# 15 Sales Training Topics That Maximize Team Readiness

BRAINSHARK

Sales organizations are *always* chasing better results, whether that means more deals, larger deals, shorter sales cycles, or greater market share.

To meet these targets, companies need a sales training approach that covers enough ground to keep reps sharp for every engagement. Yet many sales organizations only train reps when it's absolutely necessary, such as during onboarding, product launches, or a new methodology rollout.

With almost no training happening between these events, organizations overlook **fundamental skills** that reps need to make the most of buyer engagements.

In fact, 59% of sales teams will spend more on selling skills training over the next 12 months, according to CSO Insights, because buyers expect "excellent communication skills across all channels, sellers to be well prepared, to learn something new, and to be provided with insights."

This eBook covers **15 high-impact sales training topics** to help reps develop the skills they need to show up ready to every buyer engagement.

# What's Inside

## 1. Pre-Call Research That Pays Off

It's on your sellers to research each of their customers or prospects, and then tailor their outreach accordingly. Knowing what the CEO said about the company's growth plans on its last earnings call, for instance, can go a long way in making the buyer feel understood.

While some details can only be unearthed during a discovery call, others can be readily found online. Reps should know where and how to research so they can spend their time asking more valuable questions than, *"Are you expanding your team?"* or *"Have you launched any new products recently?"*

**Training Tip:** Create a training course showing reps how and where to find news articles, press releases, and other publicly available information about their target accounts or buyers. Reinforce the training by asking reps to record a video explaining how they'll use research to enhance an upcoming sales interaction.

**More than 80% of B2B buyers are frustrated by reps who can't answer their questions.**

The Buyer Persona Institute

## 2. Ensuring Reps are 'Pitch-Perfect'

Good elevator pitches help turn cold calls into sales opportunities. That's why the ability to quickly and simply describe the benefits of your solution(s) and get the buyer thinking about their own needs is paramount for sellers.

But if your entire sales force described what your company does right now, would they all have similar responses? Would their messaging cover the right topics, convey the right tone, and demonstrate confidence?

**Training Tip:** Break down the key elements of your ideal elevator pitch for your major selling roles – SDRs, account executives, account managers, sales engineers, etc. – and include tailored tips for effective delivery. Then, either via in-person role play or using a video coaching tool, have sellers practice delivering a 30-second company pitch and receive feedback from managers and peers.

**69% of buyers have accepted phone calls from new providers in the last 12 months.**

RAIN Group

# 3. Building Business Acumen

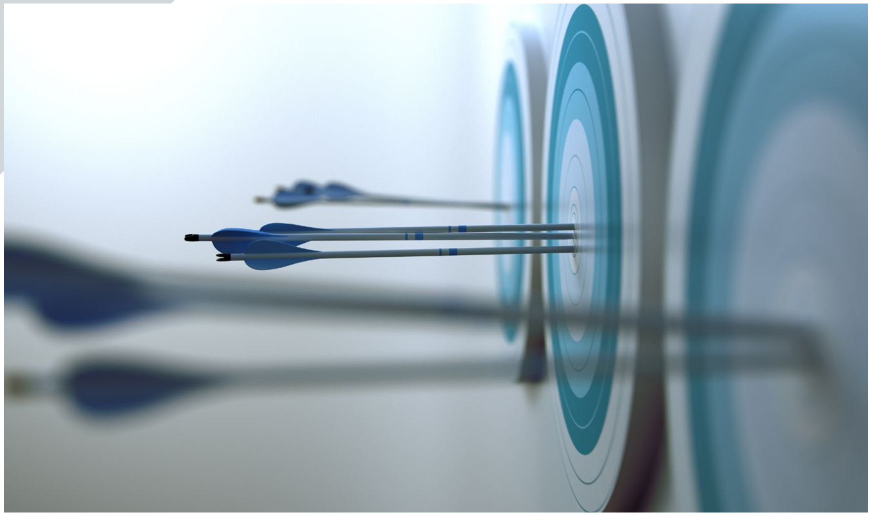
For salespeople, business acumen means having a strong grasp of the buyer's company, including the financial factors that affect decision-making, and using that knowledge to make the right recommendations.

Naturally, this is a skill that reps build with experience. But you can accelerate that growth by showing sellers how to listen more actively, adapt their communication styles to the other party, and recognize where the client is in the buying process. (E.g. Have they recognized the need already? Are they now evaluating vendors?)

**Training Tip:** Ask internal subject matter experts to provide an executive-level view of your company, how different teams work together, and how sellers can collaborate with them internally. This will help reps better understand their buyers' businesses. An experienced member of the senior leadership team, along with key members of other teams, can provide a more holistic perspective.

In addition, have your top salespeople share best practices for "reading a room" and include the best examples in a training course. Tips for slowing the conversation down when needed, identifying unspoken needs, or pushing back against a disengaged or grumpy buyer can all be very helpful to inexperienced reps.

Use role plays to help reps further hone their listening skills. For example, have someone act as a potential customer describing a set of hypothetical business challenges, and then ask reps to summarize the information to see whether they understand key points.



## 4. Pinpointing Buyer Pain

Failing to ask the right questions, or not knowing what to listen for when speaking with buyers, can be the difference between a win and a loss. A well-prepared seller will know how to propose a solution that addresses the buyer's key pain points.

Your reps also need the ability to make the case for change during discovery by uncovering where your buyer wants to be, confirming why a change is needed, and then aligning your solution(s) with the desired future state.

**Training Tip:** Create a microlearning course that highlights your most common use cases. Point out which buyer personas care about each use case, provide real-world examples that illustrate why key challenges are painful, and outline effective questions to ask once they've understood each need.

Then assess reps' understanding by outlining a hypothetical selling scenario that includes key buyer pain points. Ask reps to share the top three discovery questions they'd ask in this situation and have them explain why.


## 5. Storytelling That Sells

A LinkedIn study found that 93% of decision-makers are more likely to consider brands when a salesperson shares relevant content. But how skilled are your sellers at presenting insights and success stories to buyers?

Assuming your reps understand the buyer's challenges, they still need to know which content best connects with that pain – whether it's research, thought leadership or a case study. Sharing insights in a way that feels authentic will add to the seller's credibility and help your company stand out. (In fact, research shows we remember stories better than stats!)

**Training Tip:** Go over one or two key success stories with reps that align with a common use case. Provide tips for telling that story in the seller's own words, and reinforce what reps learn by sharing examples from a more experienced peer.

Ultimately, you'll want to gauge whether sellers can use consistent messaging and tone when they highlight case studies on a call or in an email. Can they articulate how a current customer solved the buyer's problem? Consider a video coaching assessment where reps practice sharing key stories verbally or in writing via a text-based coaching activity.

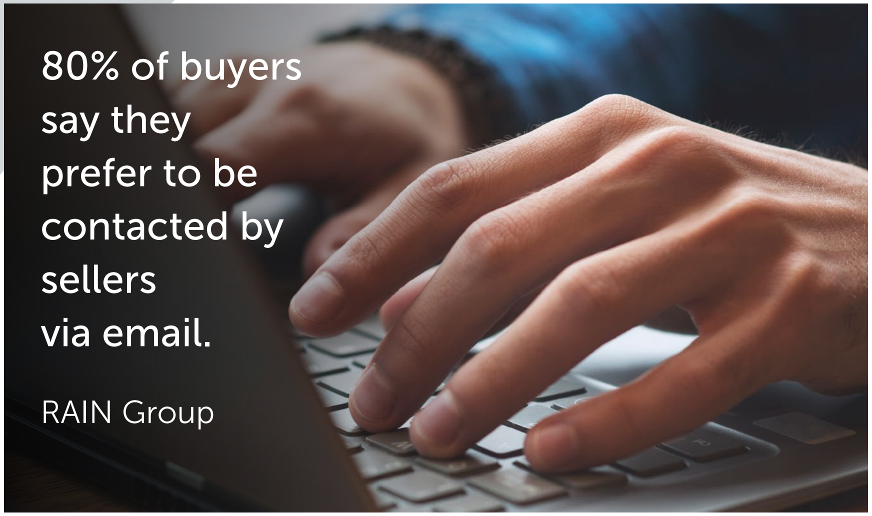

# 6. Smarter Social Selling

Reps don't need to be experts on the latest social media trends, but they should understand the basics of professional networks such as LinkedIn. Unfortunately, 69% of sellers don't have an active social selling training program, according to Feedback Systems – meaning they're self-taught and likely "practicing" on prospects.

If reps are filling every direct message with promotional messaging, posting too frequently, or even simply not sharing relevant information, they probably aren't raising their brand's profile. Define your organization's social selling philosophy and give your salespeople the confidence to engage prospects on social media.

**Training Tip:** Take the fundamentals of good messaging covered in your "Sales Communications 101" training and adapt them to the specific dynamics of the major social networks. On LinkedIn for instance, knowing where to look for new connections, how often to post or direct message, and how to share content that doesn't come across as "too sales-y" are all important to know. Show your sales force what "good" social outreach looks like using your savviest reps as examples.

Your training should also include effective use of social selling tools. Help reps make the most of a platform like LinkedIn Sales Navigator by tying your best practices to the tool's key features, such as finding similar prospects or key buyer details (i.e. job tenure, location) via search.




## 7. Written Communication 101

You want sellers to deliver a message that's clear, concise, and compelling in every client interaction. While many training courses focus on what reps are saying, what they put in writing is an equally important part of moving deals forward.

Crafting great prospecting emails matters, but there are other buyer touch points where reps need to be on top of their game, such as follow-up emails, LinkedIn messages, and even text messages.

**Training Tip:** Outline tips for tailoring sales emails to a specific buyer and highlight language and tactics reps can use to encourage buyer action through their writing. Your marketing team, sales managers, or top reps can be useful resources here.

Drive the learning home by having reps practice crafting a personalized email based on a buyer's business challenge. Evaluate the responses for accurate messaging, tone, consistency and – oh yeah – grammar. You can scale this type of assessment (especially helpful for dispersed sales teams) by using a text-based coaching tool to grade writing effectiveness, with ratings and fields for written feedback.

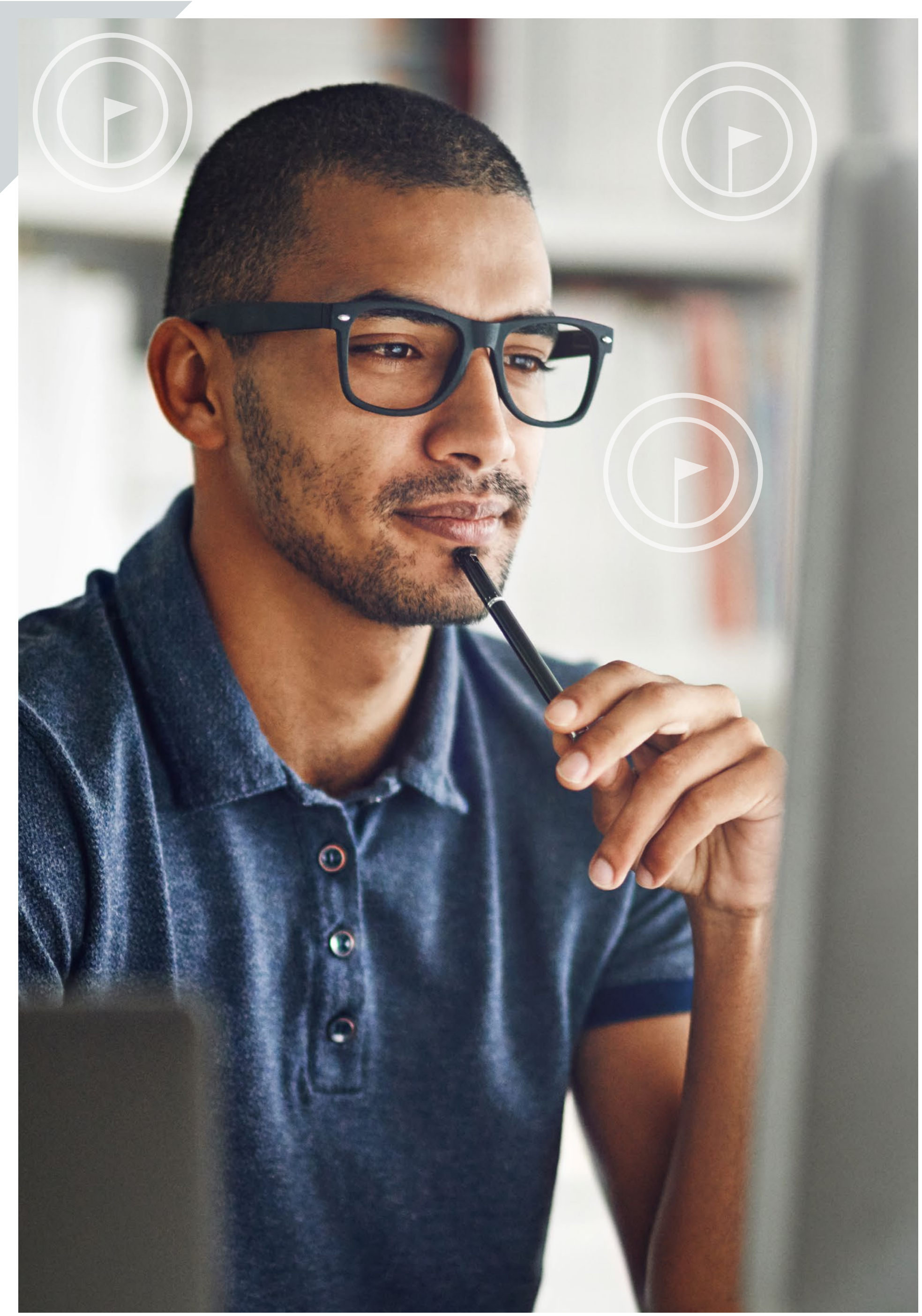
## 8. Capitalize on Upsell and Cross-Sell

Getting buyers to fight for extra budget is tough if your sellers can't convey the value of a larger investment. Without a compelling reason, the buyer won't feel any impetus to change the status quo or broaden the scope of the deal.

Identifying common buying "triggers" is a key part of upselling and cross-selling. Do your sellers know how to message based upon the buyer's growth plans or financial goals? If you're training account managers, do they know which items could lead to a larger sale?

**Training Tip:** Summarize your use cases and document quantifiable added value for each upsell or cross-sell opportunity. Outline trigger events that have led to customer deal expansions in the past. Also highlight resources that help reps articulate the benefits of a solution that combines two or more products or services.

For example, have your reps review a case study related to a current upsell opportunity. A success story can create buyer urgency by showing how a customer with similar needs realized ROI on an expanded purchase. Then ask reps to identify and describe how they would position your solutions against the upsell opportunity. Have sales managers review the submissions to ensure reps can "put it all together."



# 9. Talking Through Sales Triggers

Salespeople should be looking for trigger events, such as a recent leadership change, acquisition, new product launch or growth initiative, to uncover potential buyer pain. Once a trigger has been identified, reps should frame messaging based upon the buyer's response.

**Training Tip:** Compile a list of the most common sales triggers for your target industries and personas. These could include changes in leadership or regulations, rapid buyer growth, major product launches and updates, or company underperformance.

Then connect the dots by covering effective responses and follow-up questions if a buyer is dealing with one of these trigger events. For example, has a buyer received poor customer reviews or missed its quarterly earnings projections? Walk reps through the messaging needed to create urgency around a use case that will help the buyer's support or customer success teams.

After training sellers on trigger messaging, ensure they can effectively deliver it in front of buyers using a video coaching assessment. Do this by providing a sample scenario where the buyer just underwent a leadership change at the C-level and have reps practice positioning solutions that address those needs.


# 10. Turning Tricky Objections into Opportunities

Do your reps view buyer objections as an obstacle, or as a chance to add value to the interaction? If they come prepared, it should be the latter. The key is ensuring each rep has a strategy for navigating the objections they face most often.

**Training Tip:** Gather feedback from sales management to determine the most challenging garden-variety objections their reps face, such as issues with pricing ("that's too expensive") or committing to change ("we don't really need this right now").

First, break down best practices for handling any kind of objection: pausing, asking specific questions that define the need, confirming the need, and then working to satisfy it. Then outline steps for managing each different type of objection.

If indifference is the objection's root cause, share questions reps can ask to uncover hidden buyer needs. If it's skepticism over pricing, highlight case studies sellers can share as a source of proof; for example, they can discuss the value that a similar-sized company realized after implementing your solution.

## 11. Identifying Buyer Authority

The average B2B sales cycle now involves more than 6 different buyers, according to Gartner. Large deals especially can involve everyone from the CEO to the legal, security and IT teams. Assuming an authority figure has committed to what's being discussed can only come back to bite your organization when it's time to negotiate.

Do reps know who owns the budget for their proposed solution, and which decision-makers would need to sign the contract? Do they understand the procurement process? Clarifying these details early in the sales cycle will streamline the process and ensure no unexpected roadblocks appear in a deal's closing stages.

**Training Tip:** Remind sellers how they can uncover the prospect's business goals (such as *"We want to grow our market share for a specific product line"*) through effective discovery and pre-call research. Also provide a checklist of items reps should confirm with the buyer, such as which decision-maker owns those business goals, whether that person has been briefed on your proposed solution(s), and if any other buyers would need to sign off on the deal.

If your reps discover that a high-authority buyer hasn't been looped into sales discussions, outline steps they can take to bridge that gap – either by equipping a champion to sell on their behalf, or by working to gain commitment for a follow-up meeting with the power-broker.

## 12. Asking for the Sale

Seeking commitment from a buyer can feel intimidating, but it has a few major benefits: sales pipeline clarity, greater sales efficiency, (potentially) shorter sales cycles, and ultimately a closed deal. Without making the ask, your reps might be working an opportunity longer than they should be, only to hear "no" later.

**Training Tip:** Reps need to confirm that your solution meets all requirements set in the buyer's RFP (request for proposal), the buyer has secured any necessary budget, and both sides are ready to move forward with the sale. This includes committing to an agreed-upon timeframe.

Supplement your training with documents that provide examples of good closing questions, and then have your sellers practice them on their own time to increase confidence. Pairing less experienced salespeople with a more tenured "mentor," who can provide feedback, is another great way to ensure reps are ready to make the ask.

## 13. Requesting and Using Referrals

Referrals carry huge benefits when reps can leverage them. But not all sellers know what an ideal referral candidate looks like, when to approach the subject with a customer, or how to manage the referral once it has been agreed upon.

**Training Tip:** First gauge the strength of the sales relationship that you're considering for a referral. Use your company's existing referrals as case studies and provide reps with key takeaways, such as which factors made them good candidates and best practices for making the request.

Your training should also define the specifics of being a reference when reps ask for a client's commitment. How many recommendations will they be asked to provide each year? Will their correspondence with potential buyers happen via phone or email? Sellers who ask these questions paint clearer expectations for the customer.

**Peer recommendations influence more than 90% of B2B buying decisions.**

Influitive

## 14. Customer Crisis Management

Sellers will ideally set clear expectations with their clients upfront. But it doesn't always happen. Maybe there was miscommunication, or something out of the rep's control is straining the partnership.

Whatever the case may be, your buyers are human beings who can (and will) become frustrated or disappointed when the unexpected takes place. If and when that happens, your sales force needs a strategy for resolving conflict quickly and effectively.

**Training Tip:** Teach reps how to de-escalate the situation by 1) acknowledging that there's a problem, 2) clarifying what the problem is, 3) identifying the key issues causing the problem, and 4) creating a mutual action plan.

Say the problem involves one of your products. Explain which steps the rep should take when addressing a problem – in collaboration with members of your product and customer service teams – such as identifying any unresolved support tickets and seeing if any of the customer's issues will be addressed in the current product roadmap.


# 15. Coaching Your Sales Coaches

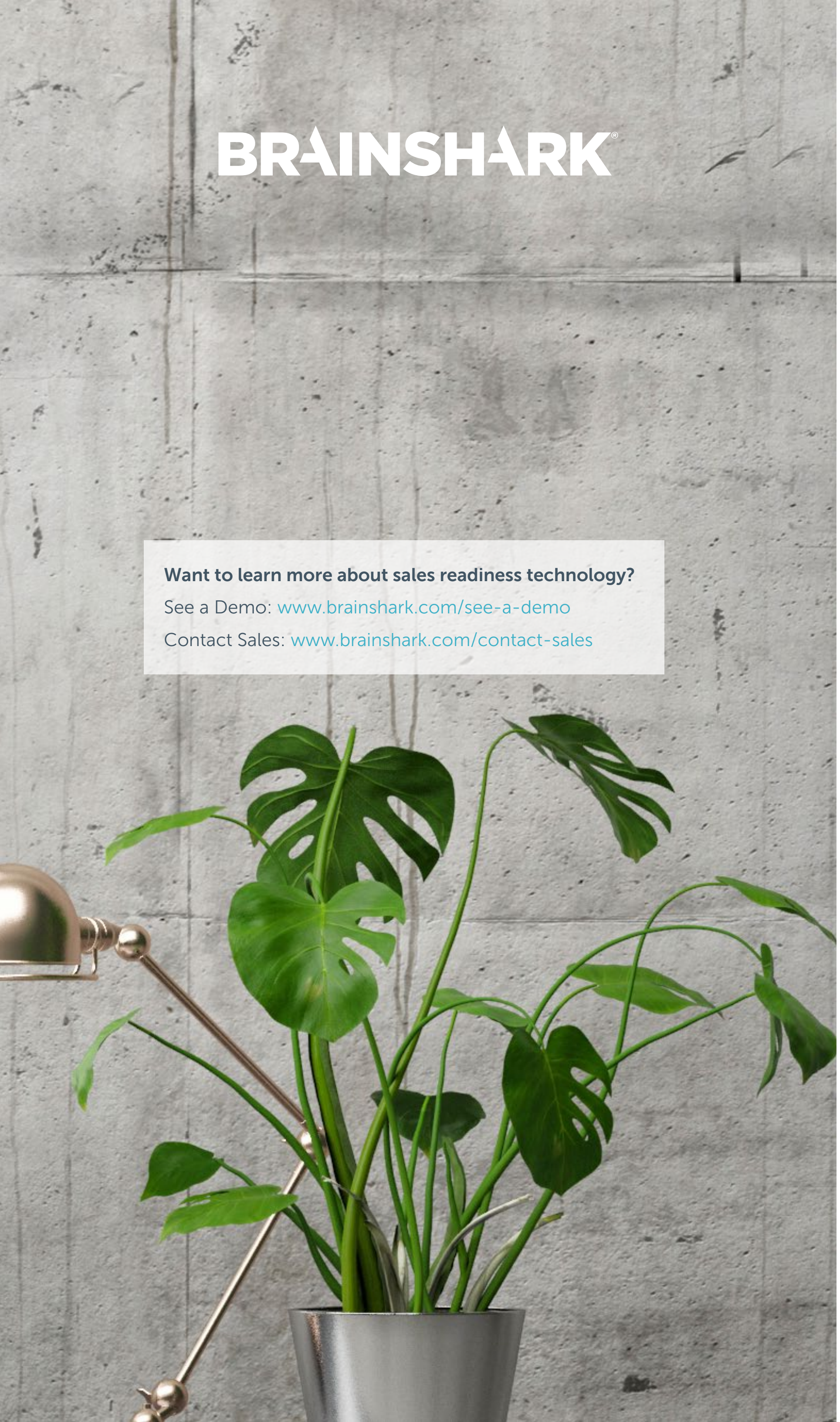
Many sales managers recognize the importance of coaching, but not all of them know how to do it effectively – whether they're running in-person role play exercises or reviewing video coaching submissions.

Preparing managers to provide more actionable feedback will reinforce what reps learned during training, highlight areas for potential improvement, accelerate skills development and ultimately boost performance.

**Training Tip:** Make your coaching scenarios relevant by gathering feedback from the reps, managers, and other key members of the sales organization. Also ensure managers understand what's expected of them when it comes to coaching. What sort of cadence should they keep with reps? How often should they have 1-on-1 coaching calls or meetings? How many exercises must they assign and review?

Then, most importantly, show what "good" coaching looks like by sharing best practices and including examples. Show managers how to provide feedback that is specific, concise, and constructive. Provide tips for establishing trust with reps who struggle with performance critiques. Explain how to turn challenging sales scenarios – such as a buyer who's stuck in a "no-decision" holding pattern – into teachable coaching moments.

A sales readiness platform can enhance sales manager coaching. Brainshark's AI-powered Machine Analysis engine, for instance, saves time and streamlines the coaching review process by automatically generating a score for each submission.




# About Brainshark

Brainshark's sales readiness platform gives you the tools to prepare all your client-facing teams with the knowledge and skills they need to perform at the highest level. With best-of-breed solutions for training, coaching, content and more, you can ensure reps are always ready to make the most of any selling situation.

With Brainshark, companies can: enable sales teams with on-demand training that accelerates onboarding and keeps reps up-to-speed; validate readiness with sales coaching and practice that ensures reps master your message; and empower sales organizations with rich, dynamic content that can be created quickly, updated easily, and accessed anywhere.

Thousands of customers – including more than half of the Fortune 100 – rely on Brainshark to get better results from their sales enablement initiatives. Learn more at [www.brainshark.com](http://www.brainshark.com).