

# Is your annual SKO your launchpad... or a liability?

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Every year, thousands of companies spend millions of dollars bringing their sales teams together for the **annual sales kick off (SKO)**. And they do it for one simple reason: **your competition is trying to take your business every single day.**

This isn't golf. There's no prize for second place. Every sales leader wants their sales organization to be **more competitive in the marketplace, sharper in the field, and faster to win.**

The whole team looks forward to it; speeches are made to toast last year's successes and sales leaders build hype for next year's potential - only to watch the energy evaporate the moment reps head home.

The problem isn't the content or the speakers or even engagement. The problem is most sales meetings are treated as events, not systems.

High-performing organizations can still struggle here, defaulting to "the meeting" instead of intentionally designing what happens before, during, and after. They move fast to plan the event. They don't spend the time designing the system around the event that ultimately sustains business impact.

Companies that expect results don't make that mistake. They build a three-phase performance engine: one that begins before the meeting, **peaks during it, and accelerates immediately after.** And if done well, the payoff is **3.2 times the investment.**

If your meeting doesn't **start and end with strategy and execution,** it's a very expensive interruption. Not an SKO.

## Phase 1: Pre-Meeting

### Train the brain before you fly the plane

Most sales meetings still make the same fatal mistake: they expect learning to happen after people arrive. That's backwards.

High-performing sales organizations use the pre-meeting phase to preload the brain, so the meeting itself becomes application and reinforcement, not introduction.

**This is where gamification earns its keep.** It's not gimmicks or trivia for swag. **Purpose-built gamification does three things:**

**Gamification is not gimmicks or trivia — it educates, signals what matters, and creates momentum.**



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1. **Educates** reps on products, strategy, and priorities before they walk into the room
2. **Signals what matters**, so there's no ambiguity during the meeting
3. **Creates momentum, not confusion**

Gamification works here because it respects how adults actually learn: short bursts, clear goals, feedback loops, and visible progress like leaderboards.

By the time attendees arrive, they shouldn't be asking, "What's the strategy?" They should already know that. **They should be asking, "How do I win with it?"**

If your first keynote slide says, "Let me explain the strategy," you've already lost leverage.

## Phase 2: The Meeting

### Turn learning into tension

Here's another uncomfortable truth: **passive sales meetings create passive sellers.**

In a competitive market, passivity does more than stall performance. It creates openings for competitors to win deals your team should have owned.

If your meeting is built around listening instead of doing, don't be surprised when nothing changes afterward. Effective sales leaders deliberately inject **productive tension** into the meeting itself using **individual competition and team-based challenges** to reinforce what matters in real time and build energy along the way.

**Competition works because it:**

- **Forces attention** (people lean in when there's something at stake)
- **Reinforces priority** (what's scored is what's important)
- **Creates memory** (competition anchors learning emotionally)

This is about **making learning active instead of theoretical**, not "winning prizes."

When reps compete around messaging, deal strategy, product application, objection handling, and target customer scenarios, they hear the strategy, and they practice it under pressure.

If your meeting feels calm, polite, and comfortable, you're missing out on **developing salespeople**—you're only entertaining them.

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### Phase 3: Post-Meeting

#### Convert applause into revenue

So, what comes next? The applause fades. The lights come up. It's time to go home. And then...nothing actually changes. This moment is the most valuable and the most fragile window of the entire investment.

The goal is speed. **How fast can you turn learning into action?**

That's where post-meeting sales incentives stop being "rewards" and start being **execution accelerators**.

Done right, post-meeting incentives put strategy into motion immediately—eliminating the "I'll get to it later" trap—and reinforce the critical behaviors emphasized and practiced at the meeting.

These aren't generic incentives or longtail contests that start weeks later. These are incentives that launch as soon as the meeting ends and are tightly aligned to your call to action.

They are focused on:

- **Priority products**
- **Target customers**
- **Key behaviors**
- **Near-term pipeline actions**

This is how learning becomes muscle memory and how actions produce business results.

If reps leave the meeting knowing exactly what to do next and are incentivized to do it, you've created a clear path to revenue growth. Companies that implement strategic sustainment see up to **23%** higher quota attainment within **60-120 days** of the SKO and a **19%** increase in average deal size over the next **12 months**.

### The real question sales leaders should be asking

The question isn't "**Was the meeting engaging?**"  
The question is "**What changed on Monday?**"

High-performing sales organizations understand that SKOs are about preparing teams to compete, execute, and convert strategy into revenue faster than the market moves as well as inspiring their teams.

That's why they design the system and not just the meeting:

**Phase 1: prepare the brain**

**Phase 2: create tension and mastery**

**Phase 3: convert insight into income**

**Anything less is theater.**

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