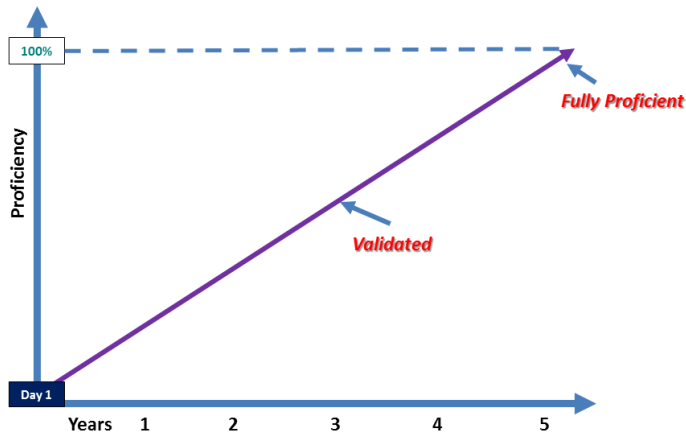


# Insurance Producer Learning Path



## The Challenge

Bringing in and developing new producers can be a very long and expensive proposition. It can take three years to become validated and as much as five years to become fully proficient. Many drop out along the way while others never seem to make it. The purpose of this whitepaper is to provide ideas and insights on how to dramatically shorten the path to proficiency.



**“Start with the end in mind.”**

## Defining Proficiency

The first step is to accurately define proficiency. For the most part, proficiency for a producer is defined in terms of:

- Size and profitability of book
- Generating a consistent flow of new business
- Capturing renewals

To be proficiency, producers have to go beyond the breakeven point of validation to be consistently hitting the sales goals the agency needs to be successful. In addition, proficiency is more than just hitting the numbers. It's also:

- Selling a complete range of products
- Selling to all sizes and types of customers
- Working effectively with the internal team
- Acting in a professional and ethical manner

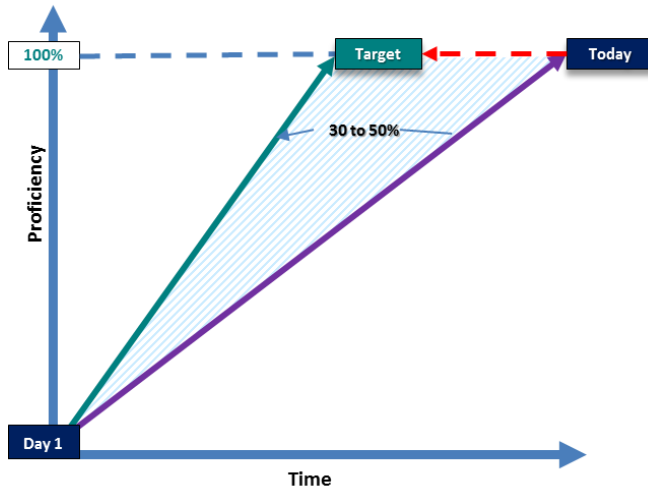
## Time to Proficiency

Time to proficiency often depends on the starting point for new producers. A new producer just out of college will take a lot longer than an experienced veteran who starts with a large book of business. However, on average our experience tells us that it usually takes a new producer around three years to be validated and then one to two years more to become fully proficient.

The value of defining proficiency and measuring current time to proficiency is so that there can be a clear end in mind and a basis for setting a target for improvement. Our experience with all types of Learning Paths, there is an opportunity to reduce time to proficiency by 30 to 50%.



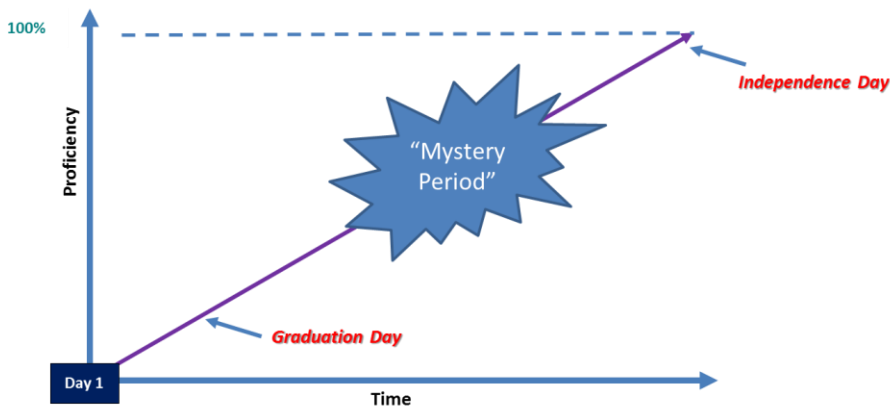
**“Eliminating the Mystery period is the fastest way to shrink time to proficiency”**



### Mapping the Path to Proficiency

What happens in most agencies is that there is a flurry of activity when new producers start. They may go through licensing and a producer school. However, it doesn't take long before the formal training stops. We call that graduation day which is a long way from validation and an even longer way from proficiency.

At that point, producers go through a long period of trial and error learn which is often sink or swim. Unfortunately more sink than swim. We call this the mystery periods because it's different for everyone, unstructured and not tracked.



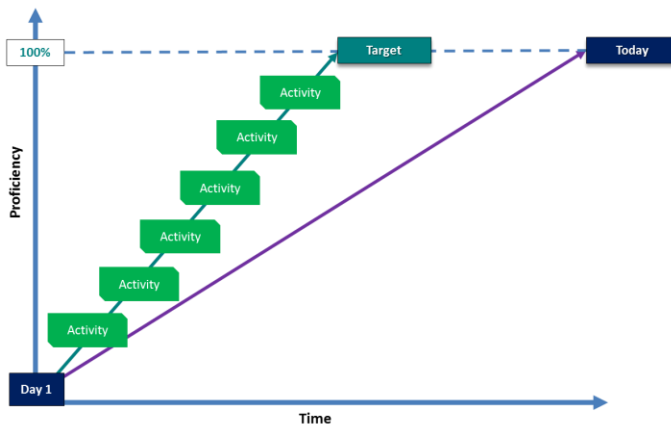
We've marked independence day as the day the producer is fully proficient and operating independently. They have an opportunity to continue improving their performance but they are now a valuable member of the team.

### Reducing the Mystery Period

The greatest opportunity for reducing time to proficiency is to shrink the "mystery" period. This is accomplished by transforming the vast wasteland of the unknown, unstructured and informal into a formal Learning Path that can be measured and tracked.

## Creating a Learning Path

A Learning Path is the complete sequence of activities that go from day one to proficiency. They are sequenced in a way that speeds up the learning process.



**“Build a sales discipline  
in year one.”**

The first major improvement is to document and structure all of the informal training. This includes job shadows, provider visits and joint calls. Instead of saying, “why don’t you go on calls with Bob today?” there is a set number and purpose for each call with a strategy for debriefing these calls. This means that each new producer will get a similar experience and that it will be productive.

The second major improvement is to structure the path so that everything doesn’t have to happen all at once. Training a producer to sell any product to any type or size of customer can be overwhelming if it isn’t sequenced properly. It needs to be organized and spread out to allow the producer to become successful at one level before moving on to the next. Training needs to be more just-in-time rather than dump and pray.

## Maximizing the First Year

While the goal is to go all the way to proficiency, it helps by focusing on making significant progress in the first year. One of the goals of this first year is to be able to determine if the new producer will become successful and will stick with your agency.

For producers who start with little or no experience, the big test is to see if they can actually generate new business. For producers who are more experienced the big questions is will they fit in and can the produce at the desired level.

Let’s start by looking at those with little experience. The first step is to create a new business proficiency definition that sets targets for the type, number and size of new business accounts. The new producer may not be ready to sell everything by the end of the first year so focus it on what they can sell.

A key part of generating new business is to get into a sales discipline that repeat itself week after week. Therefore, parts of the proficiency definition should include sales activities that lead to achieving the new business goals. This includes:

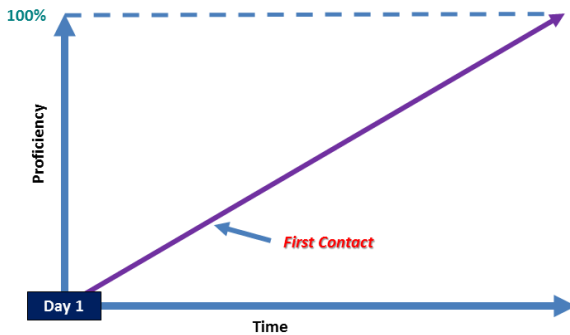
- Number and type of prospects in the pipeline
- Numbers of appointments be week
- Number of proposals generated

There also can be proficiency statements around networking both with in-person and social media. Think about what your day or week should be like if you're building a clientele.

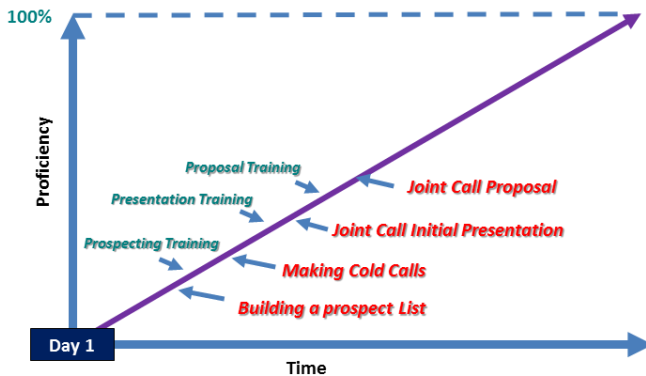


**“Structure training so that it’s just-in-time.”**

With that definition in place, let's look at the corresponding Learning Path. At the start of the path should be everything that is essential before making first contact with a prospect. Keep in mind that the longer it takes between learning something and using it, the more likely it is that it will either be forgotten or not used.



The next step is to map out a sequence of sales activities. This means plugging in where they will make cold calls, sales presentations, presenting proposals, etc. Immediately before each of these activities, you can add in joint call activities where the new producer can see how these activities are done the right way.



Finally, there needs to be a series of planned reviews and assessments to make sure the producer is on track and making progress at the desired rate. For the first 12 weeks this should be weekly and then monthly for the remainder of the first year. This enables making mid-course corrections including adding more practice or training to the Learning Path.

One of the key things to look at in this reviews is the producer's sales discipline. Are you seeing a systematic approach to bringing in new clients? Are you seeing daily cold calling? Are prospects moving through the sales pipeline?

## Dealing with Experienced New Hires

Learning Paths are designed to be easily customized for more experienced producers. It's a matter of looking at the proficiency definition and determining what's already been accomplished and then doing the same with the Learning Path. This puts everyone on the same path and eliminates a lot of variability.

One of the big challenges with experienced salespeople is to help them fit in to your organization and adapt to your markets and products. Just because they know how to sell, doesn't mean they can easily sell your products in your marketplace.

For example, you can have great technique handling objections. This technique however, doesn't give them the answers to those objections or an understanding of why the customer presented that objection. In addition, just providing product training doesn't mean they can fit the two together in a natural fluent manner.

Therefore, just creating a path of product training isn't enough. There has to be a lot of application and practice to make it all work. Let's take the example of making an effective initial presentation. On the Learning Path there needs to be :

- Observing others on joint calls
- Practice preparing and customizing presentation
- Practice presenting
- Call evaluations

Integration of skills and knowledge is the hardest part of getting experienced salespeople to proficiency. It doesn't happen easily or naturally. It has to be a critical part of the Learning Path.

## Summary

Learning Paths provide a discipline and structure for getting new producers up-to-speed quickly. Since validation is almost three years away and full proficiency a year or two more, it's important to get new producers off to a fast start in their first year. This is a critical time to build in a sales discipline and assessing whether this producer is going to be successful.

For more experienced producers, the challenge is to get them to fit in and adapt to your markets, products and way of doing business. Integration of skills and knowledge with application and practice is the key.



**“Integration of skills and knowledge with practice and application is the key.”**