

Effective Coaching Builds Competency from the Ground Up

by Art Wilson



Sales teams are constantly reinventing themselves to align with their customer's environment. When they are at their best, they are in sync with the customer's tactical and strategic initiatives. But the best actions to take are sometimes not clear. The sales manager's coaching skills are critical to help their teams gain their bearings.

Seizing coachable moments that surface through normal activities in a sales process gives sales managers their chance to provide effective coaching. We have seen the following four critical coaching habits produce breakthrough results for selling teams:

1. Establish high-value coaching relationships
2. Identify coachable moments
3. Help teams develop extraordinary goals
4. Get commitment to actions

Coaching Habit 1. Establish a High-Value Coaching Relationship

Whether the coaching relationship is requested by a sales team member or by the potential coach, it is important that this relationship (and the act of coaching itself) be clearly separated from any other pre-existing relationship. If it is not different, the conversations will quickly revert back to the previous relationship.

Also, it should be a cardinal rule of every coach to ask permission to give coaching, every time. The team member who has given permission will always be more receptive.

To ensure coaching success, the team member must trust the coach. To build trust, the coach must convince the team member that he/she is reliable, credible, and understands the team member's environment. The team member must also believe that the coach is in it for him/her, not the coach.

Coaching Habit 2. Identify Coachable Moments

How can a coach tell when a coachable moment is at hand? Here are some signals you may hear from the team member:

- Do you have a minute?
- There's something I'd like to run by you.
- What would you do in a situation like this?
- I'm stuck.

A key to discovering coachable moments is being centered on the team member, not on one's self as coach. We have found that many coachable moments occur before or after operations reviews and at critical stages of the sales process. A best practice for finding coachable moments is to look for instances when salespeople are planning an important and tough customer call. Coaching can refocus any anxiety to energy and creativity.



Coaching Habit 3. Help to Set a Specific Extraordinary Goal

Nothing inhibits right actions by sales team members more than not having a defined goal and a target date for completion. Without a goal, teams are destined to spend most of their time focused on the urgent rather than on the important.

We recommend that the coach always ask the team or team member to state clearly and openly the goals to be achieved. The next great question is to ask the team to articulate the benefit to the customer, should the goal be realized.

What is a best practice for setting goals? Think big from the customer's point of view. Identifying an extraordinary goal increases the overall business opportunity significantly.

Coaching Habit 4. Gain Commitment to Action

Why is it important for the coach to gain commitment to best next actions in a selling environment? Because how best to achieve the goal is frequently a little foggy, sales managers should seek commitment to the goal and some agreed-to milestones along the way. Crisply executed short-term best next actions related to the milestones help gain momentum and build enthusiasm toward reaching the goal. The following best practices gain commitment to action and transfer from the coach to the team members:

- Frequent crisp conversations about status and what each team member will do next
- Commit time to accomplish best next actions
- Communicate results of actions

The Coaching Payoff

The highest-impact selling organizations are often made up of relatively few selling professionals and many others who focus on, develop, and execute selling strategies for customers, opportunities, and key relationships. They manage these strategies and the virtual teams that execute the work plans as projects. Effective coaching builds competency from the ground up, and transfers peak performance throughout the organization.

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