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.

KEYWORDS

Experiential learning, Sales education, Sport management education, Sport management, Sport sales

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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 example, 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.
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