

# Contribution of the Graduate Sales Bootcamp in Satisfying Graduates and Employers

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**Abstract:** This article investigates the Graduate Sales Bootcamp, a Tanzanian soft skills training program aimed at addressing the skills gap faced by recent graduates entering the workforce. It argues that the program has the potential to significantly benefit both graduates and the business economy. The study examined a five-step training process, implemented by the program and explored its effectiveness through qualitative data analysis. This data is drawn from in-depth interviews with stakeholders and 62 graduates who participated. The study reveals a high level of satisfaction among program beneficiaries, with several key factors identified as contributing to this success.

**Keywords:** Soft skills; training; corporate economy; employability skills.

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## Introduction

High quality and relevant youth skills development as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are only useful if they address the global youth unemployment and poverty. According to the International Labor Office (2016), the global number of unemployed youth is anticipated to exceed 70 million while over 156 million youth workers are said to be living in poverty. The annual influx of graduates into the Tanzanian labor market is projected to range from 800,000 to 1,000,000 individuals. However, the economy is only able to provide approximately 250,000 job opportunities each year. Consequently, the majority of graduates experience an average waiting period of approximately 5.5 years before successfully obtaining employment that provides a wage. The employment rate for women stands at 67 percent, whereas men exhibit a higher employment rate of 79 percent (Kakengi, 2019).

In recognition of the changing nature of the work and the workplace and the various opportunities available to youth workers, mastering soft skills is necessary for workplace readiness. The existence of

a comprehensive and diverse collection of literature pertaining to soft skills is well-documented, as exemplified by findings of Futureworx (2018). Hard skills are commonly associated with specific job requirements whereas soft skills possess the ability to be applied across various professional roles and industries. The literature identifies crucial soft skills that facilitate the transition from higher education to the workforce. Furthermore, different disciplines hold contrasting and conflicting perspectives on the skills and attributes that are considered relevant for students and employers. The definition and acquisition of soft skills pose challenges when considering their use within specific industries and occupations (Mutalemwa et al. 2020).

As a result of rising globalization and reliance on technology, there is a growing demand for soft skills in the business economy. These skills can be acquired through formal education in classroom environments, at workplace or through the development of a robust training industry. Instruction in soft skills can contribute to the professional, personal and intellectual development of graduates. The literature emphasizes that

experiential learning training programs are best guided and managed by professionals with subject-matter expertise and practical knowledge in conducting dynamic and interactive sessions. In addition, in the opinion of Tarrant (2010) where trainings programs, even short-term ones, are experientially structured, there is a high propensity that training participants will achieve a new worldview by the end of the program. Scholarly studies undertaken by Wylie and Neeley (2016); Hardie and Ross (2018); Washington and Mondisa (2021), Tan et al., (2022), Long and Nga (2022) and Mgaiwa (2021) highlight several key learning methods that are crucial for the development of soft skills and, consequently, employability. These methods include mentoring, work experience, lectures, experiential learning, self-assessment feedback, computer-assisted learning, case studies and problem solving, extra-curricular activities, field visits and industrial placements.

There is no guarantee that all soft skills training programs will result in connecting graduates to the labor market through improvement of soft skills and employment opportunities. There exist constraints which may deter the soft skill training intervention from working as expected. In the opinion of J-PAL (2017), the success lies in implementation details such as the length, quality and intensity of training, the impact of support services paired with the training like job placement and counselling, private sector engagement and the alignment of skills to jobs available.

This article aims to investigate the efficacy of the Graduate Sales Bootcamp, a program designed to address the skills gap among recent university graduates. This initiative focuses on the development of soft skills, which are critical for success in the corporate sector. The paper also explores how the program's five-step approach, informed by research on effective graduate training programs (Wylie & Neeley, 2016; Hardie et al., 2018; Washington & Mondisa, 2021; Tan et al., 2022; Long & Nga, 2022; Mgaiwa, 2021), can effectively equip graduates with the skills needed to meet the demands of the modern job market: (i) Step 1: Recruiting graduates -Experience and Passion for Selling (ii) Step 2: Interviewing Corporate Recruiters and Sponsors to Adapt the Coaching Program, (iii) Step 3: Training the Selected Graduates in Class for One Day, (iv) Step 4: Coaching and Mentoring Graduates and (v) Step 5: Evaluating the Impact of the Training

## Methodology

The study draws from the reviewed literature and the author's experiences as the founder and coordinator of a case study (Graduate Sales Bootcamp). The participant observer method (Iacono et al., 2009) is complemented with interviews with stakeholders as well as an evaluation of the 2015 Graduate Sales Bootcamp which took place from 16th to 25th May 2016 and which aimed at examining the impact of the training that was held on 9th September 2015 to establish the career progress of 61 trainees after the training. The responses from trainees were collected through emails and phone calls. These were reliable and cheap data collection instruments. Furthermore, interviews took place in 2015 and 2017.

The Graduate Sales Bootcamp is a free and sponsorship led one day soft skills training which is coordinated by the author of this article who works for Mzumbe University in Tanzania. The coordinator chose to work and partner with an Italian sales coach Enzo Graziano since 2015. Enzo is a direct sales coach who has dedicated a decade, spanning from 2005 to 2015, to cold calling and hitting the roads of 15 countries across two continents and three regions in Africa. The rationale of the bootcamp is that developing a breed of qualified and trained people might be the answer to the challenges faced by many reputable businesses. Selling is a skill that everyone uses every day, no matter what they do for a living. For example, financial institutions, FMCGs, insurance firms and retail players struggle to recruit the salespeople that will serve the growing middle class of Africa and Tanzania in particular.

The bootcamp organizers realized that there was no academic course able to teach the science of "direct sales" in a way that was practical and geared towards the requirements of employers. "It takes more than papers to develop that ability. The best graduates of the best university in the country might not be as good a sales performers. To win in sales, you need first and foremost, important values and personal beliefs that are the core of salesmanship: integrity, honesty and persistence" said Bhavesh Chandaria, Head of Learning, Training and Development of SAFAL Group, the largest iron sheet producer in Africa who was interviewed in 2015 and was the sponsor of the 2015 bootcamp. The bootcamp combines formal theoretical instructions as well as experimental learning. It is directed to

bridge the gaps between employers and graduates who intended to start a career in sales or learn how to sell themselves to secure employment. The aim of the bootcamp was to force graduates out of their comfort zone (mindset, personality traits and behavioral patterns) and improve their employment prospects as successful job seekers, job shapers and job makers. Participants were subjected to public speaking exercises and role playing games so that the audience can learn from the mistakes they make when they sell.

The findings in this study are delivered numerically as well as in image and narrative formats. The study employed a qualitative narrative research approach, including allowing quotes to be integrated when describing the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2009). This approach allows the reader to understand the setting, participants' thoughts and the role the researcher took in the study. It also makes it easier to comprehend the problem, findings and recommendations of the study (Creswell, 2012).

## Results and Discussion

The training process of the Graduate Sales Bootcamp followed the following five specific steps every year.

### **STEP #1: Recruiting graduates -Experience and Passion for Selling**

In the 2015 Interview, the sales coach Enzo Graziano emphasised:

The personal background of a sales candidate counts more than anything ever accomplished in a safe academic background. We don't have to evaluate just what the candidate has achieved but most importantly how it has been achieved. When selecting a great sales candidate, we should first and foremost take into consideration his or her passion for the profession of sales. Sales is not a job but a career that demands life-long learning. In 2015, there are no longer salespeople but technical consultants with sales skills.

In connection to the statement, sales play a crucial role in sustaining the overall well-being of the business economy. When firms have robust sales, they have the potential to flourish, facilitate job creation, produce tax income, foster innovation and encourage competition. All of these factors

collectively contribute to the enhancement of the economy, benefiting all individuals involved. Moreover, sales can be classified as soft skills. Sales is a fundamental business activity that involves establishing and nurturing connections with potential clients and existing consumers, comprehending their requirements and offering them appropriate resolutions tailored to their specific demands.

The coordinator of the bootcamp is in charge of the selection of graduates who should be in their final year of their degree programme and should have been unemployed for less than three years after graduating. The coordinator looks for graduates with passion for selling. In 2015, the graduate sales bootcamp only recruited trainees who were truly interested in spending a lifetime in sales. The subsequent bootcamps had graduates from any academic disciplines.

### **STEP #2: Interviewing Corporate Recruiters and Sponsors to Adapt the Coaching Program**

Prior to the delivery of the training program, the researcher interviewed the sponsors (see Table 1 for a list of sponsors since 2015) to adapt the training and role-playing games to the possible scenarios faced by job seekers and professional salespeople in the same companies. The researcher invited the sponsors to attend future training sessions to identify potential sales hires and invest in their teams. Sales driven organisations identified a number of steps in the sales process as of paramount importance, for the success in their organisations. In particular, they identified the following tasks and skills: winning the fear of rejection e.g. in a job search, making sales calls, introducing oneself and making an impression, for example in 7 seconds, booking face-to-face meetings via phone, overcoming (price) objections and closing the sales/scoring a job offer.

Jobseekers can learn a lot from the above sales process. Salespeople pitch prospects on a product or service. Jobseekers pitch prospective employers on themselves as candidates, for instance, by reaching out to them and convincing them that, above all others, they are the right persons to solve their problems.

The presence of sponsors, their staff and other delegates at the training session added an unexpected element to the environment. This larger audience creates a more challenging situation for the trainees participating in public speaking

exercises and role-playing games. By overcoming their stage fright in this unexpected circumstance, trainees weren't just learning sales techniques. They were also developing valuable skills in communication, resilience, and the ability to perform under pressure.

Orth et al (2019)'s study supports the first two steps, which posit that the trainer and learner should develop a co-adaptive rapport and adjust their practice constraints accordingly as their connection develops.

### STEP #3: Training the Selected Graduates

The bootcamp developed an experiential training program that combines theatrical plays, public speaking training and role-play tasks to challenge the attendees of the program. The program had one unique delivery methodology and learning tools. The training manual based on graphic illustrations, using cartoons as teaching instruments to influence critical thinking and reflective skills (Wylie & Neeley, 2016). Corporate recruiters collaborated with the coordinator to share their views and bring the session closer to the expectations of the private sectors.

**TABLE 1: List of Sponsors and Type of sponsorship in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018**

2015 Graduate Sales Bootcamp
Mzumbe University Dar Es Salaam Camps College. ALAF
2016 Graduate Sales Bootcamp
Julius Nyerere International Convention Centre (JNICC) - (in kind-venue) .SBC-Pepsi (cash). Mwananchi Communications Ltd ( in kind).The Guardian Ltd ( in kind), .CRDB Bank (cash) TLR Eclectic (in kind).Sahara Media Group Ltd (in kind) .Social Security Regulatory Authority (cash). Harbor View Suites (in kind). Cornerstone Partners Ltd (cash). Fastjet (in kind). Fofam Group Media (in kind) .Hotel Slipway (cash). Nakabi Afrika Ltd (cash). National Housing Cooperation (cash).Sanlam Insurance (cash) .Pyramid Pharma Ltd (cash). Lensmark Studios (in-kind). Ben Bros Motors Ltd (cash).Reuben Printers (in kind). Vayle Springs Ltd. (cash)
2017 Graduate Sales Bootcamp
EFM TV ( in kind publicity), Oxpérience (in kind, live streaming, publicity ), SSRA ( in cash for venue hiring), ITV (in kind publicity), Ruksa (in kind, publicity), Lensmark Studios (in kind, equipment, photo/videography), Precision Air (in kind, Transportation for Enzo), Brighter Monday (in kind, publicity), MC luvanda ( in kind), VSO/ICS (in kind, ushers), Sanlam Life Insurance (cash), CLOUDS (in kind, publicity), Smart Industries (in kind, snacks), Sayona (in kind, water), Resolution Insurance (cash), Knight Support (in kind-health emergency services), TLR (in kind, furniture for training), Fasjet (in kind, publicity and ticket for the best graduate), Harbour view Suites (in kind, accomodation), Care Sanitation and Suppliers Ltd (in kind-cleaning services at the venue) and Glory Sanitary Napkins (in kind).
2018 Graduate Sales Bootcamp
Mwananchi Communications Ltd (in kind), Oxpérience (in kind), JCDecaux (in kind), SBC-Pepsi (in Kind), Sayona, Social Security Regulatory Authority (cash), AyoTV (in kind), Precision Air, Prime Advertising Tanzania, LensMark Studios (in kind), National Housing Corporation (cash), Watumishi Housing Company (cash), Kwetu Studios (in kind), TV-E (in kind), Rotaract Club of Karuiki Dar es Salaam (in kind), Kijitonyama Tennis Club (in kind), Ennovate Hub (in kind), The One TzCulturalTours (in kind), Kasole Secrets Ltd (in kind), @edmark_looseweight (in kind) and MHS juice (in kind).

### STEP #4: Coaching and Mentoring Graduates

Experiential training programs, like the Graduate Sales Bootcamp, are highly effective for teaching soft skills due to their interactive nature and focus on building emotional intelligence. This is supported by research from Hardie et al.,(2018), Washington and Mondisa (2021), Tan et al.,(2022); Long and Nga (2022).However, effective sales training goes beyond simply teaching the "science" of sales techniques. It also needs to consider individual differences and adapt to the student's strengths and

weaknesses. This approach helps identify "sales styles" that work best for both the individual and the company they represent. The following paragraphs will elaborate on this point by providing examples from private sector companies in Tanzania, including SAFAL (ALAF) in 2015, SBC (Pepsi) Tanzania in 2016, and Precision Air in 2018. These examples will showcase how these companies tailored their sales training programs to meet the specific needs and individual strengths of their trainees.



**FIGURE 2:** Graduate Sales Bootcamp held at the Julius International Conference Center, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania

### **SAFAL**

The SAFAL group organised an internship programme for 20 graduates selected out of the 62 trained by the bootcamp. Bhavesh Chandaria, the Head of Learning and Development for the SAFAL group, designed and led the internship. The graduates had to accomplish two main tasks: to gather market intelligence by interviewing literally hundreds of business owners of small hardware shops and to sell. After a one-day induction and factory visit, the students were equipped with the skills necessary to sell just like any other salesperson. The road assignment was the most important part of the training program. EnzoGraziano, the trainer spent three days on the road to coach the graduates. The sales tasks were monitored daily and culminated with a final weekly report communicated to the Human Resource department of the SAFAL group who ended up hiring six graduates.

### **SBC Tanzania Ltd (Pepsi)**

SBC Tanzania Ltd was incorporated on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2001 with the mission to revive the Pepsi Cola business in Tanzania and to transform Pepsi brands into sizeable and serious contenders for volume and share of mind in the Tanzanian market. The esteemed sponsor of the 2016 Graduate Sales Bootcamp spotted talents during the training and selected 23 graduates who were offered an internship opportunity in November 2016, comprised of a comprehensive orientation as well as a road assignment. The activities and benefits of the sponsorship and internship are outlined in Box 1.

### **Precision Air**

In 2018, 35 graduates who attended the bootcamp, participated in a marketing survey and analysis group assignment that involved 725 respondents chosen among the graduates' social network for Precision Air, a locally owned airline. Eight finalists presented the findings to the Management of the Company. The finalists' performance was rewarded by free air flight tickets to any destinations in the country. In addition, Precision which has been sponsoring the bootcamp since 2017 covered the 2018 bootcamp in their inflight magazine (See Box 2.).

### **STEP #5: Evaluating the Impact of the Training**

The 2015 graduate sales bootcamp underwent an evaluation in accordance with the guidelines put forth by J-PAL (2017) and the findings are as follows:

#### **Current Status of the Trainees**

There were 62 consulted trainees, based on the 9<sup>th</sup> September 2015 attendance list. From the total number of 62 trainees, 67.74% got employed and the rest (32.25%) were still looking for jobs. Interestingly, the employment status of the trainees revealed that 37 (59.67%) were employed by private sectors and five (8.06%) were employed by public sectors. The employing private sectors were banking (CRDB Bank, Access Bank, Ecobank, DTB Bank and Barclays Bank), telecommunications (TIGO, VODACOM and Airtel), Airline (Fastjet) and other business enterprises/ Companies (ALAF, Mohamed Enterprises, Smart Brand Enterprises, Metro Production Company). Trainees were employed as sales officer, marketing manager, credit officer, customer service officer, operations officers or Bank teller and loans officers.

## Challenges Found When Looking for Suitable Job Placement

The majority of the respondents reported that job rejection was attributed to not having enough experience. This, in their opinion, was the toughest challenge they faced in the job market. One trainee poignantly mentioned "Due to my background in sales and marketing, coupled with the attainment of a postgraduate degree, I often encounter situations

where I am perceived as both underqualified and overqualified."

## How Quickly One Finds a Job after the Training Program

Most of the trainees (70%) got employed within one month after the training program and a few (20%) got employed after three months. The remaining 10% were employed after five months of the training program.

### Box 1- The Internship With SBC Tanzania Ltd

Internship candidates were subjected to the following activities no later than one month from the training event:

- Orientation through SBC Tanzania Ltd mode of working conditions, rules and norms of the organization
- Conducting a market survey in order to collect pertinent market and sales data of SBC Tanzania on the following areas with a view to make appropriate sales and marketing changes:
  1. Price compliance in the market: how much the consumer was paying for products and this will entail speaking to the consumers
  2. Market preferences for plastics vis a vis bottles and competitors: markets are shifting from glass bottles to plastics like PET.
  3. The opinion and views of consumers (such as distributors, stockists and retailers) on SBC's products (e.g. prices, preferences to name such few examples)  
The survey covered Dar es Salaam region and graduates conducted a market survey based on the instructions as well as the supervision of SBC National Training and Capability Manager
  4. The mode of survey was visiting retail centers or blocks within Temeke, Kinondoni and Ilala districts in Dar es Salaam.
  5. Interns were in the field from Monday to Thursday and Friday was for reporting and evaluation.
- Interns were offered Pepsi T-shirts, meals and transport based on Pepsi Internship policy.
- Database of the interns was permanently in custody of Pepsi for considerations of Pepsi future employment
- Spotted interns with the right attitude and passion for sales observed during the internship activities had the possibility to be considered for SBC Tanzania Limited employment.

### BOX 2 – Precision Air Inflight Magazine Issue 93, January-March 2019

## Helpfulness of the Training in the Current Job

Majority of trainees (80%) considered the training skills helpful and relevant to their job placement, despite the hostile job market they currently faced. More than 80% of trainees strongly agreed that the training had been so much helpful in their job in terms of customer service and how to deal with clients." Additionally, 30% agreed that the training

is still worthwhile in boosting their career prospects. On a more optimistic note, one respondent reported: "It is understandable that the job market is currently oversubscribed but in the future, I hope my training skills will enable me to use when I find a job."

## Paa staff spotlight

# No pain, no gain at Graduate Sales Bootcamp

*Precision Air believes in developing its employees as they are the ones who take care of its cherished customers. The airline, which was established 25 years ago, believes that developing staff is not enough and it is of paramount importance it develops a community.*

*With this aim in mind, Precision Air sponsored the 4th annual edition of the Graduate Sales Bootcamp founded and led by Dr Darlene Mutalemwa of Mzumbe University. Every year Dr Mutalemwa identifies graduates who are hungry and humble enough to work for the best employers in Tanzania.*

### Characters

*The programme is attended by graduates in business, economics, law, environmental engineering, medicine and virtually any other major. The young attendants are trained on the lost art and science of "direct sales" and then placed on challenging road assignments that shape their characters for a lifetime.*

*To develop the young graduates Dr Mutalemwa has chosen sales coach Enzo Graziano. Enzo has served some of the largest FMCGs, banks, financial institutions and international players in Africa. His training methodology is based on the foundational sales values of humility and self-denial. He helps people embrace what he calls "the gift of pain" by infusing the joy of serving with humility.*



*The sales trainer believes in the "power of being a nobody".*

*While training the Precision Air management team on sales leadership, Enzo said: "If you think you are special, you will spend the rest of your life trying to prove a point, but when you understand that you are nothing before God and before*

*your community, you spend your life trying to serve someone to count a little bit more".*

### First job

*The airline intends to be a sponsor of the Graduate Sales Bootcamp for years to come and help more than 1,000 graduates find their first job by the year 2025.*

## Usefulness of the Training

Most of the trainees (86%) strongly agreed that the bootcamp helped them face life with a more positive attitude. The remaining 14% consisted of those who agreed (7.8%), disagreed (4.7%), and strongly disagreed (1.5%). On the other hand, 67.7% of participants strongly agreed that the program helped them become more effective at work, while

30% agreed, 2% disagreed, and 0.3% strongly disagreed. Furthermore, the majority of trainees (96.77%) strongly agreed that the trainer was prepared and inspiring. The remaining 3.23% consisted of trainees who agreed (2%), disagreed (1.01%), or strongly disagreed (0.22%).

Finally, the majority 98.38% strongly agreed that they would suggest other graduates to attend the same training against 1.62% who agreed on the same. One of the respondents narrated:

Growing up, my family faced financial limitations. To help out, I assisted my sister with selling vegetables at the local market. This experience allowed us to contribute towards our daily needs and education. Inspired by the diverse field of marketing, I pursued a bachelor's degree, believing it would open doors to various marketing positions in Dar es Salaam. After two years of working, I felt the urge to further enhance my career prospects. Hoping for better earning potential, I enrolled in a Master of Science in Marketing at Mzumbe University. While I gained valuable theoretical knowledge, I soon realized the gap between academic learning and practical application. Despite my work experience, I struggled to communicate my skills effectively during job interviews, naively assuming my experience would speak for itself. Participating in the 2015 Graduate Sales Bootcamp was a turning point in my journey. Initially, I hoped to connect with recruiters present at the event. The internship at SAFAL Group (ALAF) proved to be a transformative experience. Selling roofing sheets in underprivileged areas of Mbagala under the scorching sun was challenging but ultimately humbling. While some trainees expressed discomfort with the assigned tasks, I observed the value of resilience and understanding the customer journey in any role. This experience shifted my perspective on the professional world and job interviews. I recognized that employers are interested in an individual's story and their potential to contribute value to the organization. I am now equipped to effectively present myself in interviews, evidenced by recent job offers I've received. I further solidified these skills by participating in the 2017 bootcamp."

The training was also useful to other participants. A graduate in political science and public administration from the University of Dar es Salaam, remarked: "I expected the bootcamp to land me a

job. I was so wrong. I realized that I was not ready to be employed because I did not know how to sell myself through storytelling." Another respondent remarked, "I realized with shame that my team made mistakes when selling our product. These mistakes were caused by our pride and lack of humility when approaching customers. I have since learned how to build trust with my customers." This was also echoed by another person who reported: "We appreciated the learning on both personal and professional levels."

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The Graduate Sales Bootcamp in Tanzania offers a unique approach to bridge the gap between academic qualifications and the demands of the job market. The training equips recent graduates with valuable skills through a well-defined five-step process. Refining the recruitment process could incorporate assessments to identify a candidate's "sales style" and suitability for different company settings. Expanding collaboration with additional sponsors can diversify internship opportunities and broaden the program's reach. Additionally, refining internship tasks can ensure they are relevant to the graduate's field of study and contribute meaningfully to their professional development. Strengthening data collection and analysis methods can provide more specific information regarding long-term career outcomes and employer satisfaction. Finally, exploring the feasibility of offering specialized bootcamps tailored to specific industries or career paths could cater to a wider range of graduate needs and aspirations.

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