The Origins and Early History of Sales Training:
A Descriptive Study of Sales Training Prior to 1900

By Jon M. Hawes and C. David Shepherd

Sales training is big business employing a significant number of people to provide this vital service to firms of all sizes. However, one may ask, when and where did sales training first emerge? What sales techniques were taught in these early instructional programs? What companies and industries were pioneers in using this tool to gain a strategic advantage in the marketplace? This article answers these questions through a descriptive review of the available literature about the beginning of formal sales training beginning in the 1800s. Understanding the origins of selling and sales instruction is important for those teaching sales. Specifically, by providing this historical perspective of selling, sales instructors and educators will be better able to develop more effective sales techniques and provide training with greater impact.

INTRODUCTION

Sales training is nearly ubiquitous within modern American firms, especially for those selling within the industrial marketplace. LinkedIn estimated that in 2018, $15 billion was spent on training sales employees in the United States (LinkedIn 2019), and the Association for Talent Development recently reported results of a national survey showing an average organizational annual expenditure of $2,326 per salesperson on sales training (Cole 2019). Given this expenditure, it is evident that sales training has become an important sector within the U.S. economy. Such large expenditures on sales training are not surprising when one considers the high return on investment for training expenditures. In fact, Accenture reported that training provides a ROI of 353 percent (Vanthournout et al. 2006). In other words, for every $100 investment in training, the company found that it experienced a return of that $100 investment plus an *additional* $353 of "measurable value to their bottom line" (Vanthournout et al. 2006).

Given its importance and the expenditures made for sales training, it seems surprising to find so little written about its origin and early history. While considerable research has focused on the history of related topics

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such as advertising (e.g., Beede 2021; Coolsen 1947), the behaviors of salespeople[1] (e.g., Church 2008; French 2016), brand management (Aimé et al. 2018), and retailing (Doherty and Alexander 2015), we were able to identify only one article focusing on the history of sales training (Stein 2007). Further, even though the seeds of sales training had been sown over a century earlier, Stein's article limited its attention to sales training after 1930.

The purpose of this manuscript is to address this gap in our knowledge concerning sales training's past by providing an overview of the origin and early history of sales training prior to 1990. To that end, this descriptive research will examine an exhaustive search of articles, propriety information, and other artifacts focusing on the training of salespeople in the context of pre-1900. Before beginning that discussion, however, the usefulness of historical research in sales training will be discussed.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH PROVIDES INSIGHT

Why study the history of sales training? This question can be answered from both an applied and a theoretical perspective. While many justifications have been offered for historical research in the social sciences (Bloxham 2020; Flippin 1923), in business disciplines in general (Williamson 1966), and in marketing specifically (e.g., Savitt 1980; 2009), the applied justification provided by Ferrell et al. (2015) for studying the history of marketing

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[1] Throughout this paper, we use gender-neutral terms such as salespeople or salesperson unless a direct quotation is provided even though during the 1800s, nearly all field or outside (not retail clerks) sales workers were men.

education offers perhaps the most appropriate analogy for understanding the value of historical research about sales training. Ferrell and his colleagues (2015) explained that marketing professors engage in activities designed to help increase students' understanding of marketing. In order to be successful, professors must have a thorough and deep understanding of how that content knowledge of marketing evolved over time. Beyond this important justification, a strong knowledge of marketing education history helps educators know more about the discipline itself, which enables them to be "more comfortable and credible in the classroom, given the broader perspectives they bring when teaching" (p. 159).

In other words, knowing about the history of how a topic has been taught can lead to better instruction. Ferrell et al. (2015) continued by noting that marketing educators are often tempted to emphasize the latest trends or fads without acknowledging the foundations and principles underlying such developments. Ferrell et al. (2015) stressed the need for more historical research in marketing education by stating, "Professors who know and appreciate the history of marketing education are better positioned to teach current content and anticipate the future" (p. 160).

While the Ferrell et al. (2015) research focused on the history of marketing education, the same principles are just as applicable to the study of the history of sales training. Individuals impacted by sales training tend to fall into one of three groups. People in the first group work in sales and are studying to improve their own sales performance. Individuals in the second group are current sales students in college sales courses preparing for jobs in sales and developing skill sets that will enable them to secure work in sales and quickly ramp-up to becoming a successful salesperson. Finally, people in the third group, sales trainers, educators, and managers, use sales training content and methods to transfer that knowledge to others.

Regardless of the reason for studying sales training, putting those techniques into a historical context can provide the student with a much richer understanding of not just how to rotely use the technique but also why the technique is used and how it can be modified and applied in differing situations. In other words, understanding the historical foundation for a sales concept should aid

in both applying the theory and in anticipating future applications of it (Upshaw et al. 2018).

As previously mentioned, the study of the history and development of sales training can also be justified from a theoretical perspective. In his 1980 article, Savitt answers the question, "Why Study Marketing History?" with the following:

> Historical study adds a robust quality to a discipline. It enables scholars within the discipline, as well as society at large, to gain an understanding of its origins and its patterns of change. Such study relates a disciple to its past and to other disciplines. Historical study helps to establish an identity for a discipline by providing some idea of where it is and what it is (p. 52).

Savitt also explained that the lack of historical marketing research stems from the lack of appreciation of its importance and the lack of a method. As he states, "As an applied discipline, marketing must cater to its client market of decision-makers (1980, p.54)." He continues to point out that decision-makers want information for making better decisions today, and, as a result, research looking backward would be considered a luxury. As sales is one of the most applied streams of marketing research, it should come as no surprise that little research has looked at the history and development of the selling discipline, and even less is known about the origin and development of sales training.

Along with his discussion of the need for historical research in marketing, Savitt (1980) also discussed a method for that research. Savitt stressed that historical research should be based on the principles of the scientific method and that it must retain the objectivity of that method. He cautions that subjectivity can creep into historical research as a result of differences between the past and the present. Savitt also notes that historical research is not deterministic. Instead, he states that "Historical research and writing are basically descriptive, they begin with the narration of events in a time sequence" (1980, p. 53). Following the guidance provided by Savitt, the following pages will provide a chronological description of sales training efforts prior to 1900 to begin the process of building a more robust understanding of this subset of marketing history.

A CHRONOLOGICAL REVIEW OF SALES TRAINING HISTORY

Putting Sales into Its Historical Context

When thinking about the origins of sales training, it is important to know about the history of selling. In the early 1800s, the prevailing wisdom among the public, and more importantly among business executives making sales enablement decisions, was that success in sales was based on natural ability. In other words, salespeople were born, not made (e.g., *Clothier and Furnisher* 1890; Goddard 1889; Kahn and Shuchman 1961; Townley 2019). As historian Mark Bernstein (1996, pp. 26-27) pointed out, salespeople of the 1800s were seen as "drummers, men who, at least in their own minds, lived by their wits, sold by their charm . . . Selling was a slap on the back, a fresh joke and a stale cigar when the deal was struck." Interestingly, the word "salesmanship" had not even entered our language until the 1880s when it was added to *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Spears 1993).

Powers et al. (1987), Friedman (2004), and Spears (1995) have provided insightful and thoroughly researched depictions of selling in the 1800s. These researchers described an environment in which firms were usually quite small, customers were typically in rural areas as most people worked on a family farm, very few people graduated from high school, communication was slow or lacking (the telephone was not even invented until 1876), roads were often unpaved or not yet built, and demand typically exceeded supply. That last insight, demand exceeding supply, clearly limited the need for sales training or the use of sophisticated selling methods (Fullerton 1988). In addition, Church (2008) pointed out that during the period from 1750 to 1850, in small to medium-size enterprises, the owner or a family member usually performed the very limited selling role, which was often no more than handling the exchange process.

Crick (1847) and Guild (1937) provided interesting firsthand descriptions of a New England "peddler" and what a life in sales was like during the early 1800s. Travel was difficult, accommodations were often unavailable, and movement from town to town was necessary to sell goods. As was standard business practice, Guild bought a stock of inventory and kept traveling to new towns selling it until his inventory was depleted from his wagon. Similarly, Darnton (2017) presented an overview of the diaries and correspondence of a commas voyageur (translates to English as traveling salesperson) working at a Swiss publishing company, Jean-Francois Favarger. These documents were written during his business travels of 1775 and 1776. His diaries and correspondence are especially interesting because they provide evidence of Favarger carrying out many of the same tasks as modern salespeople. Those tasks include gathering market and customer information for his company and negotiating with potential customers as well as with suppliers.

Given the small scale of industry, it was not unexpected that sales training did not flourish during that era. For example, Darnton (2017) noted that Favarger's sales training consisted only of mastering clerical work and following instructions. No doubt, when traveling salespeople gathered after a long day of selling, they likely talked among themselves about how a demanding customer was handled or how a prospect was converted into a purchaser. Beyond such informal talks, however, there appeared to be little else available to help salespeople prepare for career success.

Earliest Forms of Sales Training

Sales training has been defined as "a planned program within the organization that endeavors to bring about relatively permanent changes in employee knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavior" (Singh et al., 2015). Obviously, the previously mentioned books by Crick (1847) and Guild (1937) were not intended to be sales training tools as each was simply a diary of a life in sales. While there were a few publications in that era written with the intent to teach about or suggest best practices for selling (e.g., Defoe 1726; Jones 1849; *Journal of Mining and Manufactures* 1855), they fell far short of the Singh et al. (2015) definition of sales training.

First Known Guidebooks on Salesmanship

There was one French example, however, of a merchant manual or guidebook for becoming a successful merchant working as a wholesaler that may nearly meet this standard of a systematic examination of how to sell. It was written by Jacque Savary in 1675 and titled *Le Parfait Négociant* (translates into English as

The Perfect Trader). Hollander (1953) provided a translated excerpt in which Savary (1675, p. 62) urged salespeople to be "agreeable to those who are customers . . . in gentleness of words . . . representing with honesty that the stuffs are fine and good . . ." This may have been the first publication to encourage salespeople to build rapport (see Table 1). Savary's book was one of many available merchant manuals available during that era intended to help young people learn about trade (Herreld 2007; Hoock 1990; Meuvret 1953). In fact, Rabuzzi (1995-1996, p. 171) reported that from 1470-1820 over 12,000 different merchant manuals were published in Europe, some of which had an objective of providing instructions on "how to comport himself as a merchant."

Table 1

Early Use of Sales Training Concepts/Techniques

Sales Training Topic	Date	Source
Building Rapport	1675	*Le Parfait Négociant* by Jacque Savary suggested that salespeople should be "agreeable to customers"
Sales Convention	1843	American Track Society
Free Give Away (Initiating the Norm of Reciprocity)	1843	Annual Report of the American Track Society
Selling Scripts	1870	F. B. Dickinson Company
Handling Objections	1853	American Bible Society Sales Manual
Adaptive Selling	1853	American Bible Society Sales Manual
On-the-Job Training	1865	Henry Baldwin Hyde of Equitable Life Assurance Society
Salesperson Coaching	1865	Henry Baldwin Hyde of Equitable Life Assurance Society
The Sales Process	1875	*Success in Canvassing*, by Ebenezer Hannaford
Sales Apprenticeship	1884	*Reminiscences of Early Circuit Life* by James Erwin
Creative Selling	1886	John Patterson at N.C.R. Sales Conference
Benefit Selling	1887	*The N.C.R. Primer* by Joseph Crane
Role Play Sales Call	1892	John Patterson at Regional Sales Meetings
Sales Training School	1984	NCR Sales Training taught by Joseph Crane in Dayton

EARLY SALES TRAINING IN NOTEWORTHY INDUSTRIES AND COMPANIES

Religious Organizations

Perhaps the first notions of what would come closer to the definition of sales training provided by Singh et al. (2015) emerged during the early 1800s in what some might consider an unlikely sector of U. S. society, organized religion. Friedman (2004) reported that by 1800, Methodists had established a network of about 300 traveling (circuit riding) preachers who also sold books. These evangelical preachers pioneered many techniques salespeople would later adopt (Friedman 2004).

One of these preachers was named James Erwin, and he began his work in the early 1830s. In Erwin's (1884) book *Reminiscences of Early Circuit Life*, which was intended to guide young preachers, Erwin describes how it was his "duty as a minister to supply the people with religious literature" (Erwin 1884, p. 20). These Methodist circuit-riding preaching providers of religious literature gave a lot of thought to best practices to lead nonbelievers to their cause. Leaders of the organization had even developed an apprentice system (see Table 1) in which young preachers rode with senior preachers to learn the trade. To facilitate the conversion of nonbelievers (and to no doubt spur book sales), Erwin felt compelled

to teach his persuasion techniques to less experienced individuals through his book.

There are other perhaps even more noteworthy examples of these early inklings of sales training within the religious community. Russell Salmon Cook directed the American Tract Society and used what was called a colportage system to recruit, train, and motivate salespeople using this system, which had earlier been used in France (Twaddell 1946). In their annual report of 1843, the executive committee described the colportage idea as one in which every family would be visited in an attempt to sell American Tract Society books. If the family could not afford one, they would be given one to "guide them to heaven."

Given the evangelical objective, it is easy to understand how considerable effort was taken to help the sales force succeed. Indeed, in that 1843 report, it was stated that for their system to work, the colporteurs "had to be salaried, their travel expenses had to be paid . . . they had to be trained and motivated . . . and they had to be closely supervised" (Noll 2001, pp. 162-163). It is unclear what form this training took, but at a minimum, it can be said that the training mentioned in that 1843 annual report appears adequate to meet the Singh et al. (2015) criteria of "planned" in their definition of sales training. This training likely occurred at the colporteur conventions where workers gained "new fervor and enthusiasm through contact with one another" (Twaddell 1946, p. 128).

Another important organization within the religious community was the American Bible Society. Their managers advanced sales training beyond that used by Cook's American Tract Society. The American Bible Society was founded in 1816 and by 1820 had a large sales force. Leaders of the organization tried to exert strong control over their agents. That was quite unusual during this era of American sales management history. In fact, by 1853, they developed a 24-page manual of instructions for their salespeople (Wosh 1994). One instruction was to keep a record of the objections and other kinds of opposition they encountered (for a chronological list of sales training concepts and techniques, see Table 1) and to report that and other interesting incidents so future versions of the manual could provide advice on how to deal with it (American

Bible Society 1853). Anderson et al. (2020) reported that canvassers for the American Bible Society carried booklets with persuasive scripts to use in different selling situations.

The Publishing Industry

Gravengaard (1947) described how another publishing business sector also taught their salespeople to use scripts (see Table 1). He stated that as early as the 1870s, the F. B. Dickinson Company (a subsidiary of the R. C. Barnum Company) used the "Sales Talk," which leaders of the firm taught to their salespeople. As a sales trainee with the company, Gravengaard had been required to spend a full hour every Monday night attending a lecture on salesmanship, and each Saturday, he had been required to spend an hour in the home office practicing the sales talk (Gravengaard 1947).

Charles L. Webster & Company was another publishing firm of that era that provided sales training to its canvassers in the form of a sales manual. Mr. Webster was the nephew of Samuel Clemens, better known as Mark Twain. Mr. Clemens had founded the company to serve as a publishing outlet for his books and selected Mr. Webster to run the company. In 1884, Mr. Webster's company obtained the rights to publish and market former President Ulysses Grant's memoir. To that end, almost 10,000 sales agents were recruited to sell books "on subscription," meaning money was collected prior to the delivery of the book.

For nearly the first time, there were also some women recruited for this sales team. Census reports indicated that in the United States during 1880, there were 53,500 "hucksters and peddlers," and that 51,000 were male while the remaining 2,500 were female. Most of those females worked as book agents (Friedman 2004, p. 34), and many of the 2,500 women in sales worked on the sales team for Grant's book project. To train such a large sales force, a 38-page pamphlet was written allegedly by R. S. Peale (said quickly, it can sound like "Our Spiel"), which included scripts and detailed instructions on how to sell Grant's memoirs to prospective customers (Peale 1884). Many people believed that the pamphlet was actually written by Mr. Clemons himself (Lambert 1985). The script began with the sentence "I called to give you an opportunity to see General Grant's book, of

which so much has been written in the papers" and went into great detail on how to sell the book (Holman 2012).

Another noteworthy example of efforts to develop sales skills within the publishing industry came about in 1875 (Hoffeld 2019). During that year, Ebenezer Hannaford (1875) authored a 24-page book titled *Success in Canvassing: A Manual of Practical Hints and Instruction, Specially Adapted to the Use of Book Canvassers of the Better Class*. This book described a three-step process of selling: (1) gain a hearing, (2) create desire, and (3) take the order. One of the techniques highlighted in the book was to keep a list of who bought a book within the community and refer to those people when calling on others to gain credibility and ease perceptions of risk. The book met with a highly receptive market. It was soon revised, expanded, and sold to an even larger audience.

The Insurance Industry

Life insurance was another industry in which sales scripts were used as early as 1859 (Inks et al. 2019). Even before that, as early as the 1840s, insurance agents received kits that included circulars of instructions. It is not clear if scripts were a part of the kits (Stalson 1942). By 1862, the Home Life Insurance Company of New York had issued a 275-page Agents Manual (Hollander 1953). In 1870, Philip Sayle released his second edition of *Practical Aids for Assurance Agents*, which is still sold today. Henry Baldwin Hyde, the founder of the Equitable Life Assurance Society, also wrote a booklet he called "Hints to Agents" in 1865. In it, he instructed salespeople to rehearse provided scripts (Gschwandtner 2006). These instructions were thought to be invaluable by agents who looked to Hyde for sales training in the form of one-on-one coaching (see Table 1) (Equitable Life Assurance Society, 1901). His original booklet was soon expanded into a book, and more than 50 years later, it was still considered a classic (Hendrick 1906).

Sales Training at National Cash Register Company[2]

John Henry Patterson, the founder of the company now known as the NCR Corporation, is generally known as the "father of modern sales training" (e.g., Inc Staff 2011; Amerson 2013; Carr 2007; DiSilvestro 2016;

Kane 2019; *Salesboard* 2017). Furthermore, many consider Patterson to be the founder of modern selling due to his early usage of and advocacy for sales training (e.g., Friedman 2004; *Forbes* 1967; Gitomer 2004b; Gschwandtner 2010; Iddings and Cassel 2016; Strong and Hawes 2020). However, as we have shown, sales training did exist in some forms before Patterson's efforts at NCR. In fact, Patterson often said that he never had an original idea, but he was a voracious reader (Gitomer 2004a) who tended to scoop up ideas from others (Bernstein 1996).

In 1884, John Patterson assumed ownership of all U.S. patents for cash registers along with possession of the National Manufacturing Company in Dayton (Conover 1939; Hawes 1985). Up to that point in time, the two previous owners, over a period of five years, had only sold a total of 359 cash registers (NCR Corporation 1984). In 1884, the level of production was only five cash registers per week. However, with only one full-time sales agent (Biles 1993), his supply greatly exceeded demand. It soon became apparent to Patterson that he owned a business that made a product that few understood or wanted (Carson 1966; Sant 2006). Further, the product offended retail store clerks as its strongest selling point was keeping the clerk honest (Brevoort and Marvel 2004; Crandall and Robins 1988). He quickly realized that he would have to create a demand where little demand existed (Crowther, 1922).

Patterson immediately began an educational direct mail campaign and started recruiting a sales force. By 1886, Patterson had five salespeople and soon asked them to come to Dayton to discuss company business, including prices and sales practices. This was the first known sales meeting of its kind ever held (Marcosson 1945, p. 34). During this meeting, Patterson asked a question he would ask many thousands of times, "How do you sell?" (Crowther 1926, p. 104). One of the salespeople, Harry Blood, replied that he never brought up the idea of a cash register until he had made friends, not only with the proprietor but also with all those who would be using it. Patterson's response was, "All the rest of the men ought to know about this," and that was the start of what later developed into sales training at NCR (Crowther 1926, p. 104-105). It was also probably the first time

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[2] Patterson's company was called the National Cash Register Company until its name was officially changed in 1974 to the NCR Corporation. Even in the early days, however, many shortened it to NCR. For simplicity, we will henceforth simply refer to that firm in this paper as NCR.

in the history of selling in which salespeople had been encouraged to examine their own methods for the benefit of others as a form of self-reflection and peer training. Patterson decided the meetings were so productive that they should be held annually, and from this emerged NCR's legendary program of annual conventions for its salespeople (Johnson and Lynch 1932).

Soon after that first meeting in 1886, Patterson convinced Joseph Crane, his brother-in-law, to begin selling cash registers. After a rough start, Crane became the company's top salesperson. In early 1887, Patterson asked him, "How do you sell registers? What is your method? What is your system?" (Crowther 1923b, p. 603). Crane told him that he said the same thing to every customer. He had learned this by trial and error. When he first began selling for NCR, he did 16 demonstrations of the cash register and sold none. Afterward, he analyzed his selling efforts and concluded that he forgot to say important merchant benefits during the calls, so he started writing them down. Soon, he had a systematic way to cover all the benefits retailers would receive. He began saying the same thing to every client, ensuring to cover all the points he wanted to include (Crowther 1923b).

Patterson asked if he got bored selling that way, and Crane told him no because although the approach was similar, each customer was different. Patterson immediately called in a stenographer, had Crane repeat the sales call, got it typed, and this became *The N. C. R. Primer*, which was distributed to every member of the sales force with a recommendation to memorize it and use it (Carson 1966). Many scholars consider this the beginning of systematizing or standardizing sales (e.g., Bernstein 2004; Cortada 1993; Friedman 1998; Usui 2008). In addition, this was the first time in history that a selling interaction had been consistently developed from the customer's point of view with a focus on benefits (see Table 1), not product features (Sant, 2006). *The Primer* broke the sale down into four steps: the approach in which the customer's problem is identified, the proposition, the demonstration, and the close (Sant 2006). Despite Patterson's recommendation to use *The Primer*, however, many members of the sales force ignored it. This was unfortunate because in many cases, when a salesperson memorized the sales talk and did specifically what *The Primer* suggested, sales

increased substantially (Crowther 1923b).

In 1892, Patterson read a bleak economic forecast, and he believed an analysis of his salesforce was necessary so NCR could survive the coming downturn. He asked Edmund Gibbs, the Advertising Director, to accompany him on the trip in which they planned to visit 50 towns in 51 days to hold sales conferences instructing sales agents. Patterson and Gibbs planned to take turns serving as a prospect while each salesperson demonstrated his selling skills (Gibbs 1926). This may have been the first time in which role plays were used in sales training.

Patterson and Gibbs did their best to train sales agents during their trip, but it became evident early during their journey that NCR sales agents had not mastered *The Primer* and their selling skills were not well developed. It was clear that something needed to be done (Gibbs, 1926), and that opportunity arose during the Chicago World's Fair of 1983. When Patterson visited the NCR booth, without introducing himself, he asked the NCR clerks (who were not regular sales agents) working the exhibit to explain the cash registers. He found that most of the clerks knew very little about cash registers and even less about explaining them.

That evening, Patterson required the clerks to attend a "school" at his hotel (Crowther 1923a). Prior to the session, Patterson developed a list of questions exhibit visitors would likely ask and the information he wanted the clerks to share with exhibit visitors. Patterson printed a small booklet and taught the clerks what to say that evening. He gave them an exact speech to be memorized and said word for word. He worked with them, and through role-play practice each had mastered the assignment (Crowther 1923a). This night training session was so successful that Patterson immediately began thinking about extending that for regular members of the NCR salesforce (Gibbs 1911).

Patterson decided to establish a formal school to train salespeople (Friedman, 2006). Joseph Crane, NCR's best salesperson, would be the teacher, and the school would be held at the company headquarters in Dayton for six weeks of training, with the company paying for expenses. On April 4, 1894, he opened the first sales training school in a little cottage on the old Patterson homestead.

Rather than being exclusively for new salespeople, the school was primarily to train sales agents already working for NCR. The first class was drawn from those clerks who worked at the World's Fair and NCR salespeople. Some dropped out before the end of the six-week course. *The Primer* served as the basis for the curriculum. Examinations were conducted, and there was great worry about passing. At the end of that first session, 17 graduated, and a photograph of them is shown in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1

NCR's First Sales Training Class in 1894

Source: Used with the permission of Dayton History, 1000 Carrolton Blvd., Dayton, OH 45409
https://daytonhistory.pastperfectonline.com/photo/A46980C4-29BF-4BBB-B484-726220766280

The school for salespeople at NCR became known as Sugar Camp and it brought many changes to the firm and to what has now become the sales profession (Carr 2007). The school's most significant impact was the substantial increase in NCR's sales revenue. After completing the school, salespeople experienced enormous gains in sales performance. Some doubled their level of sales after attending school. NCR salespeople began making more money than agents had ever made in any line before (Crowther 1923c).

NCR Training Technology and "Teaching Through the Eye"

John Patterson was a visionary in sales and sales training. He also had strong beliefs about training and how to get others to understand concepts. Patterson strongly believed that people are visual learners. He often stated that 87 percent of our knowledge is received through our eyes because of its exactness (Wertenbaker 1953). He also believed that:

business is only a form of teaching. You teach people to desire your product; that is selling. You teach workmen how to make the right product; that is manufacturing. You teach others to cooperate with you; that is organization. To succeed in business, it is necessary to make the other man see things as you see them (Patterson 1918, p. 875).

To facilitate this form of teaching (training), even at the first sales conference in the Dayton hotel in 1886, Patterson had a blackboard brought in for his use. He illustrated his points and drew pictures to help the audience understand. Patterson was the first trainer we have found who made use of role-playing to teach selling. He added realism when possible by setting up small "stores" in the training facilities equipped with merchandise and money in the cash register. At conventions, dramas or short plays were acted out on stage to show the problems merchants faced that could

be solved with NCR cash registers. By 1891, NCR had incorporated "magic lantern slides" into its training for salespeople, and by 1900, they had over 100,000 stereopticon slides. Other advances in sales training coming from NCR include Patterson's invention of the flip chart (see Exhibit 2), and the first industrial use of video to train salespeople (Brown, 2008).

It is hard to overstate Patterson and NCR's role in the development of modern sales training. Patterson was the first to focus on identifying the traits and behaviors of successful salespeople and to systematically share that information with other salespeople. Importantly, Patterson was the first to use several mainstays of modern sales training. In fact, with its grounding in the view of selling as a process and the heavy utilization of role-play sales calls, along with presentation slides and flipcharts, the NCR sales training sessions may not have seemed that dissimilar to a current sales training session.

Exhibit 2

John H. Patterson Using a Flip Chart While Teaching a Sales Training Class at Sugar Camp
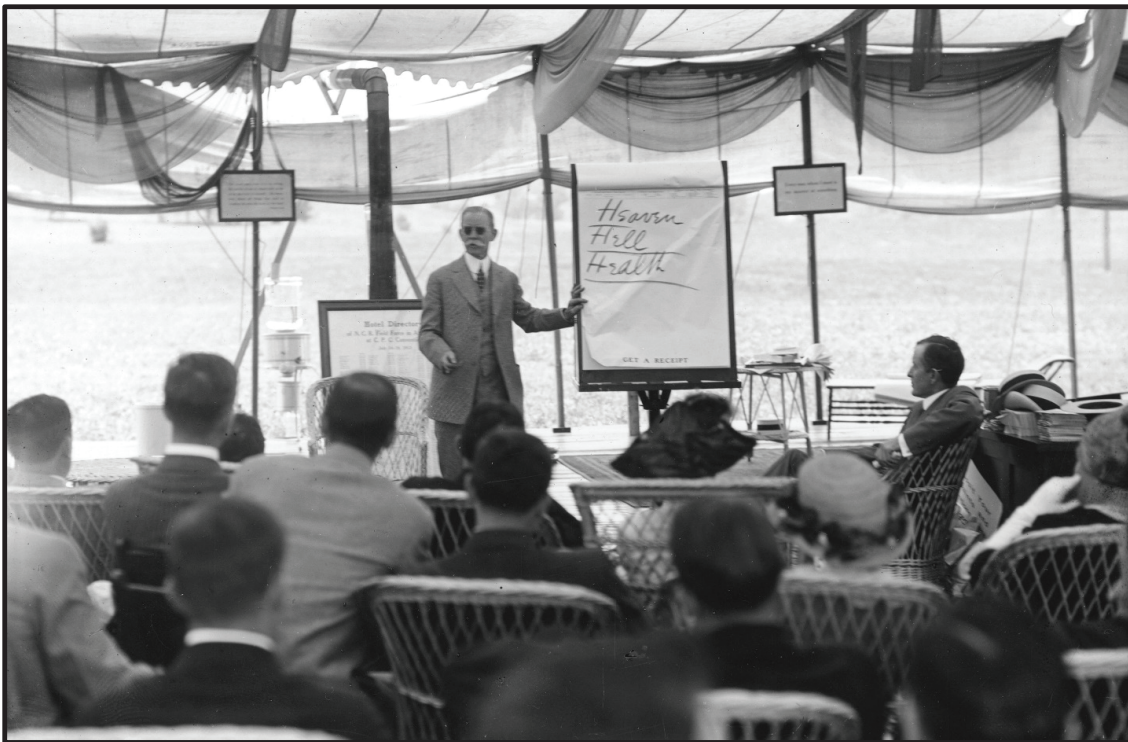
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https://daytonhistory.pastperfectonline.com/photo/5E99E183-CE6E-4109-9BE7-477254697140

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This manuscript contributes to the literature by discussing the origins and early history of sales training. Importantly, it also provides a historical context for these early steps forward in the development of sales training. As discussed in this document, the rudiments of sales training can be traced back at least as far as a guidebook for successful salesmanship called *Le Parfait Négociant* written by Jacque Savary in 1675. As sales training progressed through the years after Savary's merchant manual, many concepts and techniques emerged which are still used today.

What should the modern sales trainer take from this discussion of the origins and early history of sales training? First, having examples of early uses of different sales concepts, sales training approaches, and sales enablement techniques should add richness, insight, and depth to the trainer's understanding of these concepts. For example, consider the concept of adaptive selling. While introduced into the modern sales research and training lexicon in a 1990 publication (Spiro and Weitz), we now know that the need to adapt to the selling situation was noted in a sales manual produced by the American Bible Society in 1853. This knowledge should help the educator or trainer add background to their discussions of the theory as they will now have a more complete understanding of the origin and early use of the concept. This greater understanding should result in a trainer who is "more comfortable and credible in the classroom, given the broader perspectives they bring when teaching" (Ferrell et al. 2015, p. 159).

This knowledge of the origin of a construct could also prove useful for researchers as it lays out a roadmap for future historical research with questions such as, "How was the concept originally described in its source material?" "When was this notion referenced again in sales training courses, materials, or research?" "How did the scope of the original concept change over time?" As illustrated with the adaptive selling example, knowing the origins and early history of sales concepts can facilitate sales training by adding richness, resonance, and depth to the topic. Further, this historical analysis has offered a roadmap for researchers to add to our understanding of sales concepts by tracing their origins and use over time. Table 1 should provide researchers with a wealth of sales training topics to guide future historical research in sales training.

As with any research, it is important to note that there are limitations inherent in the research used in this manuscript. Perhaps, the greatest limitation of this research is its subjective nature. First, while the authors attempted to be exhaustive in their search of sales-related books or articles on the subject in the early years of sales training, the decision on what material was relevant enough to include in this study was subjective. Secondly, of course, we were constrained by the challenge of finding such dated documents. While there has been a substantial expansion of available materials recently due to ongoing digitalization projects of rare secondary literature, many items that could have been useful simply were not retained from the 1800s. In addition, many of the media we currently use to store and record data had not yet been invented. In fact, there were only a few magazines devoted explicitly to business issues during the 1800s, in stark contrast to the latter half of the 1900s.

In closing, we hope that this historical review of the origins and early history of sales training proves helpful for sales educators/trainers by adding depth and vibrancy when they share these concepts with an audience. Further, we hope that this historical review has provided a roadmap that will lead to additional research into many of the concepts noted here. We see this as a circular process in which historical research of sales concepts taught by today's educators and trainers will yield a greater understanding of those theories, which will, in turn, allow for enhanced learning.

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