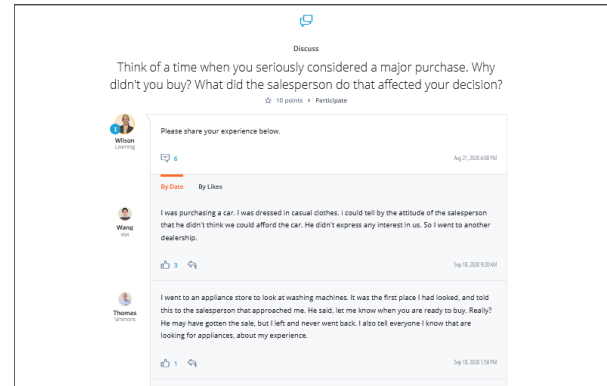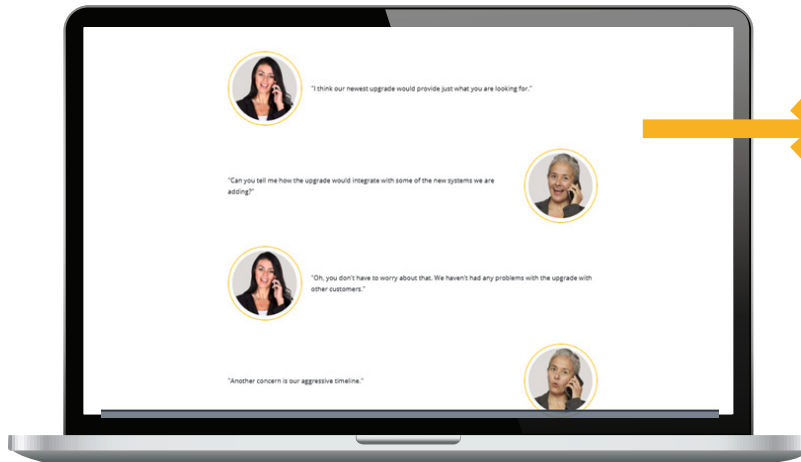
You need to be doing fewer things for more effect
instead of doing more things with side effects.

—Gary Keller, *The One Thing*

# Encourage Multiple Voices



In traditional training, it is natural for trainers to view themselves as the experts—introducing new techniques, spelling out how to implement them, and demonstrating how to use them.

However, this ignores a crucial adult learning principle: adults bring their prior experience to the table. Digital sales training programs have the advantage of engaging multiple voices—incorporating the thinking, ideas, and experiences of salespeople, their managers, sales executives, and other experts, moving away from the facilitator being the "Sage on the Stage" to the "Guide on the Side."

Effective digital sales training includes:

- Engaging the voices of all key stakeholders in sales performance

- Creating opportunities to share sales experiences

- Using manager feedback as a force multiplier, leveraging their expertise and influence

- Using less "telling" and more "asking" for their ideas, opinions, and experiences

Learn how to do this in a digital learning environment with the following examples.

## Encourage Multiple Voices

Replace quizzes and games with peer discussions. Salespeople gain great value from seeing others' examples of customer experiences, hearing and sharing their opinions on the outcomes of scenarios or video models, or seeing differences in how they each respond to the same situation.
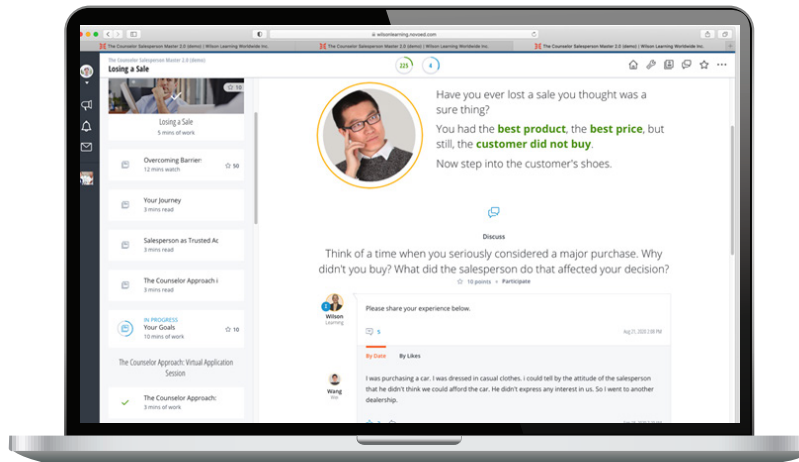


**When have you seen a great example of this?**

**How might this apply in your situation?**

**What other ideas does this generate for you?**

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# Encourage Multiple Voices

Another way to engage other voices is with assignment feedback. In this example, salespeople create and post a sales presentation for a client. Then, depending on the type of assignment, salespeople might:

○ Receive feedback from a number of their peers

○ Receive coaching from their manager

○ Receive coaching from the facilitator or sales expert
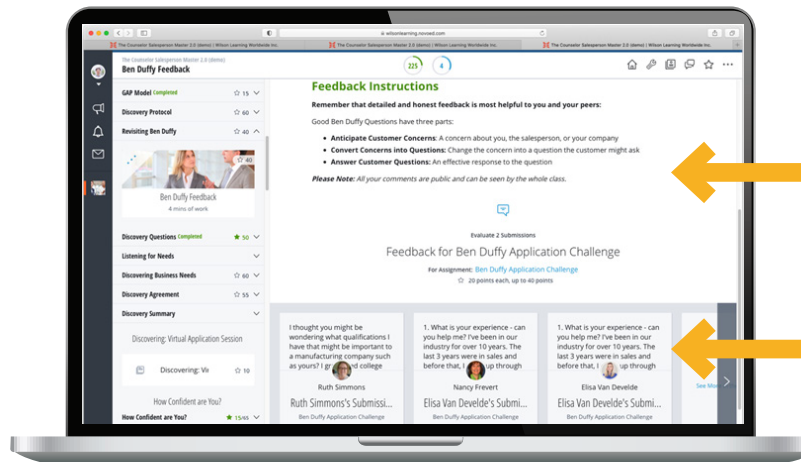


Prompting type and amount of feedback

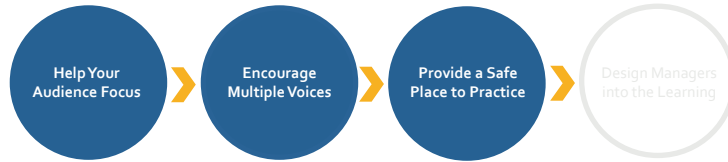Exposure to peer contributions

**"**

Smart teams will do amazing things, but truly diverse teams will do impossible things.

—Claudia Brind-Woody,
*Vice President and Managing Director
of Intellectual Property, IBM*

## Provide a Safe Place to Practice



**Help Your Audience Focus** → **Encourage Multiple Voices** → **Provide a Safe Place to Practice** → Design Managers into the Learning

We all know the KISS expression: Keep It Simple . . .

Well, in the world of sales, simple is not always easy. While learning the steps of a sales process, or the components of a meeting agenda, are simple, the ability to execute on these simple models can be very difficult—especially if there is not a safe place to practice.
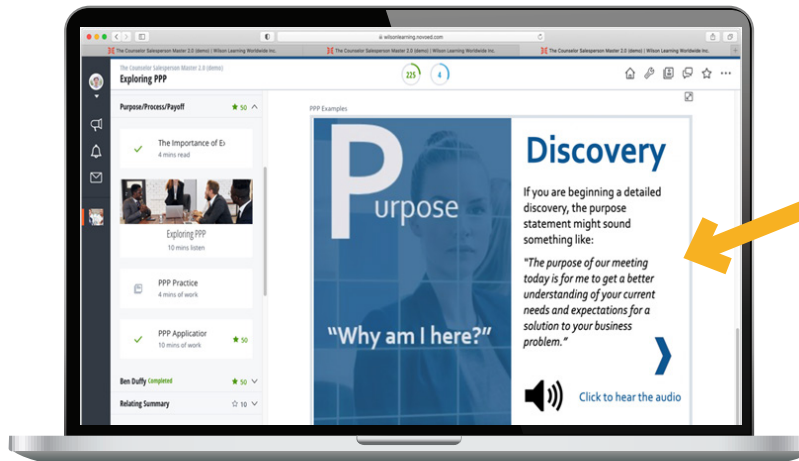
One of the advantages of digital sales training, unlike classroom training, is that a salesperson can try new skills without fear of failure.

Effective digital sales training utilizes a three-step process that we call "crawl-walk-run."
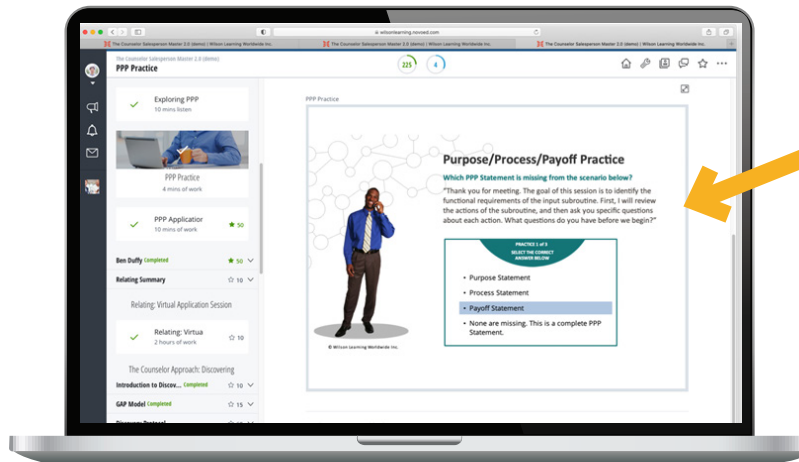
## Provide a Safe Place to Practice

**Step 1: Crawl**



The first step is to ensure that salespeople are grounded in a simple model. In this example, a Purpose-Process-Payoff (PPP) Statement model is used for conducting a client meeting.

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# Provide a Safe Place to Practice

**Step 2: Walk**



The second step provides a safe place to check their knowledge of how to use the skill.
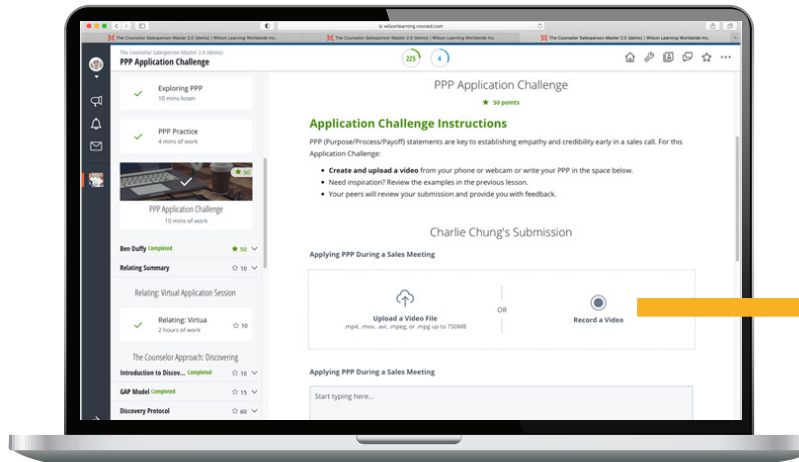
This is more than a simple knowledge check but instead is a check on best practices on how to apply the learning.

In this example, salespeople are shown examples of PPP statements and are asked to identify what is missing from the statement.

# Provide a Safe Place to Practice

**Step 3: Run**

In the final step, salespeople apply the PPP Statement approach by recording a video of a PPP for an upcoming meeting. This video is then sent to their manager or a coach to provide feedback and coaching suggestions. The manager or coach can also post the best videos to a gallery to share with other salespeople.

Video Practice

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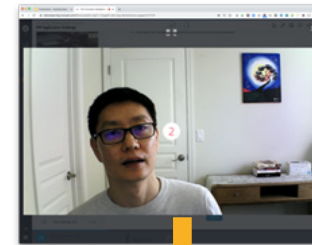
With regard to excellence, it is not enough to know,
but we must try to have and use it.

—Aristotle

# Design Managers into the Learning



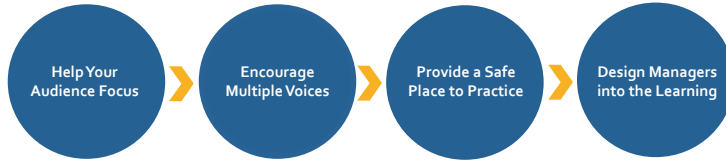We have all been there: salespeople go through hours of digital or classroom training; they practice, engage in simulations, and share experiences. After providing them with job aids and sales planners, you return them to their sales teams and watch as all of the new skills die a rapid death.

Manager support of new skills is known to be the biggest determinant of whether new skills are used. But most organizations don't provide the environment, or the knowledge base, for managers to engage in the learning process.

Managers must be designed into the learning—not an afterthought, not an add-on, but a planned and prepared part of the learning plan.

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# Design Managers into the Learning

## Manager Dashboard
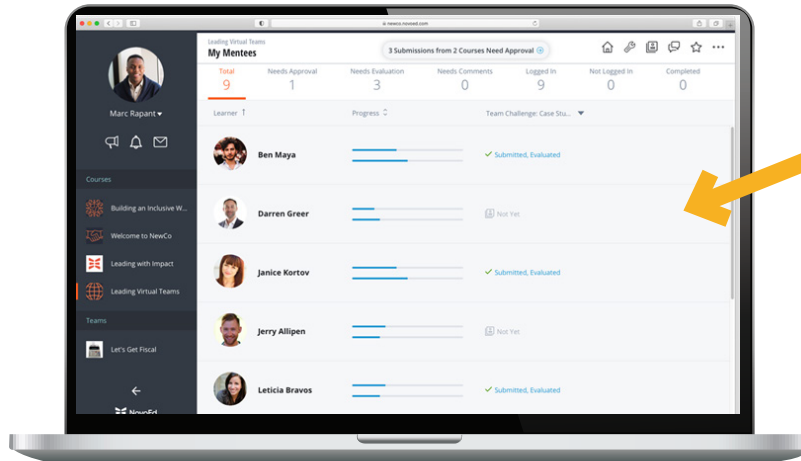


It starts with giving managers a clear space for engagement.

The Manager Dashboard gives a quick overview of salespeople's progress and any action the manager is expected to take.

# Design Managers into the Learning

**Easy Way to Give Simple Feedback**
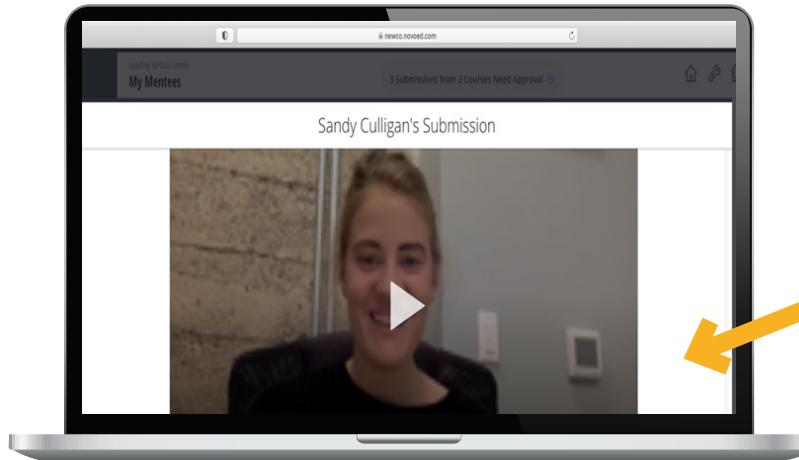


Managers also need ways to give quick and simple feedback.

In this example, the salesperson submitted a video example of an account plan. To provide feedback, managers simply add their comments and then approve the submission or send it back for revisions.

In the past, coaching may have taken an hour and several emails back and forth—now it can be accomplished in minutes.

# Design Managers into the Learning

## More Detailed Coaching
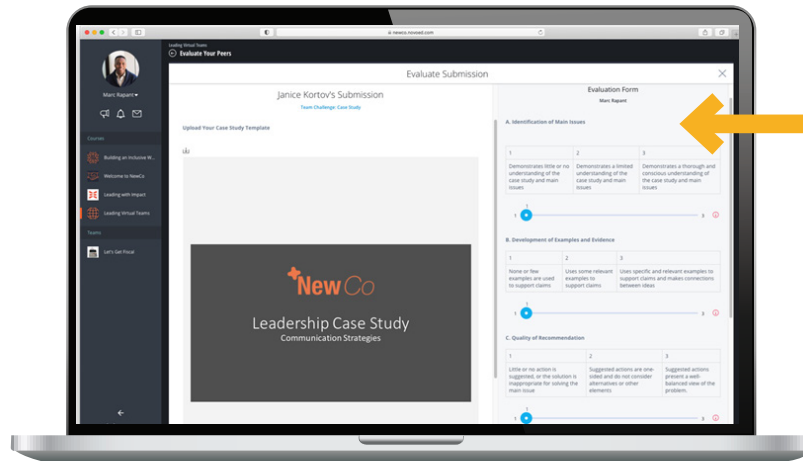


Of course, there are times when a manager needs to provide more detailed coaching.

In this example, the manager is provided an evaluation checklist and rates the salesperson's performance on each element of the work submitted.

Rather than having to remember all elements of the evaluation, managers are guided by the checklist and the salesperson receives more detailed coaching and feedback on their performance.

"

Regular feedback is one of the hardest things to drive through an organization.

—Daniel Kahneman

# Design Managers into the Learning

**Integrating Managers in Learning Matters**

Research shows that manager coaching of new skills has a significant impact on salesperson performance, and we can provide it. A study with nine different organizations and a total of around 300 managers revealed:

- When there was no manager coaching, sales performance improved about 10% from salesperson training alone.

- When managers were also trained as coaches, but not directly involved in the learning, the impact almost doubled to 18% improvement.

- When managers were integrated into the learning, performance improved 41%, more than 4 times the baseline.

## 10%
No Manager Coaching

## 18%
Managers Trained as Coaches

## 41%
Managers Part of the Learning Solution

# Design Managers into the Learning

**The Learning Platform Also Matters**

Making manager engagement easy is critical, and the data supports it.

Before our use of the learning platform, we provided assignments to salespeople and managers though email. When tracking engagement, we found that only 2% of managers provided feedback, which in turn caused salespeople to stop completing assignments about halfway through.

But, after implementing the learning platform, both manager engagement and salesperson activity went up dramatically. Managers provided feedback over 82% of the time, leading salespeople to complete almost all of their assignments.

**Before Learning Platform**

Challenges Completed **46%**

**2%** Manager Feedback Completed

**With Learning Platform**

Challenges Completed **91%**

Manager Feedback Completed **82%**

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# #1

## MOST PRESSING SALES TRAINING NEED:

### CREATE A BETTER CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

**1** Help Your Audience Focus
- Reduce irrelevant media
- Make gaming meaningful
- Use white space effectively

**2** Encourage Multiple Voices
- Allow salespeople to share insights and experiences
- Use expert coaching to drive improvement
- Use manager feedback to support usage

**3** Provide a Safe Place to Practice
- Keep models and processes simple
- Practice, practice, practice
- Apply to real-life situations

**4** Design Managers into the Learning
- Plan for manager involvement, not as an afterthought
- Facilitate monitoring of progress and performance
- Make it easy for managers to provide feedback and coaching

## PRIORITIES

Increase Win Rates

Shorten Sales Cycle

Reduce No Decisions

Shorten Time to Proficiency

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## Wilson Learning Worldwide

To further explore how Wilson Learning can help you create an effective sales development strategy, visit:

https://global.wilsonlearning.com/sales-solutions/

For more information, contact Wilson Learning at 1-800-328-7937 or visit www.wilsonlearning.com/contact.

## About the Authors

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Michael Leimbach, PhD, is Vice President of Global Research and Development for Wilson Learning Corporation. With more than 35 years in the field, Dr. Leimbach provides leadership for researching and designing Wilson Learning's diagnostic, learning, and performance improvement capabilities. He has managed major research studies in sales, leadership, and organizational effectiveness, and has developed Wilson Learning's impact evaluation capability and ROI models. He has served as a research consultant for global clients, was Editor-in-Chief of the ADHR journal, and serves on the ISO Technical Committee on Quality Standards for Learning Service Providers. Dr. Leimbach is a published author and frequent speaker at global conferences.

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David Yesford is Senior Vice President of Wilson Learning Corporation. With more than 35 years of experience developing and implementing human performance improvement solutions around the globe, Mr. Yesford brings valuable experience, strategic direction, and global perspective to his work. He has held strategic roles in Wilson Learning's core content areas of sales and leadership, as well as e-learning and strategic consulting. Mr. Yesford is the contributing author of several books and has been published in business publications around the world. He frequently speaks at international engagements, focusing on sales, leadership, employee and customer engagement, brand, and strategy implementation.

### Charlie Chung

Charlie Chung is VP of Business Development for NovoEd. He spent eight years in sales and marketing management consulting, helping numerous organizations size and structure their workforces and refine their value propositions. Over the past five years at NovoEd, Mr. Chung has helped design and develop a substantial number of online training programs for Fortune 500 companies, universities, and nonprofit organizations.

## About Wilson Learning

Our work with thousands of organizations has taught us that every organization is uniquely shaped by its history, culture, mission, values, lore, leadership, and, ultimately, its people. Every organization has a pulse.

For 55+ years, Wilson Learning has partnered with organizations around the world to consult on, assess, design, develop, deliver, reinforce, and sustain learning solutions, fueled by our passion and vision for "Helping People and Organizations Achieve Performance with Fulfillment."

Our broad-reaching capabilities include:

o Providing learning services that help address human performance needs, including performance consulting, instructional design, customization, and flexible delivery of learning solutions using every available modality

o Leveraging the wellspring of our Intellectual Property to produce double-digit percentage performance improvement in salesforces, workforces, and leadership ranks

o Bringing our implementation "know-how, can-do, and will-do" expertise to every learning initiative to fully engage key stakeholders and provide transformational learning that is recognized, reinforced, and sustained

o Employing our global presence to meet your needs for consistent learning solutions around the world, ensuring local and cultural adaptation while working in over 50 countries and 30 languages

## About NovoEd

**Building Sales Capabilities in the Brave New Digital World**
NovoEd's collaborative learning platform empowers organizations to design and deliver experiential learning that accelerates business performance on a global scale.

Since the company's founding at Stanford's social algorithm laboratory in 2012, global corporations, executive education providers, and training firms have relied on NovoEd to develop high-margin capabilities through purposeful practice and application, coaching and mentorship, and group collaboration. NovoEd's proven approach to learning connects diverse groups of learners, mentors, and leaders in a high-impact online environment.

Accelerate the impact of your business-critical training initiatives with engaging learning experiences that develop critical skills, enable collaboration, and promote inclusion—at scale.

o Collaborative Learning

o Transformational Scale

o Demonstrate Impact

o Enterprise Integrations

NovoEd's learning capabilities help you deliver powerful, engaging learning experiences that address your most important organizational challenges and facilitate positive behavior change.

*Award-winning collaborative learning solutions for transformational change*

**To learn more, visit: www.novoed.com.**