



Talk about a Sales

By Eva Simeone



Among the many out-of-classroom experiences available to the more than 240 students in The Ralph and Luci Schey Sales Centre — an academic offering open to Ohio University students of any major — is one that relies on a human resource: its alumni.

With a format similar to speed-dating, Alumni Sales Experience Day gives Sales Centre students the chance to spend eight minutes with each of several participating alumni (32 for this spring’s event) to ask them about anything from salary negotiations to how best to set and achieve personal goals.

Ohio Today asked me — a sales certificate candidate — to extend the day a bit by talking to other Sales Centre insiders about what distinguishes the program, now marking its 10th year. Not surprisingly, their comments were right in sync with many of the tenets on which my professional sales education is based.

Identify the need. Set yourself apart with an indispensable product or service.

“Ohio University started one of the nation’s first undergraduate sales programs in 1997 as employers began asking for college seniors with sales skills. Approximately 50 percent of college graduates accept their first professional jobs in sales or a sales-related role, but only about 1 percent of colleges and universities actually teach sales. Today, the self-funded Sales Centre has the support of more than 40 companies that invest in the program and recruit our talented students, who by the time they graduate have earned one of the six sales certificates we offer. That credential comes with a lot of hard work, including 28 credit hours of classes and a 300-hour sales internship.”

— *Kenneth Hartung, BBA ’69 and MBA ’70, The Sales Centre’s executive director*

Start with a vision of what you want to accomplish and follow it.

“Faculty and alumni sat down and posed the question, ‘How can Ohio University create a unique sales program unlike any other?’ That’s the origin of how we’re not a major and not a minor. It’s a cross-disciplinary certificate open to any Ohio University major, and that was a core value established at the very beginning. People go into sales from every discipline; we wanted to provide access to sales education from every discipline.”

— *Professor of Marketing Catherine Axinn, who oversees students’ academic requirements*

Believe in what you do. If you don’t, why should your customers?

“Sales is what I wanted to do from day one. I believe it’s an endless fight to one day hope that the business world will recognize sales as a true profession. It takes all of us working together to do that. Many people correlate sales with that used Cadillac mentality. Instead, The Sales Centre teaches a formal sales cycle



Eva Simeone

Force

Photography by Rick Fatica and Kevin Riddell



Mike Cady

where the salesperson uses a consultative methodology (serving as an adviser to the prospective buyer) throughout the entire process.”

— *Sales Centre Alumni Society Chair Mike Cady, BS '96, who in 2006 was among the top 1 percent of Xerox's 4,000 sales representatives*

In sales, it's about demonstrating that the investment will yield the desired result. Prove your value.

“As a hiring manager for Xerox for 30 years, I would have loved to have had the opportunity to hire college seniors who basically had two years of sales training. That would save me \$150,000 to \$200,000 per employee. Here, I see engineering students sitting next to philosophy majors working on projects with business majors. That's real world. You work in diverse groups.”

— *Professional Sales Advisory Board member Tom Starr, BBA '69, CEO and founder of Miracles for Life*

Associate your product or service with a winner. “We knew that The Sales Centre had an established track record of success, and we wanted to feature outside-the-classroom experiences. I had the opportunity to visit Ohio University and meet with Kathleen Rioux and Amber Fox (two students featured in a recent PBS documentary), and the degree of professionalism we encoun-

tered proved that this was the school we wanted to highlight.”

— *Richard Wonderling, who produced “The New Selling of America” documentary for ThinkTV, the Dayton, Ohio, PBS affiliate*

Master the skills you need on the job through advanced sales training. Then anticipate, prepare and over-deliver.

“We interact with many high-level business executives while in The Sales Centre. During my internship, I felt comfortable cold-calling, securing meetings for other sales representatives and speaking in front of groups. I already had the experience in these areas because I practiced it throughout the past few years.”

— *Senior Kathleen Rioux, who was featured in the documentary*

Remember your vision. Use it as your touchstone.

“It was really my father's dream to start and continue this academic program. He has often said the university must teach students new and innovative ideas, which The Sales Centre does. To have his name on a program of this caliber is something he's very proud of.”

— *Sales Centre proponent Larry Schey, an Ohio University Board of Trustees member*

Eva Simeone, BSJ '08, is a student writer in University Communications and Marketing who will graduate in June with a degree in journalism and a media sales certificate.