


# Skills transfer best for productivity

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In today's business world there is cut throat competition and playing fields have changed. Gone are the days when people would stick to their systems and process for years. The only constant we face in business is change itself.

Professions such as sales and marketing are going through a total shift and few are staying at one company for years. The art of head hunting and calls for "own customer" pack gets one the most nod.

Very few employers have looked into the benefits of skills transfer. Like in soccer a salesperson is regarded as a goal scorer and hence calls to see how many goals you scored before. (Your own database). New employees should have experience in the same industry and have clients that they have been serving before. Well, this has even resulted in slavery contract clauses such as *not to be employed in same industry after 4 or 6 months when you leave*. Do we really need to be scared when sales people leave our company?

Reason for leaving range from bad management systems and professional growth to poor packages etc., but employers today bar you from joining any of their competitors when you sign a contract. Employees sign the contract with the clause because they are desperate for a job but dislike clauses that prevent them from joining a competitor or same industry until the 4-6 month period is over.

## Client relationships

Client relationships are both person-based and company-based. If a company's values and service levels are good, even if a representative leaves, most clients will stick with you. Yes a few personally glued clients/decision makers will move along with your rep, but will that really hurt your business?

What makes a client-employee relationship good and grow depends on several factors including: period of interface, personal links, company quality products and services etc. A salesperson who has been serving you for four years and more will most likely understand your needs more. Human beings need new friends and new connections and as a result the need for skills transfer with new and different personas will occur.

## Do new sales people work harder?

If your organisation replaces a salesperson I find that the new guys from a totally different industry - with the skills - work harder to get you new clients. Given that he/she has no database, he/she will farm more new clients than those who have been there several years. Your business new market development and share is likely to increase faster.

I looked at a company. New sales reps always make more calls or send emails than those who have been there long. We then underestimate the rate at which potential clients get to know us through the calls or emails. It's dollars stills to flow!

Skill transfer gets you new employees who think outside the box and desperate to show their mark. They are like soccer players who have joined a new team in a new league. Dedicated and willing to show he/she can do it. But those from the same level, the same league tend to come relaxed and hoping their form from the previous team will continue as is and find it's opposite.

## **Skills transfer**

I have seen engineers go into sales and marketing and do very well, I have also seen sales people in a publishing environment go into a manufacturing environment and do very well. Their skills transfer pays more dividends in both the short run and long run. They see your process with a customer eye. Those from the same industry bring what they used to do from your competitor. Do you really need to copy what your competitors are doing or do something exclusive and best? Then skills transfer brings the results and the better brains.

I have seen players in soccer signed as striker but end up being a good middle fielder; or a middle fielder turning to be a good striker. Yes, some skills transfer players/employees struggle, but do we really give them the platform to show what they are capable of or are employers desperate for sales and profits?

Social science professions like sales and marketing, human resources, public relations greatly benefit from skills transfer. Get employees from totally different industry and see the magic touch. One local bank in Zimbabwe employed workers from government and within three months they had the highest number of new clients as people switched banks. The new employees had more energy to prove that they can do it in corporate world outside government.

## **New employees must prove themselves**

We are in a business world where companies are not patient for employees to prove themselves. Some even getting fired before their proposals come through. When they do come, credit will be passed on to others who will have taken our clients or orders. Competition is the drive for impatience and short probation period. In Japan they have ten years probation for some professions and we all know the new innovations coming out of that market.

A culture of "We have been doing this for long" has had more organisations slipping slowly into a loss. Any new ideas or change of process is received with doubt. Only when you get more new staff from different sectors will they quickly see the shortfalls. We have heard terms like "Business Re-engineering" but as an organisation it's hard to re-engineer your process when you have the same brains and the same industry hands.

## **Making changes**

I remember growing up in Triangle Zimbabwe. It's a sugar farming estate with a lot of tractor drivers. When new models of tractors came, some drivers were reluctant to change theirs. Comfort zone! Nobody could drive the 'other' tractors. It was more like a prized personal asset. It's the same with today's employees, those who have crafted some processes long ago see no need for change. As much as we sing customer services; process mapping; customer focus you can hardly achieve more with the same brains and eyes. You need to pollute your organisation with new brains from different sectors.

You can either change something by polluting it or diluting it. I find skills transfer as the best way in the field of sales and marketing in particular. Not really the case with technical works but at times it can work wonders.

## **Company culture**

Most companies have got the "push the way" method for sales, personally so that you earn more. We now talk of basic and commissions as remunerations; own database as entry requirement; own car and even your own computer. Business no

longer resource or equip sales personnel so that they drive company as was before. Sales personnel have to do it their way as long as orders come in.

In Zimbabwe and Zambia; they still have a culture of a company car for sales personnel and the vehicle has to be branded. In South Africa one has to have your own car - no petrol allowance - and agree to a basic and commission structure. What will drive the rep to stay longer is his/her client base and commission structure.

Good, but will that sustain the business for new entrant competition? Do we equip sales staff to get into the battle field for all to win or is it now individual based? If I can get enough commission to survive and be comfortable, why worry? One would say 'we need an ambitious person' but not all people are ambitious. One can be as skilled and good in their work but not very ambitious. I have in Africa met an academic professor with no car or driver's license but comfortable to use public transport because it's where he/she gets his comfort.

A personal change through skills transfers does the magic. When you walk into a house daily at times you might not see that some corners are dirty. Imagine a department such as police having former gym instructors as policeman? Say in Johannesburg, the metro police being fit and muscled? Who would dare break the law? (I know in Zimbabwe during strikes government would get soldiers from Angola to help and for sure we all stayed in doors. Change of skills on a broader base. Sound funny but in business it pays).

When I moved from a construction industry to newspaper publishing I found myself being the best as I wanted to prove am a good sales person. New deals; new clients; new business and new data.

Try it and you will see. It also helps to break bad organisational culture at work. Employees from different industries have no click or camp. They are in for delivery and as one advert put, it's "less yada yada".

## ABOUT RUFAZ MARUFU MAVURE

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