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THE BROOKS GROUP

How the Pandemic and a Decision to Beat It Led to Better Results for Our Clients



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“The two things required to have a successful business built on live training are the ability to travel and the ability to gather. Starting in March of last year, none of that was possible. From a practical point of view, the key ingredients for our business success had been made illegal and we had to figure out a work around.” Gary Fly

CEOCFO: Mr. Fly, what attracted you to The Brooks Group? How has the company evolved over your leadership?

Mr. Fly: I come from a consulting background. I owned a consulting practice and was really looking for a more permanent situation. I found that when my consulting engagements ended, I missed the work, I missed the people, and I was really looking for a permanent place to land. I had read a book called “Designing Your Life,” by two Stanford University professors. In it they spoke about an encore career, and that really resonated with me. There was this idea that you find a place that your background, talents, experiences, and the like, all match up with the needs of a business, and the both sides win. I was very intentional about looking for that sort of situation, and the pandemic provided the opportunity. Having run a business through the downturn caused by 9/11 and then again through the recession, I had faced the test of uncertainty and economic instability before. Using that experience, and working with the owners of the business, we were able to craft a path forward that put the company in a position to prosper. That work provided the owners with the confidence to install me as the president in June of 2020, right in the middle of the pandemic, so your question around what has changed is topical.

We historically derived the majority of our revenue from live, in-person training. When I say the majority, it is well over 90% in our 44 years in business. The two things required to have a successful business built on live training are the ability to travel and the ability to gather. Starting in March of last year, none of that was possible. From a practical point of view, the key ingredients for our business success had been made illegal and we had to figure out a work around. I can remember, on March the 6th, having a conversation with one of our facilitators who was scheduled

to go to Canada about two weeks later. He called and said, "Gary, I do not think that I am willing to get on an airplane and go to Canada. I am concerned about my health; I am concerned about COVID and am just not comfortable." On that same day, we had two clients call and postpone their training, so it became pretty apparent to us that things needed to change. We quickly pivoted our business and created a set of virtual offerings. It was not simply taking our two- or three-day trainings and putting them on Zoom, it was reconstructing the curriculum. It was changing the way that it is taught as well as changing the way the learner experienced our content.

We worked very hard for about 6 weeks to really reconfigure all our offerings and make them virtual – and to do a good job with it. We incorporated best practices and adult learning theory with the help of our curriculum designers, who are all Master or PhD-level folks. Next, we had to retrain all our facilitators to be able to deliver in a virtual setting and understand how to use virtual tools. We decided to use Zoom for our meetings and programs, so we had to upskill all our facilitators. It really has been a whirl wind year for us, and those were just some of the changes that have taken place.

CEOCFO: *What were you able to construct, because of your sales training and teaching experience that made it a little bit easier to create the courses in an organization that had never been involved with people in that respect?*

Mr. Fly: We have a six-step methodology in our sales training process. It is an acronym – IMPACT - and the first three steps of that are "Investigate, Meet, and Probe." Ultimately, it is all really about discovery; what does a client need, how do you build rapport, how do you ask good questions; those sorts of things. On March 16th we told our sales team to stop selling and to start asking questions; "What is going on? What are people really concerned about? What is happening?" Because we teach questioning and rapport building, we really leaned on that to solve the riddle of what do sales organizations and sales leaders need right now.

We were able to build our business using these digital tools, and our sellers were already accustomed to doing a lot of work online. By listening to what the salespeople were learning and their conversations with our clients, we were able to take our knowledge of how to sell in a virtual world and start to construct curriculums and solutions that lined up with the needs of the marketplace at the time. We really turning to our own methodology, and we were able to do some good discovery work through our use of the investigate, meet, and probe steps of our own process.

CEOCFO: *How do you help your clients learn how to ask questions, how to listen, how to recognize important information?*

Mr. Fly: Clients learn through a combination of role play, scenarios, peer interaction, and Q&A in the classroom. We really focus on teaching how to ask open ended questions and going 3-deep to really understand the root cause or the root issue the prospect is experiencing. Utilizing open-ended questions allows the person on the other end to answer and to really elaborate. You are not driving them towards a preconceived

answer, but rather letting them unpack it in a way that makes sense to them.

Through good listening comes good questions - we talk about this 3-deep questioning, so it forces the person asking the questions to really pay attention, because it is almost impossible to ask a good question or to go 3-deep if your mind is shut off and you are not paying attention.

CEO CFO: *How do you teach people not to fall back into old habits? How do you help people keep that momentum and keep what they have learned top of mind?*

Mr. Fly: First we do assessment work. The assessments help people understand their natural proclivities; how they communicate, what motivates them, and how they see the world. I know, for example, that I have a tendency to gloss over details, that I will tend to try to sell my point of view. I am a high D (Dominance) on the DISC scale. Understanding this allows me to know how to adjust my communication style in certain situations. It is to say, "this is how you are wired, and this is how you will tend to behave or tend to react in certain situations."

Through understanding your personal assessment, you understand how you might compensate or ensure that you are not letting your natural tendencies override what you should be doing.

We then develop role plays and fun scenarios around the different personality styles. We back that up with coaching after the formal training where those concepts are reinforced. Then typically what we will utilize our app-based reinforcement solution to continue to build on the correct behavior.

The last thing that we really work hard to do is train and coach the managers. We like to train sales leaders on what their team is learning and help develop them into a coach, and how to coach back to the methodology and the work that was done in the classroom, so that they can then reinforce it as well.

CEO CFO: *What types or sizes of industries? Who is turning to you for services?*

Mr. Fly: We deal with all organizations that have a product or service to sell - typically with sales teams of more than 20. We focus our work in North America, but right now we are delivering programs in Germany, England, Dubai, and Singapore – so really we work all over the world. We have many facilitators that are native speakers. We've seen a lot of success in the healthcare/med device fields, agricultural/chemical space, and manufacturing.

CEO CFO: *What do you look at about a company you are taking on as a client? What do you need to know about them or understand about the culture, so they are getting a program that is most effective for them?*

Mr. Fly: The key is are they willing to change, and are they willing to invest in reinforcement? If they are willing to do those two things, then we know that we can make the training stick and that they will be successful. Our discovery process includes interviews with the leaders of

the organization and interviews with actual salespeople. If we have the opportunity, we will even go on sales calls with them, so we do a lot of discovery work to understand the realities of the situation. We then tailor our curriculum to that.

In addition, we use real life scenarios in our training. We will use their vernacular in the training. When we know that the company is willing to change and willing to invest in reinforcement, they will receive benefit from the training. These are really the key metrics for us.

CEO CFO: *How do you help salespeople understand the mindset of their prospective customer?*

Mr. Fly: This goes back to some of the assessment work that I mentioned. We know how people like to consume information and communicate information. As I mentioned about my own style, I tend to go into general terms. I am not a person that is going to want lots of whitepapers and tremendous detail. I want to understand what the benefit is. I want to understand quickly and essentially what the cost and ROI will be. Those are the kinds of things I want to understand. However, we have a head of research here who, if you are selling to her, she wants tremendous detail; why does this work, how has it been validated, and so on. In our trainings, the first thing we do is have the participants take an assessment so that they can see and understand their natural tendencies. Invariably, what happens is they start nodding their head like, "Oh yes, this is me, Oh yes, this is me, Oh yes, this is me," and throughout the debrief and assessment there is a report that we give them. We give them examples like, "This is how you probably like to be communicated with and this is what is important to you," and invariably they are like, "yes, yes, yes." Then we say, "Okay, understanding that I am a high D, and I am relational, but our head of research is going to have a high theoretical score and she is going to want a lot of detail, I know that if I were selling to her, I would know that I have to back off my own natural tendencies and sell to her way of buying, her way of thinking." Then we teach you how start to spot that. There are some really easy ways. In this virtual world, how do they communicate in the email? Are they long, lengthy emails with lots of detail or is the whole email written in the subject line? If you get an email from me, it may be 12 words, all of them in the subject line, and that is it. If you get an email from someone in our research department it is going to be bullet points and pages and maybe an exhibit or two.

We teach recognizing cues. If they are on Zoom, look around their environment and background. Is it messy, is it neat, it is organized and lots of memorabilia, or what is it around them? What seems to be important to them? Do they continue to ask for validation and studies or are they quick to the point and quick to get to the few details they want? We teach actual techniques to try to identify the behavior style of the person you are dealing with and the communication style of the person you are dealing with and then provide tools that say, "when dealing with a person of this sort of make-up, here are the types of information you want to emphasize and here is where you do not want to go. Do not bore them with a lot of long conversation and or a long phone call. Keep it short and to the point;" that sort of thing.

CEOCFO: *What is happening now that you are going back to some live training? What have you learned from the virtual only experience? Can you build reinforcement?*

Mr. Fly: Wow, that is a great question and you actually hit the touchstone there a little bit, when you asked about reinforcement. We took our 2-day training and busted it up into 8 virtual sessions. They were about 90 minutes each, and in that we started to see that between each session we could assign homework, for example, that they can actually go do in their sales environment. We can say, "For a first meeting, do this exercise," and the salespeople were able to do an activity in their environment and see if it worked or did not work. Then we were able to coach on it in the next session.

Out of that spaced learning experience, we have built something we call the Brooks Operating System, which is a spaced learning delivery of our training. We believe that the most effective training, going forward, will be a hybrid of virtual and live – spaced out for increased retention. Live may be a kick-off meeting or a mid-point check in or a wrap up at the end, but still delivering the content mostly in a virtual setting, in small bites, that allow the salespeople to practice in real time, in their natural selling environments, so that they can then see how effective it was and be coached on it. We have done a few of these pilots, and we are seeing effectiveness and retention go through the roof, just like you talked about.

CEOCFO: *There are many companies that offer training, some more in depth, some somewhat fly-by-night. How do prospective clients understand the depth and quality at The Brooks Group? What is it that stands out, so they know they should be working with you?*

Mr. Fly: There are some traditional things to look at, like that we have been in business for 44 years, we have a bench of talented facilitators that are all professional salespeople themselves, most of them sales leaders. Also, something that is unique to us is that we tailor the experience for the company and the industry. We have a methodology that ensures that we capture what needs to be taught, and we put it into vernacular that makes sense for the sellers that are going to the class. The third thing that makes us stand out is our customer testimonials. We have very strong testimonials from brands that people would recognize that are industry leaders, and that speaks to the reach and success of our training.

Look, we are on all the lists; Selling Power Top 20 Sales Training Companies, Training Industries Top 20, and so on. We received an award from Investopedia this year as the Best Virtual Sales Training program country-wide. We have all the credentials that you would expect in the trophy case, but the thing that really makes us different, is that we have three things that we focus on: being learner centric, adaptive, and simple. Our training is learner centric. We work very hard to engage the learners actively in the classroom so it is not a passive experience, but a very active experience. We have a curriculum that is adaptive. In any company's training, you might have someone that has been there three weeks, and you might have someone that has been there 30 years. Therefore, we have developed curriculum that helps both

of those people find benefit in the exercises and in the work. Our curriculum and our methodology is simple: simple to understand and is simple to use for the learners. It is built in a way that they can use their natural tendencies and their natural selling rhythms inside of the methodology that we train them on. Those things really set us apart.



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