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**The Use of Videotaped Segments of *The Apprentice* in a Food and  
Agricultural Sales Class: The Case of ApEc 3451**

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The following except was taken from Blog on Sales by David Stein on Sept. 27,2004.

*I watch The Apprentice. For a number of reasons...A lot of people don't realize It, but this show is all about selling. According to Donald Trump, " Selling is 50% of the job."...Observing how they sell is ...entertaining to me. They have to sell their teams to get the job done, then to Trump, Carolyn and George..those three are becoming real tough buyers...*

The authors have watched two seasons of episodes of the popular program- ***The Apprentice***. We were attracted to this series because of it is clearly connected to the reality of business. After watching it for a while, it was apparent that the subject of sales was included in several episodes. In the first season, the selling of lemonade was the first task given to the candidates. Other items sold were real estate, advertising campaigns, and *Trump Ice*- a branded water. Clearly, several of these items fit in the food or beverage making them choices for discussion in a Food and Agricultural Sales class. As a result, the instructor and his teaching assistant chose to show one of these episodes to get a student reaction to this topic.

The reaction of students was very enthusiastic. So additional episodes were selected and shown. This experiment was continued this year with the second year's series. This paper reports on the educational gains elicited by the use of this videotape series and

shares the results of a student evaluation conducted at the end of this year's spring semester class.

### **The Use of Video Segments in Sales Education**

Several educational techniques are commonly used to teach the elements of sales.

Classroom instruction involves lecture, discussion, roleplay and case studies. Of these techniques, the use of roleplay is the most engaging and dynamic. The difficulty with this situation is that students may not fully adopt the role and the results may seem artificial. Lecture and discussion can only describe the techniques , not fully demonstrate their use in a specific context. In fact, the situational nature of sales and the variety of techniques used will require change with different contextual environments.

The materials used by Downey and Stevens in the text- ***AgriSelling-*** make ample use of statements from salespeople on a variety of topics. A video supplement was created by use of a USDA Challenge Grant in the mid- 1990's and consists of interview segments on video format. Hearing how people describe how sales occurs is a useful part of the class. The multidimensional and contextual basis for sales requires that students choose which elements of a sales call plan should be adapted to different situations. Analysis of sales dialogue is another useful technique for teaching sales. The authors have used several sources to compile specific dialogue regarding sales. This is particularly important in describing how and when to close a sale and which strategies to use. Computer records for sales in the ACT and other programs also can determine where a salesperson

is at in the midst of a sales call. The authors demonstrate this software in the teaching of the class.

### **Addition of Reality to Sales Situations**

One of the opportunities with a complete inclusion of a sales situation is the ability of students to judge what people have done right or wrong in a sales context. Students can respond to questions and then contribute to discussion with regard to that topic. For example, in the episode about Trump Ice, it was important to notice that instead of selling and delivering a large amount of water, that a contract could be formulated at a negotiated price with scheduled deliveries overcoming the storage limitation. Creative solutions such as this are important to communicate.

How teams could improve their performance is also important to note. One blog lists the following general thoughts: *Plan ahead, do your homework-strategies and tactics of not only your team, but other teams also are important, be flexible and differentiate yourself from the competition.*

The focus on team performance is a very important part of this series. Most salespeople, although seeming to work alone, require team support to accomplish their goals. Several episodes deal with management of team efforts, leadership and creating group harmony in the process of selling or representing products.

## **Business Lessons From The Apprentice**

The American Management Association(AMA) offers and advertises general business topics which relate to *The Apprentice* Series. The AMA suggests that” while designed to entertain, The Apprentice depicts business interactions and challenges that frequently occur in real-world settings.”

Some of the lessons listed that deal with sales include: *The Art of Listening, Win-Win Negotiations, Involve Customers for Sales Success, Making Effective Presentations, and Aligning Sales and Marketing*. In the segment on sales, it is agreed that sales can provide first-hand customer insights, share competitive data, identify prime customers, and provide customer feedback. In the segment on Customer Involvement, the necessity of giving verbal and visual signals, focus on customers benefits, use of demonstration and testimonials, tell buyer stories that back up claims, and give options that lead to closure.

## **Industries Use Sales Training with The Apprentice**

As part of a national sales meeting, *Sara Lee Foods* used Audience Response Solutions provides a sales training game. The goals was to teach “*how to develop prospects whose business would be the most profitable, to select the appropriate strategy for each account, to conduct effective face-to-face sales calls and to continue to uncover sales opportunities.*” Four simple rules were used: use five minutes to prepare, use anything you find for a sales aid, make you pitch in five minutes, and Just Win. Judges use

Response keypads to vote on criteria to select a winner. In retrospect, the exercise provide customers with compelling reasons to choose their solution. (*Rob Headley- Mkt Manager-Sara Lee Foodservice*).

### **Teaching Materials Used With Video**

The video segments must be integrated with the other class materials. The use of prepared questions is the most common supplementation. Students can answer these questions as they view the video. Another technique is discussion or debate about the relative performance of various teams. Both techniques elicited good student response. The use of Classroom Response Systems can also be integrated into the teaching of these video segments. A pilot test of this technology will be used in the next teaching of the course. The viewing of the video can also be combined with problem solving and role play exercises. In particular, groups can be asked to recreate the dialogue from the original situation. An exercise in negotiation skills has also been combined with the appropriate episode to illustrate the skills needed in negotiation. Most students have not been schooled in negotiation techniques and find the exercise very rewarding.

## **Redesign of MBA Curricula and Similarity to the Apprentice**

According to Justin Ewers, “*most MBA students are too young to be taught business administration, never having administered a business.* Their classes are focused on analysis and technique instead of clinical experience(US News&World Report, April 11,2005). Employers find the following skills to be attractive: *strategic thinking, leadership, adaptability and written and oral communication.* “The redesign of MBA programs is focusing on leadership and communication with a team-based performance management system designed to generate constructive conflict.” This change in educational effort seems to suggest that the evaluation of work tasks as in *The Apprentice* and actual team management are becoming essential components of academic programs.

## **Student Survey Feedback on The Apprentice**

Students were asked the following questions:

1. What aspects of *The Apprentice* did you enjoy most?
2. How did *The Apprentice* address sales?
3. What specific sales topics are addressed?
4. What did you learn about sales from *The Apprentice*?



Student responded to #1 by these comments:

*This is real world information, it shows the challenges of job/competition. It gives a good look at teams and how they function,*

*A good look at leadership in groups.*

*A look at how different personalities clash.*

*Necessity of cooperation*

Response to #2:

*Selling , promoting, “everything is related to sales”; motivation, planning and communication; different ways to do things;real life struggles; problem-solving, prospecting, rejection. Competitive atmosphere*

Response to #3:

*Negotiation, importance of preparation/location, management skills/time management, customer value importance, different kinds of sales*

Response to #4:

*Real life view of business, competitive landscape, you have to be good, not make mistakes, have a vision and work from there, even the best salespeople need innovative ideas. More than one way to solve problem, importance of teamwork. Better than reading about it.*

## **Summary and Conclusion**

This paper described the use of videotape segments of the *The Apprentice* used on ApEc 3451-*Food and Agricultural Sales* at the University of Minnesota. Students report that they now more fully appreciate the value of teamwork, the success and failure of certain sales strategies evaluated from the episodes, how different personalities can either mesh or conflict, the situational nature of sales, value of knowing your customer and their objectives, and the nature of business competition. Students agreed that the video segments were a good addition to the class. Use of classroom response systems will be integrated with the next use of the video segments to elicit immediate responses to situations. Technology in addition to classroom response systems will play a definite role in the multidimensional teaching of sales applied to agriculture and the food industry.

## References

1. Downey, et al(1998). *AgriSelling*. Touhy Press.1994
2. Ewers, Justin(April 11, 2005). *Is The MBA Obsolete*. U.S News & World Report.
3. NBC. *The Apprentice*. Episodes in 2004 and 2005.