

SECRETS OF SUCCESSFUL COACHING

Executives everywhere are touting the importance of coaching for success. But, while everyone's *talking* about coaching, very few people are actually *doing* it. The truth is, far too many salespeople receive little or no real coaching.

Imagine an athletic team whose coach never held practices and didn't show up for games – you'd wonder why the team had a coach at all. Yet, many salespeople tell us their managers don't hold regular practice sessions to help sharpen their skills. Worse yet, *most salespeople say that their sales manager rarely or never goes on sales calls with them.*

We often hear that sales managers have entirely too much to do. For example, consider a sales manager who is also expected to sell, has administrative duties to handle, operational tasks to complete, paperwork to process, marketing duties to undertake, ordering to finalize, office politics to juggle, keeping battling salespeople from each others' throats, a lead management system to track...

But lack of time doesn't entirely explain the coaching void. No one has enough time to do all the things they'd like to do or should do for success. ***After all, sales managers have the same 24 hours in their days as everyone else.***

So, let's take a look at some other reasons that sales managers aren't devoting enough time and effort to coaching their sales teams.

1. They don't know what coaching really is.

Even sales managers who know that coaching is important can have a hard time pinpointing exactly what coaching is. It's not quite the same as teaching or training, so what is it?

For starters, training imparts ideas, concepts or strategies in a safe environment – think of an athletic coach illustrating plays on a chalkboard in the locker room. By contrast, coaching is what happens out on that field during practices and during games.

Part of understanding what coaching really is is accepting that in order to do it, you've got to get out from behind

your desk. And unless your team sells strictly by telephone, you're going to have to get out of the office as well. Not just once or twice a year – frequently. **We suggest that sales managers schedule one joint sales call per quarter with each salesperson.** If you find that goal impossible because of all the other things you have to do, it may be time to reorganize priorities and redistribute some of the workload.

2. They (or the organization they work for) don't understand what the sales management role is all about.

Consider this story that Bill Brooks told in [*The New Science of Selling and Persuasion*](#):

"I was recently contacted by one of our CEO clients who wanted to schedule a luncheon meeting. He told me, 'I need to have lunch with you as soon as possible. I've figured this sales thing out and want to tell you about it.'

I showed up at 11:45am and he was already there. As we were hustled to our table I could see his excitement. Once we sat down, he looked around the restaurant as if to ensure that what he would tell me would not be overheard by anyone. He leaned across the table and whispered to me, 'You have to coach them every day.' My response? 'Is that all?' He then responded to me, 'Of course not. You have to TEACH them what to do first. Then go into the field and COACH them every day.'

What sales managers and their organizations so often fail to realize is that the success of a sales manager should be defined by the performance of his or her sales team. That means the bulk of the sales manager's time and energy needs to be spent helping each member of their sales team get better at what they do. It's not about closing deals for the sales team, nor is it about producing "work" that others in the organization can see and admire.

It's about making the sales team more effective, which requires the sales manager to focus on them, their work,

their challenges and their accomplishments while working alongside them to help them improve their performance. That can be a difficult transition for someone who's accustomed to defining their success by their own productivity and performance.

3. They don't have clearly defined standards to give feedback against.

Imagine an athletic coach with no plays, no overarching strategy or scheme for helping the team win. It's more like having a cheerleader – someone to vaguely urge the team to "play harder" without offering any specific instructions.

Any decent athletic coach knows that in order to win consistently, the most important thing is helping the team figure out **why** they won or they lost. Then they can determine what to repeat or do differently next time. That's where salespeople are often left stumbling around in the dark. They don't have a system or a strategy to follow.

And they don't have hands-on help from their sales managers to dissect their successes and failures, so all they can do is "try harder."

They'd get far better results (with less effort) if they had some specific help in **"trying smarter."** But in order to do that, sales managers need to provide two things:

- A clear set of standards and expectations that fit within a consistent, repeatable selling system.
- Firsthand feedback against those standards that can only be gained from watching and listening during active selling situations.

Here's another example from [*The New Science of Selling and Persuasion*](#):

We installed a coaching and feedback system with one of our clients over a several year period. This organization had somewhere around 400 salespeople and 60 sales managers. When we started, it was clear that they had no consistent sales process, training methodology, coaching system or anything else. They also hadn't hit their sales targets for 4-5 years in a row.

It took about 18 months to integrate the coaching process for their sales managers, the main part of

which was the feedback and course correction component. The most difficult part of the process was getting the sales managers to understand two things; (1) that their real job was the development of their salespeople, and (2) that feedback and course correction was not punitive, but developmental.

However, it goes back farther than that. We first had to get the senior management of the organization to understand and be 100% committed to three things:

1. Ongoing training
2. Allowing the sales managers the time and latitude to get into the field
3. Communicating that this process was all about growth and improved performance, not eliminating people.

That's one of the most fundamental problems: very few people embrace the positive side of what coaching can and should be.

TRULY EXCELLENT COACHES HAVE AN UNRELENTING *DESIRE* TO HELP EACH TEAM MEMBER GET BETTER AT WHAT THEY DO EVERY MINUTE OF EVERY DAY.

4. They don't have a coaching mindset.

Truly excellent coaches have an unrelenting **desire** to help each team member get better at what they do every minute of every day. For these gifted coaches, the act of coaching is as natural as breathing. ***Coaching isn't just another thing that they do – it's more of a mindset that pervades everything they do.***

Strong sales coaches never miss an opportunity to coach.

Whether it's in the hallway, between meetings, on the way to a sales call, following a sales call or at lunch, strong coaches seek every opportunity to ensure that their salespeople are constantly being reminded of exactly how they can perform better, more effectively or with better results.

But be careful here – never missing an opportunity to coach DOES NOT mean constantly criticizing everything your salespeople do and pointing out how they could do it better. If your team learns that every time you open your mouth you're going to say something negative, they'll quickly

learn to tune you out.

The best coaches also lay the groundwork that puts their team members in the right mindset to accept and use the coaching they get. Recognizing and building on each salesperson's strengths is the heart of effective coaching. When you make a point of celebrating each success, you give your team members an added incentive to repeat those successes.

Frequently recognizing your team's accomplishments takes you out of the role of critic and instead makes you a cham-

panion for the team's success. Once your team members see that your goal is to help each person get better at what they do, they'll be more open to accepting your criticism and suggestions for improvement along with your praise.

Here's a [coaching exercise](#) that will help you evaluate your current coaching practices and pinpoint where your team could use some additional coaching from you. It's also a great way for you to demonstrate that you'd like to develop a positive dialogue that will help everyone – you and the sales team – perform better everyday.

INFUSE YOUR SALES MEETINGS WITH SOME SKILLS TRAINING, COACHING AND INSPIRATION

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