

Chapter 13

Using Experiential Client-Based Projects in Sport Sales Courses

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ABSTRACT

Sales has gradually gained traction in the sport management programs over the past 15 years. This article examines the extent to which client-based experiential projects are used in sport sales courses and determines if teaching practices are different in client-based and non-client-based courses. Online survey responses were received from 36 of 85 sport management programs that offer a sport sales course. Results indicated that 58.3% of sport sales courses utilized a client-based experiential sales project. The sports properties that partner with sales classes the most are college athletics, minor league teams, and Big Five professional sports teams. Clients provided students with leads in 55% of the projects. The most popular organizational model was the independent model, which was employed by 70% of the courses engaging in a client-based project, followed by the on-campus and in-venues models. Client-based courses were more likely to use mock sales calls, guest speakers, and the Sales Huddle game. Implications for teaching client-based experiential courses are addressed.

INTRODUCTION

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Despite the fact that sales is a career pursued by many majors on college campuses, a shortage of sales talent exists in many fields, including sport management (Cummins, Peltier, Erffmeyer, & Whalen, 2013; Popp, Simmons, McEvoy, 2017). Within the sport industry, the growth of business-to-consumer inside sales teams in professional sports and college athletics has created demand for qualified salespeople (Pierce, Popp, & McEvoy, 2017). Sales positions outnumber all other types of entry-level positions by a 3-to-1 margin, according to data available on leading sports job search site Teamwork Online. For ex-

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7707-3.ch013

ample, ticket sales and service positions accounted for 34% of all entry-level jobs on Teamwork Online in October 2017, and this number rises to 41% when including jobs in sponsorship sales. In sum, ticket and sponsorship sales positions accounted for 24% of all jobs on the site. Another leading website for job searches, Work In Sports, estimated that 53% of job postings require some level of sales experience or competence (Clapp, 2016). Despite the prevalence of entry-level jobs in sales, sport management programs have been slow to respond to this marketplace reality. A comprehensive review of sport management programs revealed that only 22% of undergraduate sport management programs have a course in sport sales (Pierce, in press). This adoption rate mirrors the 21% adoption of sales courses in AACSB-accredited institutions in business schools (Fogel, Hoffmeister, Rocco, & Strunk, 2012). The underrepresentation of sales education in the sport management curriculum is problematic given the significant quantity of entry-level positions and the above-average compensation levels and upward mobility for those successful in those entry-level positions (Pierce et al., 2017).

The paucity of sales education within the sport management curriculum has resulted in a void of sales talent prepared to fill the available positions. Compounding the problem on the academic side of the equation are the ineffective sales management strategies used to prepare entry-level salespeople for success. Kirby (2017) noted the high turnover rate stems from forcing entry-level salespeople in their early 20s, who rarely use their smartphone for phone calls, to make 100 scripted calls per day in a boiler room environment. This creates a top-down indoctrination structure that does not allow for creative thinking and offers little professional development and training. In fact, Popp et al. (2017) found nearly a quarter of sales hires in college athletics received fewer than two hours of training before making their first sales call. Even more shocking, half of the respondents to the survey indicated that their employer provided fewer than two hours of monthly on-going training. As a result, entry-level sport sales positions have seen high rates of turnover. It is estimated that five out of six entry-level ticket salespeople either choose to leave sales or are let go from their positions (King, 2010), a rate significantly higher than the 28% annual turnover in other businesses (Fogel et al., 2012). Therefore, it is critical that sport sales educators provide students with high-quality sales education that simulates real-world environments to best prepare them to succeed in their first sales position.

Sales educators are increasingly focused on linking theory to practice through experiential learning (Irwin, Southall, & Sutton, 2007; Pierce & Petersen, 2015). Because the most basic purpose of sales education is to provide students with the competencies needed for success in sales, sales education should utilize an experiential approach where faculty serve as the coach (Anderson et al., 2005). Students can get experience making actual sales calls through client-based experiential sales projects. Professional sales courses in the business education literature have presented similar projects with students selling advertising for newspapers or magazines and attracting students to the business major (Chapman & Avila, 1991; Milner, 1995). These projects move beyond role-playing and video analysis, which stop short of giving students a complete sales experience, by offering students the opportunity to make sales calls. Reliance on lecture, role-playing, and video analysis does not provide students with a complete selling experience because students miss prospecting, talking to customers, conducting a needs analysis, and following up to close the sale.

The extent to which client-based projects are utilized is currently unknown in the business and sport management literature. It is also unknown how teaching methods differ for those using client-based projects and those not using client-based projects. The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which client-based experiential projects are used in sport sales courses in the United States and determine if teaching practices differ between client-based courses and non-client-based courses. To accomplish

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