

AN EXPERIENTIAL APPROACH: A MENTORING PROGRAM TO PROMOTE HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE IN PROFESSIONAL SELLING

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ABSTRACT

A concern of business executives is the lack of practical experience among today's college graduates. A number of pedagogical approaches such as role play exercises, discussion of current events, and in-class sales presentations introduce realism into the classroom, but these are only simulations of real-world experiences. The Sales Mentorship approach summarized below however, provides actual real-world experience. This is especially useful at institutions where many undergraduates have not had business experience.

The primary objective of the Sales Mentorship Program in a professional selling course is to involve students in the day-to-day operations of sales-related businesses. Ancillary objectives include: fostering on-the-job skills and competency, enhancing understanding of professional selling, encouraging individual development, and promoting a career outlet.

The implementation plan initially entails obtaining administrative commitment for the program. The following then must be done for the students: (1) introduce the program, (2) provide letters of introduction, (3) demonstrate the advantages of the program, (4) present

salespersons' job descriptions, (5) identify the potential on-the-job problems and liabilities which might be encountered, (6) explain the time commitment the program entails, (7) discuss the written and oral requirements of the program, and (8) describe the closing appreciation plan for the program.

Problems may arise during initial program implementation under certain circumstances. They might include the inability of students to find a mentor on their own, the lack of time to fully develop the program at schools on a short semester or quarter system, and varying levels of student involvement and interest in the program. Possible solutions can be developed in subsequent program offerings. Since these and other problems may arise, a sound assessment plan is critical to program effectiveness. Assessment involves careful monitoring and quick action. Ongoing evaluations, continuous scanning throughout the term such as a phone call to a mentor or discussing an activity report with students, and gathering positive and negative points about the program from mentors and students are helpful to ensure program success and fine-tune future program offerings.



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