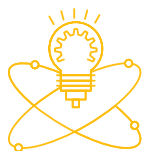


# THE WORLD NEEDS UNIVERSITY-EDUCATED SALESPEOPLE

Making the Case for Expanding Sales Education Through “Immersion” Programming



In the past, many salespeople were provided little, if any, formal training. They learned on-the-job, often from their customers. Today, many organizations have formal training programs and there are hundreds of independent sales training courses, each attempting to prepare salespeople in many industries for the dynamic environments in which they must work. For maximum effectiveness, sales education must acknowledge and address complexity and build customized programs and partnerships.



## COMPLEXITY AND ACTION

There are many more college-based sales courses and programs than there were five years ago. At Texas A&M University and other top tier institutions sales education occurs in multiple colleges—from business and agriculture to engineering and the college of medicine. Sales education is needed in a wide range of disciplines because it reflects the variety of organizations that benefit from employing individuals and teams with diverse technical competence AND great communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

Interdisciplinary education must be a priority to combat complexity. Sandra Eads, Director of Brand Licensing at Phillips 66 explains, “As business becomes increasingly competitive, companies are looking to recruit top talent with broad skill sets. We’re looking for recruits who have the technical capacity to understand our complex business, and also have the skills to sell our products in the marketplace.”

Several “Immersion” programs have been created by the Reynolds and Reynolds Sales Leadership Institute at Texas A&M University to address the needs of multiple industries. These programs are generally two-week boot camps that provide foundational business and sales knowledge to students who seek customer facing roles. Four Immersion programs have been developed including Sales+Analytics Immersion for Engineers, Business Immersion for Engineers, Business Immersion for the Health Sciences, and Tech Immersion for business students who are specifically interested in the tech industry. Students self-select into the immersion programs, which typically occur outside of the regular semester.



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# "THE WORLD NEEDS PEOPLE WHO CAN COMMUNICATE WELL, WHO CAN THINK CRITICALLY, WHO CAN SOLVE PROBLEMS. THAT'S WHAT SALESPEOPLE DO."

ELI JONES, DEAN OF MAYS BUSINESS SCHOOL, TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY



## SALES+ANALYTICS IMMERSION FOR ENGINEERS

The Sales+Analytics Immersion boot camp, offered to Texas A&M engineering majors, is a two-week intensive program designed for students to learn the fundamentals of selling, including methods for executing a sales process, and business analytics tools and resources that aid in making data-driven decisions. Students are introduced to the array of sales careers and issues specific to technical sales.

Additionally, the program provides students the opportunity to prepare and practice sales techniques and receive feedback from industry sponsors. Throughout the boot camp, engineering students are challenged to understand their emotional intelligence. Students use the CliftonStrengths and Chally Assessments to learn about themselves.

Also included in the boot camp are two role-play competitions—an individual competition and a team case competition. Industry sponsors are integrated throughout the boot camp by leading content-specific sessions, teaching specific sales skills relative to their company or industry, and by acting as a judge or buyer for the competitions. By the end of the boot camp students have the tools to determine their best fit in a sales career, have developed a digital portfolio of role-play practice, and have combined and demonstrated their analytical and communication skills.



## BUSINESS IMMERSION FOR ENGINEERS AND THE HEALTH SCIENCES

The Business Immersion program is offered separately to engineering students and students of the health sciences (currently medicine, dentistry, and pharmacy). Business Immersion is a two-week intensive course which exposes students to the core fundamentals of business including accounting, finance, management, supply-chain, marketing and sales. Participating students are coached to recognize, understand, and leverage their CliftonStrengths, and they attend sessions on etiquette and professionalism. An interdisciplinary group project is threaded through the program and challenges students to put what they are learning into action. The program culminates with teams presenting their business plans to panels of judges made up of faculty from the business school and the health science center. Industry sponsors engage with the students on multiple levels, including content-delivery, panel discussions, networking, and judging final project presentations.



## TECH IMMERSION FOR BUSINESS STUDENTS

The Tech Immersion boot camp is offered to business students from all majors that are interested in the technology industry. The purpose of the program is to provide industry-specific information so that students headed to careers in technology have a leg up on some fundamental concepts such as AI and cloud computing. The majority of content is offered through asynchronous gamified training. Through these activities, students learn the concepts vital to each area of concentration. As part of the program, participants have the opportunity to take industry-recognized certification exams in each concept area. Sponsoring companies provide training materials, take part in panel sessions, and engage in networking activities with participants.



## CUSTOMIZATION INCLUDES PARTNERSHIPS

Because of the complexity of sales roles and the critical need for collaboration, a customized approach to building partnerships between academia and multiple industries is necessary. Universities invest in their educational mission in addition to building their talent pipeline and working closely with partners to connect them with right students at the right time. For example, technical companies may want to connect with engineering students who self-select into sales education opportunities. Regardless of the organization, a customized approach to partnering helps ensure connections with the right students.

To accomplish overall educational goals, sales programs have a critical need to involve multiple industries. We need funding. We need advice. We need expertise. Most importantly, we need to connect our students to the job opportunities that are right for them.

Universities need industry partners to hold them accountable for keeping curriculum current. The advisory capacity in which partners serve is vital to our ability to produce knowledgeable, productive and resourceful salespeople. Industry partners keep us informed as their needs change and as their sales roles or processes change. Additionally, companies that partner with academic institutions play a critical role in the way students are educated since they influence and are integrated into the sales curriculum. ▲