

# CALIFORNIA SALES TRAINING ACADEMY

**W**hen it comes to training sales people, sometimes the best approach is a unified one. Dealer members of NCDCA realized during the early 1990s that it would be much more efficient to have a consolidated training and recruitment program than for each dealership to have its own system. Not only has the CSTA been a success, it has been a model for other dealer associations who have wanted to take the same approach because they've seen how successful it is and how smoothly it works.

The NCDCA started the California Sales Training Academy as a way to teach anyone who is interested, but especially those who want to learn how to sell cars, what they will need to know to succeed as a professional in the automobile industry. Each four-day class, held Mondays through Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., is taught every other week throughout the year at the NCDCA Conference Training Center. Students learn how to:

- Present and sell cars
- Create a referral business
- Develop prospects

Those who finish the class receive a certificate of completion and help with finding a job through a dealership job referral program. San Diego County residents can take

the class for free. The prerequisites for taking the course are as follows:

- Students have to be 18 years or older.
- A great attitude and a willingness to learn are both important.
- All students need to have a valid U.S. driver's license. Their driving record also has to be clean.
- They have to be able to get a Vehicle Sales License from the DMV.

Attendees are expected to dress like professionals. Men should wear a dress shirt and dress slacks; women should wear skirts, dresses or dress pants. For the men, a jacket and tie are optional unless the instructor asks for them. Casual clothing, such as shorts, jeans, or tennis shoes, is not allowed.

The class isn't just about selling cars. It's about elevating the profession by ensuring that those who sign up for it learn about products and are taught the basics of ethical behavior and excellent customer service. The current teacher is Bob Heintz, who built a successful career in the automobile industry starting when he was in college. He moved to San Diego in 1987, worked as a general manager for three dealer groups, and retired in 2009 from Hoehn Motors.

But Bob realized he didn't want to be fully retired. He enjoyed being



a guest speaker from time to time at the class, and when the next head instructor position became available, Bob was ready. He enjoys teaching on a part-time basis because it gives him a chance to stay engaged in the industry, meet incredible people, and pass along what he has learned over the course of his career.


This course has benefited thousands of people who have completed it and started a career in automotive sales. In fact, many dealers will often hire sales personnel and then enroll them in the class as the first step in their training.

The CSTA Registration form is available online. Go to [ncda.com/training-seminars](http://ncda.com/training-seminars), look for the section titled Registration Information, and click the CSTA Registration Form link. You can also call (858) 550-0080.



In addition to the sales training course, NCDA also has other seminars and workshops that are offered throughout the year. Topics are chosen to help dealership employees better deal with regulatory compliance and to strengthen their business skills. For example, past seminars have included:

- Annual legal and regulatory updates
- Essentials of vehicle registration
- F&I compliance
- Harassment avoidance training and education
- Health care reform
- Wage and hour updates

The NCDA will continue to assess any new laws that are passed and put together seminars and workshops that will help association members to comply with any requirements by teaching them what they need to know and educating them about any required tools. 

**Courses are taught at**  
**The NCDA Conference & Training Center**  
**10065 Mesa Ridge Court**  
**San Diego, CA 92121**



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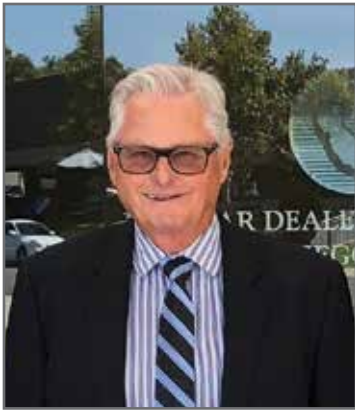
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# INTERVIEWS

## BOB HEINTZ DIRECTOR, CALIFORNIA SALES TRAINING ACADEMY

### What is your industry background?

I started in the automobile business in college, and I eventually began selling cars. I worked as a factory representative for General Motors' Pontiac for about eight years, then fell back into retail. I owned a dealership in a small town in Minnesota for 10 years. When you work in a dealership like that, you wear several hats.

I was the general manager for a Cadillac dealership for eight years, worked for Bob Baker selling Infiniti for four or five years, and moved to several dealerships in North San Diego working for two brothers, the Hoehns, for about 10 years. At that point, my wife's health wasn't good, so I retired even though I didn't feel ready to retire otherwise.

### Why do you think training like this is important?

Frankly, customers today are starving for service. Now that we are in the age of the internet and social media, we've gotten away from service, and people miss it. When they are in the market for a car, they want to talk to someone who cares about them and listens to them. It's very important to teach those who work at dealerships, or who plan to work at dealerships, good people skills. They need to understand the importance of service and excellence instead of mediocrity. Selling cars is about building relationships with people, and giving them the experience you would want if you were the buyer. What it comes down to is applying the golden rule. It works.

### What is your favorite sales topic to teach? Why?

I guess my favorite sales topic is teaching students to understand that people buy from people. The sales people are the most important part of the equation because they are the ones who talk the most to customers. They need to ask good questions, listen to what people are saying, and gain an understanding of their issues and why those issues matter. Treat people with enthusiasm and true interest. The buyer has the power to decide to buy a car, so we have to understand their wants and needs.

As an example of this, you need to work with people based on their wants and needs more than their budget. Too often sales people assume things about a buyer too soon. Don't engage them too soon about what you think they can or can't afford. Hear what they want and need. If it is out of line with their budget then you can make adjustments later in the process to what that budget is. But work with them based on their needs and wants, not what you think they have the ability to pay. Once in a while you will make a mistake, but you can adjust later to whatever that budget turns out to be.

### Share a bit about the career growth you have seen from some of the students.

There have been a number of success stories. The gentlemen who have been interviewed for this issue of the magazine have been examples of that.

- Anthony Benfatti had never sold cars, but then became the general manager of a Hoehn dealership in about six years. He was in one of the first classes.
- Chris Boone is a young man who had never sold cars before, either, when he came through the class about three to four years ago. Now he is the new car sales manager at the Lexus San Diego dealership.
- When Michael Lee took the class, he impressed me with his incredible work ethic. He is now a finance director at Lexus San Diego.

During the weeks when I am not teaching, I make dealership visits. Every time I make a visit, I see three or more people who came through the course. Not everyone goes into management. Some of them are doing very, very well in sales, which can be a career in itself.

One of the greatest satisfactions for me is to walk into a dealership and see people who are succeeding and excelling as sales people or in other roles within the dealership because they understand the importance of customer service. They succeed quickly because of that understanding. Working at a dealership is a great career opportunity, financially and personally. Those who choose to make a career working at a dealership can take pride in serving others.

### What is the value and importance of industry training as offered through the CSTA?

A lot of people offer ongoing training programs throughout the industry that are similar to the CSTA, but the CSTA is particularly outstanding.

There is a strong correlation between athletics and selling. Athletes have to hone their skills and practice. It is the same thing in selling. Sales people need to find someone to role play with so they can continually grow and improve their communication skills. That's why we do role playing in the class. I teach students that making a good first impression is important for making a sale, and then we role play on how to greet a customer properly. Students learn how to be professional and how to give people a good experience.

Selling is a process. I am a big believer in process because I've seen that knowing what to do next gives people confidence. The idea is to lead people. You don't tell your way to a sale, you ask. It's important to ask good questions that give you a direction for what the customer is hoping to achieve with their dollar, and then listen to what they're telling you.

Some sales people think too much about their own agenda instead of the customer's agenda.

### How do dealerships benefit from this course?


I have been primarily in management most of my career. The retail business is fast-paced, and there are all kinds of distractions. Managers get so engaged in their many responsibilities that they're not able to do any kind of concentrated training with employees. Even the managers who want to train find that they can't. They get pulled in too many different directions because of their different responsibilities.

We put people in a class for four days and give them a good foundation. Once they have the foundation, they can build on that foundation and continue to train themselves by going to YouTube, social media, and books. The tools are there to help people keep themselves sharp. There's a lot to be said about self-motivation and having the initiative to be the best. But first, you need a basic understanding of how to be more successful by understanding what is really important in sales: giving people the kind of experience you would like to have. Once they understand that part of it, you can encourage them to work on their skills and improve, and also encourage them not to be complacent. Being complacent is when they get into trouble.

### Based on your background with the CSTA, what are your best three pieces of advice to someone entering this industry as a career?

1. Become a student of the business. Understand that it is a career, not just a job.
2. Learn discipline. You need to discipline yourself and learn how to focus and use your time wisely. It's not just the hours you work; it's what you do with the hours.
3. Think of yourself as a business within a business. You are an employee but you have the opportunity to build your own business. That understanding changes how you approach things. It motivates you to continually learn and improve.

### What trends do you see happening in the auto industry in the next five years? How will industry training help?

Industry training is going to continue to be helpful because the basics of the business are not going away. People still buy from people. Even though we have social media and many different ways of communicating, people will still drive farther for a great sales experience. I don't see that model changing for the foreseeable future. Providing a great sales experience will continue to be important. Yes, you can buy a car online without stepping into a dealership and have it delivered to your home, but people like personal interactions. They want to see, smell, and sit in the car they're going to buy. 



## MICHAEL LEE

**Michael Lee**, a former CSTA student, is now a finance director for Lexus San Diego.

### How did you get into the auto industry?

I spent almost 25 years in the restaurant business, which is another customer service business. When I got out of the restaurant service business, however, I still wanted to be in an industry that focused on customer service. A friend suggested the auto industry to me because it had better hours, better pay, and I would still be able to interact with customers.

The biggest impact that my background in the restaurant business had on me was the hospitality part. I would greet customers warmly, and I treated people like they wanted to be treated. Some people told me I was a breath of fresh air because of the honesty and warmth. This business is not known for that.

### What do you like about it? What makes this a career choice?

This is absolutely a career for me. Once I go into a field, I am committed to it. That's just me. I like the hours and the interaction with customers, and the pay is good.

### Who suggested the CSTA to you?

It was a requirement when I went to work at Hoehn Motors.


### Was there an "aha" moment about a topic, or learning something new, that you didn't know before?

I was new to the industry, so everything was new to me.

### Would you recommend the CSTA? Why?

Absolutely. The class gives you a lot of insight and teaches a lot of fundamentals, such as terminology and learning basic one-on-one automobile sales. It gives you information that you wouldn't get at a dealership right away, although you might learn it over time. The class accelerates your training.

### How has this training impacted your career?

It helped me in the beginning because it gave me a foundation to start from. I learned the basics: how to do an interview, walk through, test drive, and all that. It helped me become a good sales person. Once I was working, I had a mentor who taught me, which is how I got into finance. 





## CHRIS BOONE

**Chris Boone**, a former CSTA student, is now the new car sales manager at Lexus San Diego.

### How did you get into the auto industry?

I have been in the auto industry for about five years. Before this, I was going to college and studying physical therapy, which is completely different than what I am doing now. Private institution schools are pretty expensive, though. I took a break to earn money. Friends and family recommended selling cars so I went into a dealership that my aunt had a connection to. That was Mazda Escondido.

### What do you like about it? What makes this a career choice?

I like that this is a people business. In the end there are a lot of business platforms that deal with people, but this is especially forward facing. What I mean by "forward facing" is that it is a positive field to be in. You are the direct connection between a customer who is looking to purchase something and the car they want to buy. You are the person who can build the value of that car for them and show them why the product is superior. It is pretty cool to have the ability to do that. I like the human aspect of this industry, learning to work with people in different ways.

### Who suggested the CSTA to you?

Gary, who was my general manager at the time, wanted me to attend the course just to get my feet wet. It provides a really good baseline for people who have never been in the business before. That was certainly me.

### Tell us a little about the training, the process, and the time commitment?

It was about two or three days of training, from 8 a.m. to almost 4 p.m. Bob was always there first thing and he led us through the platform that the car industry is built from, and then he taught us the lingo for the car business, such as what an up is.

Bob also taught us what the business models are, and how to approach people. He really gave us just a good base platform for understanding the car business. For example, he taught us how to introduce ourselves to customers. He also taught us super basic questions to ask.

People who have been in the industry a long time know it can get frustrating. Bob's approach was humble and simple; you are there to help the customer find out if the product is right for them and then convince them (if it is a good fit) that they should make the purchase.

Bob also taught us how to thrive or succeed inside the dealership and how to understand its dynamics.

### Was there an "aha" moment about a topic, or learning something new, that you didn't know before?

There are a lot of aha moments in our industry. When you do your first write-up with a customer, you sit down with them and then you talk with your manager. The manager teaches you what to do and say. Once you are done talking with your manager, you go back out to the customer and do the best you can to repeat what was said to you. While you may not say exactly what you were told, you get the general message across. You learn to say things in your own way and begin to create your own routine. Then, before you know it, you are using these word tracks you have developed with customers and instead of having to go back to your manager to repeat it, the customer understands what you are telling them right on the spot.

Those aha moments don't ever really stop, because people's logic and what they will do always surprises you. As a new person, your managers teach you the right language to use that will overcome a customer's objections. You begin to trust that approach and understand why it would make sense to the customer, so you say things and it works.


When you start, you don't know how to build value. Bob and these managers teach you basic phrases and later you discover why those phrases work.

### Would you recommend the CSTA? Why?

I would recommend it a hundred percent. First, it is free for most of those who are sent by a dealer as long as they are local. This is the case because the CSTA is connected to so many dealerships. Second, it has a huge network of dealers who could hire you. It helps you understand more about the industry, which means you can decide if you want to try this kind of work. There is a huge market in San Diego, and dealerships are always looking for people. If you decide to take the class, you can be looking for a job within a week.

After I went to the class, I stayed at Mazda. In fact, I kept working for them for five years. I've changed dealerships, but I work for the same automotive company, the Penske Automotive Group. I've stayed local to the San Diego market and have moved from sales, to finance, and to my current position.

### How has this training impacted your career?

I took the class and then I got into the business. Everything took off from there. I was unclear about some of the things Bob talked about, but I began to understand everything he said as I began working. That process was reassuring because he gave me a map of what to expect. The class helped me understand what my role was in the dealership. The tools that Bob gave us in that class are fundamentals that go throughout the industry. At the time, I wasn't sure how those fundamentals would benefit me, but as I began my career it quickly became clear. 





# ANTHONY BENFATTI

**Anthony Benfatti**, a former CSTA student, is now the GM of Jaguar Land Rover Carlsbad.

## How did you get into the auto industry?

Before working for a dealership, I worked in a lateral type of business for seven years. I started as a ticket writer at a carwash in North County, and rose to the pinnacle of that operation as manager and head of operations for a whole group of car washes. But it is pretty monotonous at a car wash. I wanted a change so I could do something that was more exciting and impactful. I wanted to be more professional, to wear a suit and tie, and to do something that was more adventurous than what I had.

Several family members were already working for dealerships. My uncle, Sean Conner, started out selling cars and was the sales manager of Hoehn Porsche. He's now the executive general manager for Hoehn Motors. My younger brother, Bryce, who is also a graduate of CSTA, was selling cars for Hoehn Acura. Sean and my brother both encouraged me to consider working for a dealership.

## What do you like about it? What makes this a career choice?

I love the challenge of working as a general manager at the dealership. Every day offers so much opportunity personally and professionally. I work in a brand where I get to help people buy their dream cars, I help employees reach their personal and financial goals, and we do a lot to support the community, such as contributing to charities. I get to meet so many interesting, diverse people. I talk to everybody from the worker at the car wash to the billionaire. The common ground is our interest in cars.

If you want to excel, there's lots of room to grow and develop. The industry has a lot of growth and potential because it offers different job roles for every personality type. You can work in parts, service, or sales. Things are always changing and evolving. We are always seeing new technology, new processes, newer models, and state-of-the-art facilities.

## Who suggested the CSTA to you?

Uncle Sean knows Bob Heintz and recommended CSTA as a great starting point to get insight and as a place to decide if I wanted to go further. The class was a great segue into the industry.

## Tell us a little about the training, the process, and the time commitment?

The class is free, so I exchanged just one week of my time to decide if working at a dealership was what I wanted to do.

The class offers a perfect training process. It's an opportunity to gather Information. You learn about the dealership model, the sales process, and what to expect when you join a dealership. It provides a good overview of the new role you will play, and gives you the basic knowledge you will need so you can feel confident the first day you start.

## Was there an aha moment about a topic, or learning something new, that you didn't know before?

I think I had an "aha" moment for myself when I heard Bob Heintz talk about this guy, Byron Brown, a top-performing salesman. Byron didn't have an automotive background, but he was a huge success anyway and he became a legend in the automotive field. Byron was the number one sales person for month after month after month. Hearing about Byron was exciting. I knew I needed to get into this industry and take on this career.

Byron is retired now, but I interviewed him during the time between finishing the class and starting work. I felt like he was passing the baton to me. He told me that dealerships give you everything you need to be successful. There are very few careers when you can be given all those things. All you have to do is make your schedule, and then put in the time and the effort. It becomes your own business, in a sense. I will never forget what he told me.

I work now in the same group Byron worked at before he retired. I go to management meetings at the Mercedes Benz stores. These businesses have been picking sales of the month for 20 years. About a third of the plaques on the wall have Byron's name on them.

## Would you recommend the CSTA? Why?

I would definitely recommend taking the CSTA class to everyone who is considering a career in the automotive world. The class is very insightful. A lot of locations don't offer potential employees anything like this. Since it is free, the only commitment is really just your time. It's a motivating class because it takes a lot of the unknowns and puts them in front of you. It addresses them. You walk out feeling like you know what you are getting yourself into.

## How has this training impacted your career?

CSTA was really what lit the fire in my career. That week-long commitment gave me a strong foundation, and I felt compelled to keep going. I came out of the class feeling confident and motivated. I knew I wanted to do this kind of work and I really enjoyed the experience. Everything I've done professionally since then has sprung from it. 