PREPARING THE NEXT GENERATION OF SALES PROFESSIONALS THROUGH SOCIAL, EXPERIENTIAL, AND IMMERSIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

Research indicates active learning strategies are more effective than traditional passive learning strategies, especially when it comes to behavioral skill development. This paper presents a series of active learning assignments that incorporate a mixture of simulated and real-world learning experiences. These experiences are designed not only to enhance students' understanding of sales and improve their selling skills, but also to begin socializing students to the world of the sales professional.

INTRODUCTION

Business education continues to evolve as schools explore and develop new major content areas (e.g., entrepreneurship and professional selling) and new course delivery methods (e.g., web-based courses). A constant across emerging content and delivery methods is the concern for the quality and effectiveness of the learning experience. Active learning continues to be recognized as one of the most effective learning strategies available, yet it is often difficult to implement. While the advent of PowerPoint has improved the visual elements of the more traditional lecture formats, college students continue to lament classroom experiences dominated by non-interactive lecture.

The literature base is full of articles detailing the value of engaging students through active learning strategies, which for purposes of this paper include those based on social learning theory, experiential learning, and immersive learning. What has received little attention in the business school literature is the extent to which sales coursework helps socialize students to the business world in general and the role of a salesperson in particular. In other words, how well does the coursework and classroom experience help students better identify with their future roles as sales professionals, including the type of work they will be doing, the expectations for which they will be accountable, the typical day-to-day activities in which they will be engaging, and the language of the sales professional?

The purpose of this paper is to present a series of exercises that not only incorporate an active learning strategy, but are also designed to begin socializing students to the professional world. These active learning experiences are utilized in an advanced professional selling course and represent a mix of real-world and simulated experiences that challenge students to apply what they have or are learning and to begin thinking and acting like a sales professional. In addition to learning content, through these experiences students begin to understand and identify with what their professional lives may be like once they graduate and begin their careers.

BACKGROUND

Active learning suggests people learn better when they are fully engaged in the learning process. In contrast to learning via lecture only, active learning requires students to participate in the processes through discussion, reflective thinking, problem-solving, and/or other activity requiring the learner to cognitively process the new information presented.

The advantages of experiential or activity-based learning over traditional lectures have been recognized clearly. Experiential or active learning is not only more enjoyable but also more memorable for students (Karns 2005). Compared with other passive learning modes, experiential learning encourages social learning, which then promotes greater involvement and interest in the course content. These effects have been well documented (Sautter 2007; Young 2005; Frontezak 1998; Bridges 1999; Graeff 1998; Hamer 2000; Gremler et al. 2000). The increased motivation generated by class involvement (Young 2005; Bobbitt et al. 2000) also encourages critical thinking (Sautter 2007; Klebba and Hamilton 2007; Roy and Macchiette 2005), greater retention of information, and increased confidence with class material among the involved students.

Auster and Wylie (2006) developed what they referred to as a systematic approach to active learning. This systematic approach includes four interrelated dimensions of the teaching process: context setting, class preparation, class delivery, and continuous improvement. *Context setting* refers to "establishing a receptive, candid atmosphere for learning that facilitates student interaction and engagement" (Auster and Wylie 2006, p. 336). *Class preparation* refers to planning not only the content, but also the process by which the learning will take place. *Class delivery* refers to the actual implementation of the learning strategy during a classroom session. And *continuous improvement* refers to the process of monitoring the relative success of the learning strategy and then making improvements as needed and on a regular basis. Although not yet empirically tested, the systematic approach to active learning described by Auster and Wylie (2006) appears to be a valid and useful tool for implementing active learning experiences.

Social, Experiential, Immersive Learning

One form of active learning is learning based on social learning theory. Social learning theory suggests people learn by observing others, attempting to reproduce the behaviors they observe, and then modifying the behaviors based on feedback (positive or negative) from others. Learners' confidence and motivation to successfully engage in the behaviors along with their understanding of the associated consequences/benefits impact the effectiveness of the social learning experience.

Closely related to social learning theory is experiential learning theory (ELT). Kolb (1984) created a model describing the components of experiential learning. These components include Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. Essentially, the model details a learning process that includes actual experience, reflection on the experience, the integration of relevant theory, information and the reflections from the experience into new ideas, followed by the application of those ideas to new experiences. These new experiences may then serve to initiate the learning process again, promoting additional reflection, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Frontczak (1998) suggested marketing educators should develop experiential exercises based on Kolb's model, indicating that learning experiences lacking one or more of the four components are less effective (Kolb and Kolb 2005).

Immersive learning is a specialized form or experiential learning in which the student is immersed in an environment that generates the experiences. Johnson and Levine (2008) describe immersive learning experiences derived from students' experiences in virtual worlds (e.g., Second Life). Once immersed, students become part of the virtual world, interacting with the environment and learning from experiences that are created by design and/or experiences arising randomly from the interaction itself. One advantage of these virtual world immersive learning experiences is that students are allowed to interact with elements (including other people, activities, and so forth) and create and/or participate in experiences that may otherwise not be possible (e.g., due to expense or risk).

For purposes of this paper, we refer to immersive learning as student-driven (faculty guided) learning experiences requiring students to work (in teams) with community partners (business organizations, institutions, etc.) on real-world issues/challenges, producing a tangible outcome or product (e.g., book, DVD, business literature, etc.) addressing those issues/challenges. Students engaged in these immersive learning experiences work directly with community partner, codetermining (with the partner) the specifics of the tasks to be completed and the tangible outcomes to be produced. The students then work with the community partner over a period of weeks or months to complete the designated tasks. While similar to internships, immersive learning experiences differ in two critical ways. First, the instructor is involved throughout, driving students to engage in the reflective observation and abstract conceptualization steps of Kolb's model of experiential learning. Without an instructor actively guiding the students, these steps may be skipped. Second, immersive learning experiences are team-based. This provides students the opportunity to share and learn with and from each other. Immersive learning experiences are more complex than other, more traditional forms of experiential learning exercises, and as a result, are less common.

Active Learning and Socialization

Many schools offering one or more sales or sales management courses include some sort of sales call role-play (Sojka and Fish 2008). In the sales courses, the role plays typically involve the student (role playing as the salesperson) attempting to sell a product to someone (student or instructor) role playing as the buyer. A relative few number of articles have been written on the educational value of sales related role-plays. Those that have been written focus on how to create sales role-plays and/or their educational value (Widmier, Loe, and Selden 2007; McBane and Knowles 1994; Moncrief and Shipp 1994; Tanner and Chonko 1992; Castleberry 1989). The consensus among the published articles is that sales call role-plays represent a form of active (experiential) learning exercise that effectively helps students learn the skills necessary for success in sales careers. Yet, sales call role-plays are, by definition, simulated. In that sense, they are limited with respect to the extent to which they help students identify with the role of a salesperson. Though they may learn the skills, they don't do so in the context

of a "real-world" setting. Exercises involving exposure to "the real world," such as shadowing a salesperson for a day, provide students insight (via vicarious learning) into the role of a salesperson and should help socialize students to those roles. However, because the learning experience is vicarious, students don't get the opportunity to engage in the behaviors (as they do with role-plays).

The lack of accurate socialization, or rather "anticipatory socialization may lead "entry-shock" (Paulson and Baker 1999). Entry-shock describes the feelings arising as a result of the mismatch between what the new employee expected and what he/she actually experiences with respect to socialization (Paulson and Baker 1999). While entry-shock may not adversely affect all new hires, previous research suggests a link between accurate anticipatory socialization and outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment (Dubinsky et al. 1986), and indirectly to turnover (e.g., Ingram and Lee 1991). Paulson and Baker (1999) address the issue of socializing students to the professional setting in which they will find themselves after graduation. They found that by implementing course exercises designed begin socializing students to the business world (i.e., anticipatory socialization), students were less likely to experience entry-shock. While the Paulson and Baker (1999) work centered on general business socialization, their results suggest anticipatory socialization to professional selling careers via learning experiences while in school may reduce entry-shock for college graduates starting their careers in sales.

The learning experiences described in this paper were created for Advanced Professional Selling course. They were developed to reflect the learning processes described above but in a way that provides the socializing aspects of the vicarious learning experiences with the behavioral and skill building benefits of the role-playing (active learning) experiences. Exercises (described below) include behavioral modeling and reproduction in simulated and real-world settings, reflective thinking, and problem solving (individually and in teams), and student-directed real-world projects.

THE SOCIAL, EXPERIENTIAL, AND IMMERSIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Enrollment in the Advanced Professional Selling course is by permission only. To "apply" for the enrollment, students must write a letter to the instructor describing why they feel they should be allowed to register for the course. For each student applying, the instructor reviews the application letter and seeks a recommendation from that student's Professional Selling course (prerequisite) instructor. Finally, the student applying for a spot in the class must complete an interview with the instructor. During the interview, the instructor and the student discuss the nature of the course, the types of

learning experiences, and the corresponding expectations.

To create the correct course context setting, as described by Auster and Wylie (2006), at the beginning of the semester the instructor reviews with the students the nature of the coursework, the learning experiences, the expectations, and the benefits associated with successfully completing the assignments and course. Consistent with Kolb (1984) and Kolb and Kolb (2005), students are encouraged to share their feelings about the learning experiences and to help shape their learning experiences by determining how they will execute the assignments. During the discussion the instructor advises students to pursue, where possible, inclusion of organizations or industries in which they have a professional interest in order to enhance their levels of engagement in the exercises.

Below are descriptions of five active learning experiences, including an overview, directions, examples, and benefits. These learning experiences were created for a 15-week (one semester) advanced selling course. Table 1 (below) contains a summary of these learning experiences.

IMMERSIVE LEARNING PROJECT (IMMERSIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE)

Overview

The purpose of this immersive learning project is to help students apply what they are learning in a real-world setting where accountability for the results extends beyond the classroom. In addition, the project is designed to get students working outside their comfort zones, producing an end-product that is not only useful to the participating organization, but beyond students' perceptions of their own capabilities at the start of the project.

Directions

A critical component of the immersive learning experience is that it is student directed. Accordingly, project instructions are somewhat limited. Teams are told only that they must work with a cooperating business organization to determine a sales-related issue/challenge to be addressed via a sales-related (e.g., training, promotional) multimedia tool.

Students form teams of three to five members. The teams must identify the organization with which they would like to work and the appropriate person within the organization to contact. They must then communicate with the contact person (client) and secure that person's agreement to participate in the project. The student teams must then meet with their respective clients, explain the nature of the project, and then co-determine (with the client) the objectives of the project and the desired outcome. For example, some clients are interested in

sales training tools while others are interested in presentations they can use in tradeshows or place on their websites.

Once the desired outcome is determined, the teams work with the client to collect relevant content (e.g., text, video, audio) and determine and add any content they feel is appropriate. Next, the teams develop the presentation strategy for the content and begin putting the pieces together to create the final product. The team must then make the final product available to the client to be used at the client's discretion. Finally, each team is required to submit for evaluation the training tool and a short paper detailing the team's experience.

Examples

After interviewing the contact a team learns that the client organization's salespeople are having trouble developing a high degree of trust with their customers. Further, they learn that trust is important to the client's customers and plays a critical role in the purchase decision process. That team would then develop a self-running multimedia presentation that describes the components of trust and steps the salespeople may take to develop greater trust with their customers. The team would then make the project available to the cooperating organization and submit the project and paper for evaluation.

A participating company is looking to create sales-oriented video for a new product that it can run on a monitor during tradeshows. The team works with the client to determine the message and collect the necessary content. The team, using the provided content, creates a movie and delivers it to the client in an appropriate format (e.g., QuickTime, Windows Media File) for showing during tradeshows and other events.

Benefits

This project challenges students in many ways. First, the process of finding a cooperating organization requires greater effort and attention than students initially perceive (while we provide the teams a list of prospective organizations, we do not contact any organization on behalf of the teams). Students spend time working out, sometimes through trial and error, how they need to go about getting an organization to participate in the project. This helps students with their communication and selling skills, while at the same time giving them a dose of real-world experience.

Second, identifying an appropriate sales-related issue challenges students' time management, interviewing and reasoning skills as they must coordinate meetings with individuals who work in the "real world" and whose schedules aren't always as flexible or accommodating as students' schedules. Further, they must be able to identify

a topic that is within the scope of their sales knowledge. This can be an eye-opening experience as it reminds students that selling is truly a complex process requiring a variety of skills.

Third, teams must figure out for themselves how to create the self-running multimedia training tool. This process includes not only creating the content and how it will be organized, but to employ the appropriate technology to create the end-product. When initiated by the teams, we will consult with the students on the content and how to organize it. We will also provide suggestions for campus resources that will help the teams with the technology needed to create the presentations. Typically, students solicit help from people (students or staff) who have expertise in multimedia development. This experience serves to enhance students' ability to work in cross-functional teams.

COORDINATING A GUEST SPEAKER (EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE)

Overview

This assignment gives students the opportunity to coordinate a presentation by a guest speaker, including contacting the guest speaker, providing directions, arranging parking, arranging meeting space, coordinating and setting-up any needed audio-video equipment, and providing refreshments (when appropriate). The purpose of this assignment is to develop students' communication, time management, and organizational skills.

Directions

Working in teams of two, students contact their assigned guest-speaker to coordinate that speaker's visit on campus. Based on feedback from the guest speaker, students must work with university personnel to reserve appropriate meeting space and any needed a/v or computer equipment. The teams must ensure the speaker has directions to the campus and the meeting location, has the necessary parking instructions and passes, and is greeted properly upon arrival to campus. Students are provided a small budget they may use to pay for refreshments or anything else needed for the speaker's visit and presentation. Students are evaluated on the relative success of the event and feedback from the guest speaker.

Benefits

Because this is not a simulated experience, students gain the sort of real-world experience they may accrue sometime early in their professional careers. Because they are accountable for the relative success of the event, they can begin to identify with (socialization) the role of a salesperson or other business person tasked with coor-

dinating a meeting. Perhaps the biggest lesson students learn from this experience is that even relatively small tasks requiring coordination among multiple individuals require planning, communication, and execution. Common "first-time" mistakes included failure to acquire parking passes, failure to acquire the correct a/v equipment, failure to test the a/v equipment in the meeting room, and so forth. One team arranged for the speaker to arrive at a designated place and time but failed to arrange for anyone from the team to meet the guest and escort him to the meeting room.

This exercise requires the instructor to pay close attention to the progress of the student teams (planning and execution) while allowing them to make mistakes along the way. This can be challenging given that the mistakes usually adversely impact the experience of the guest speaker. To minimize the impact of those mistakes, guest speakers were alerted (unbeknown to the students) to the assignment ahead of time and asked to provide feedback on their experience with the student teams.

MANAGER/COACH (EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE)

Overview

Advanced Professional Selling (APS) students are required to serve as Managers/Coaches to students enrolled in the Professional Selling (PS) course. A large portion of the PS students' semester grade is based on their ability to demonstrate their basic selling skills in video recorded sales call role plays. The primary responsibility of the manager/coach (APS student) is to help the PS students learn the basic selling skills in preparation for the role play sales calls. The APS students are told that they are accountable for the performance of the PS students in their sales call role plays.

Directions

Each APS student is assigned one to three PS students and instructed to initiate contact with those students. The APS students are required to arrange meeting times with those students in the video recording labs where they can engage in the training. APS students will answer questions, practice role playing, and model appropriate behaviors as they help prepare the PS students. They are also asked to write confidential candid evaluations of each of the students they are coaching, including an assessment of the students' readiness for the sales call. The evaluations may include feedback on the PS students' attendance (regarding the training sessions), strengths, weaknesses, overall attitude toward the assignment, and a prediction of how the student will perform in the sales call role play. The instructor can use these

reports to assess the extent to which the manager/coach (APS student) met the requirements of the assignment.

Benefits

Students benefit from this experience in several ways. First, the experience of teaching the skills to other students reinforces their own skill levels and helps them better understand the importance of the behaviors and concepts covered in the PS course. Second, the assignment gives them experience with being accountable for the performance of others, something they will experience in their professional careers. Finally, the exercise helps them understand the importance of effective time management (with respect to their own time management, and how others on whom they are dependent manage their time).

IN-BASKET EXERCISE (EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE)

Overview

Many of the professional salespeople and sales managers that have visited our classes as guest speakers have told stories about how they've had to book a business trip on the spur of the moment. More than of few of these stories include problems resulting from things like failing to account for time zone changes, travel time (e.g., to and from the airport, or from a hotel to the account), or weather conditions (e.g., not taking a raincoat or umbrella to a location expecting a great deal of rain). These salespeople and sales managers point out that their walking into an account late, tired, soaking wet, or otherwise disheveled could have been eliminated through better travel planning.

This assignment gives students the opportunity to learn how to plan a business trip. In this exercise students must, in the role of a salesperson, plan a trip to a major city (located in a different climate and time zone) to visit with a major account. The scenario requires students to not only book their flights, but also make arrangements for a rental car and an overnight stay at a local hotel. Students then provide their sales manager's (the instructor) an itinerary, expense estimate, and general description of the trip.

Directions

The instructor, in the role of sales manager, informs the students (in the role of salespeople) that a major account has called and asked for a representative to call on them in two days. The sales manager tells the salespeople that the company travel director has called in sick so each salesperson must make his/her own travel

arrangements. However, prior to finalizing the arrangements, each salesperson must submit for the sales manager's approval a report summarizing the travel arrangements, including a detailed itinerary, a cost estimate, time zone changes, the weather forecast, and what they plan to wear. Students are evaluated on the viability of their travel plans, the associated costs, and their ability to communicate this information in a professional manner.

Benefits

The primary benefit of this exercise is better planning skills. While a few students are already sufficiently detail-oriented when it comes to business travel planning, most take this sort of planning for granted. Many expect to simply go online, quickly make the flight, hotel, and car arrangements, and then write it up and turn it in. They soon find that allowing for enough travel time (traffic conditions, security issues, equipment to bring, baggage fees, and so forth), accounting for weather conditions and time zone changes, and taking other business travel issues into consideration is a more complex task than they had thought.

This exercise is, in effect, a role play and is subject to some of the same advantages and disadvantages of using role plays in general (as educational tools). However, this experience adds additional realism in the sense that students must develop a workable travel itinerary based on real-world information (flight schedules, weather conditions, and so forth). The additional realism helps students realize that an assignment to make "simple" travel arrangements quickly turns into an exercise in time management and planning.

SALES MENTOR (SOCIAL AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE)

Overview

Turnover in the sales arena has been historically high (i.e., as much as 50% or more). Much of this may be attributed to new employees (i.e., recent college graduate not seasoned professional) not understanding what they are getting themselves into. By spending time in the field with a salesperson, observing and asking questions, students can gain greater insight into what a sales job entails on a day-to-day basis. This additional insight may serve to reduce turnover.

This assignment, which is based on social learning theory, requires students to find sales professionals who will serve as their mentors for the semester. Students spend time with their mentors in the field, observing and learning about the mentor's products, their jobs, and their customers. In addition, students must participate in two sales call role-plays in which they sell the mentor's

product. In the first role-play the students must sell the product to the mentor (role playing as a buyer). In the second role-play, the student must sell the product to one of the mentor's actual customers. This role-play is conducted in the field at the customer's location.

Directions

Students are told they need to secure a mentor with whom they will work multiple times during the semester. The first step for the students is to identify a sales professional whom they would like to have as a mentor. Students are encouraged to identify potential mentors within companies or industries in which they would like to work after graduation. This helps them to begin developing their professional networks/relationships and gives them a chance to make sure those companies/industries are a good fit for them. Several sales professionals have agreed to participate in this program so the instructor can provide students help if they are having trouble identifying mentors on their own.

The second step is to secure that sale professional's agreement to serve as a mentor (which is a sales job in itself). Students must thoroughly explain to the prospective mentor the time commitment and level of involvement necessary to make the experience successful. This includes allowing the student to spend one or more days with the mentor in the field, having the mentor visit the campus to conduct the mid-term role-play, and allowing the student to make a sales call (that will be recorded) on one of the prospective mentor's customers. If the sales professional agrees to serve as mentor, the student can move onto the next step.

The next step requires the student to conduct an industry analysis with respect to the mentor's company, and an interview of the mentor to learn more about what that sales professional's job entails. Students are expected to learn, among other things, (1) what it takes to be successful in their field, (2) what their sales process looks like, (3) what role technology (i.e., CRM, etc.) plays in their company, and (4) what the typical selling experience is like. Next, students must also identify a buyer in the industry that this salesperson calls on and ask them a set of questions, including: (1) which salespeople get in to see them and why, and (2) which salespeople don't get in to see them and why?

After spending time in the field with the mentor, the student must engage in the midterm role play. During the midterm role play (conducted on campus and viewed by the rest of the class), students must sell the mentor's product(s) to the mentor who role-plays as a "typical customer" with whom the salesperson may call on. Students are evaluated on their ability to successfully demonstrate the appropriate selling and communication skills during the role-play. At the end of the role play, the mentor is given the opportunity to share with the rest of

the class information about their organizations and associated career opportunities. This gives the mentor access to all the students in the advanced selling course.

At or near the end of the semester, students make a sales call on one of the mentor's customers. The student must take a video camera and video record the entire sales call. Obviously this requires the willing participation of one of the mentor's customers. Depending upon the comfort level of the mentor and the mentor's customer, the sales call may be real or simulated. Either way, the sales call is conducted in the field with the student selling a real product to a real customer.

Benefits

This active learning assignment, involving behavioral modeling and reproduction, provides several benefits. First, students get to observe sales professionals in action, learning what the lives of salespeople are like in the "real-world." This observation helps socialize students into the world of the sales professional. Second, the mentors model sales behaviors in real-world settings, which helps students better understand the skills they are learning and adds credibility to the course instruction. Finally, feedback regarding students' ability to reproduce the selling behaviors (via mid-term and final) helps them hone their skills.

Perhaps the biggest benefit (at least from the students' perspective) is that students often find the relationship they establish with the mentor results in job opportunities, either with the mentor's company or through the mentor's connections. Students also report the experience provides them valuable insight that helps them better determine the type of sales career, if any, that is appropriate for them. Finally, the critical feedback they get from their mentors and the instructor during the semester helps them sharpen their selling and communication skills.

TABLE 1
SUMMARY OF LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Experience	Type of Learning	Overview Experience	Cognitive/Skill Developed	Time Frame	Biggest Challenges
Immersive Learning Project	Immersive	Develop deliverable product (e.g., multimedia sales aid) for real-world organization	Cooperative/Teamwork; Time management; Reasoning; Problem-solving; Marketing communications; Multimedia software Planning and resource	Semester	Identifying client
Coordinating a Guest Speaker	Experiential	Coordinate all aspects of a guest speaker's visit	coordination; Decision-making; Budgeting; Intra-organizational communications; Interpersonal communications	Two weeks (once speaker is identified & contacted)	Scheduling appropriate meeting space; Making sure all technology needs are met.
Manager/Coach	Experiential	Work with students in intro sales courses	Teaching/coaching; Interpersonal communications; management; sales knowledge and behaviors	Two to four weeks	Coordinating meeting times with other students
In-Basket	Experiential	Develop a detailed travel agenda for a sales-trip	Planning and resource coordination; Time management; Intra-organizational communications	One day	Taking in to account adequate travel time (e.g., to and from airport, fees, and sales tools/aids to take.
Sales Mentor real	Social & Experiential	Learn from professional salesperson (mentor) through observation interaction and role play; sell to one of mentor's customers	Observation; Interpersonal communications; Time management; sales knowledge and behaviors	Semester	Coordinating mentor's campus visit role-play; Coordinating sales call on actual customer.

STUDENT FEEDBACK

After each exercise and at the end of the semester the instructor provides students the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the assignments. While not tracked empirically, the instructors report the most common themes discussed in the feedback are workload and value of the assignments. Comments like ". . . your class may have been one of the more challenging classes, but I have gained experience that will last a lifetime, Thanks for a stressful . . . but fulfilling semester" are not uncommon. Although students indicate the workload is greater than the workload of most other classes, they often concede it is manageable. Further discussion usually reveals the students who had trouble managing the workload were the ones who procrastinated, waiting until the last minute to begin working on the assignments.

Feedback from students also indicates the assignments provide greater value than those of other courses. Students appreciate and value the opportunity to interact with the "real-world" and engage in activities that help them better understand and identify with what it's like to be a professional salesperson. For some students, the coursework helps them determine that a particular company, industry, or job type is a good fit for them, for others it helps them determine that a particular company, industry, or job type is not a good fit for them. The latter is beneficial not only to the students, but to the companies who may have hired those students.

CONCLUSION

As business school educators, our job is to help students develop their cognitive and behavior skills in general, and more specifically as they relate to preparation for careers in business. Evidence suggests active learning approaches to teaching (more specifically, social, experiential, and immersive learning experiences) do a better job of educating students and preparing them for careers than passive learning experiences.

Following the systematic approach to active learning described by Auster and Wylie (2006), the exercises described in this paper utilize active learning formats in both simulated and real-world settings. The intent of including real-world experiences is not only to enhance the learning of the skills, but also to help socialize the students into the role of a professional salesperson. Students expect to engage in these exercises as they would (or will) in their professional lives. The experience, reflection, abstract observation, and active experimentation (role plays) associated with these experiences/exercises help promote more accurate anticipatory socialization – giving students greater confidence in their abilities and greater confidence in their expectations of what life will be like as professional salespeople.

Fostering more accurate anticipatory socialization

may reduce entry-shock, leading to greater job satisfaction. And as existing research indicates, greater job satisfaction lowers the probability of turnover. Additional research is needed to empirically exam/test these relationships within the context of college graduates taking entry-level sales positions.

Successful implementation of these exercises requires commitment from the instructor, the students, and the participating sales professionals and organizations. However, the setting up and successfully executing these experiences provides benefits to each of the parties involved. Faculty stay connected to business professionals which helps to enhance and keep relevant their understanding of current business practices. These experiences also provide faculty the opportunity to build a network of business contacts. Properly managed, this network can improve recruiting opportunities for students and lead to financial support for grants, scholarships, and other educational initiatives.

Participating sales professionals benefit from the increased recruiting opportunities arising from greater access to the students. Serving as a mentor gives the entire class greater exposure to the mentor's organization and associated career opportunities. Students learn from the mentors' presentations and informally from the mentees. In effect, the mentees serve as ambassadors for their respective mentors and mentors' organizations.

Students are likely to begin the course with some trepidation, primarily due to what they perceive as a significant workload. However, as the course settles in and students have the opportunity to engage in these learning experiences, they quickly realize the potential value to be derived from engaging in the learning process. Although not empirically tested, this engagement should lead to greater commitment to the learning process. Finally, students typically report (once they graduate) that they are better prepared in terms of expectations and skill sets than their counterparts (those without a sales education) for their sales careers. Below are examples of feedback from alumni who (at the time) had recently graduated and taken jobs in sales (b2b).

"The main thing that I wanted to relay back to you and [the other instructors] is that the things that you are doing in the [sales course are] real world and the best that it can be. I am as equipped if not better equipped than anyone else in my training class."

" . . . the students think there is a difference between textbook, and real world and you are doing a great job of blending [these] together to get someone better prepared than any other school out there. Please continue pushing the envelope and developing great curriculum."

"I wanted to write and say thank you for preparing me for my career in sales. I accepted a sales position for the [a company] in San Leandro, CA last July, and I never had the chance to show my appre-

ciation for how well the sales program actually prepared me for this job. There are so many parallels with what you teach in the program and what I use every day at every call."

As sales recruiters increasingly turn to schools teaching sales to hire the next generation of sales professionals, those schools will need to find ways to enhance students' preparation for sales careers. By improving students' skill sets and initiating the anticipatory socialization process, our objective is to increase students' chances of success, and reduce the likelihood of turnover resulting from unrealistic expectations (as to what a sales job entails) and a lack of preparedness. Our experiences suggest the sorts of active learning experiences described in this article are the best way to achieve that objective.

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