

How to Give the Most in Your Coaching

By Peggy Besand



A recent Harvard Business Review article reports that most sales and service organizations have invested more time and effort in the past five years in improving sales managers' coaching of their salespeople than they did in the previous 50. The article cites research by the Sales Executive Council (SEC) that shows that no other productivity investment comes closer to improving salespeople's performance than coaching.

The real payoff from good coaching lies among your core performers. For this group, the best-quality coaching can improve performance up to 19%. Even moderate improvement in coaching quality—simply from below to above average—can mean a six to eight percent increase in performance across 50% of your sales force. That often makes the difference between hitting or missing goals.

- Sales Executive Council

Core salespeople (your middle 60%) who receive great coaching reach an average 102% of goal. This compares to salespeople who report poor coaching who achieve only 83% of goal. Yet salespeople continue to score their managers low in terms of the coaching they provide. Over 65% of the salespeople indicated that their manager does worse at coaching as opposed to the other behaviors that a sales manager demonstrates, such as planning, assessing risks, or even delivering bad news to senior management.

Given that better coaching can improve sales results dramatically in most organizations, isn't it just common sense to make coaching moments the most productive, efficient, and successful they can be?

Perhaps these 10 how-to attributes of a great coach will help.

1. **Adopt a sales pursuit process.** A great coach has a well-documented and known sales process—and coaches to that process consistently and often. The benefit of common approach, language, and methodology cannot be undervalued.
2. **Make coaching a priority.** Book calendar time and a special meeting room for each coaching session. Ensure there are no interruptions. Keep your commitments.
3. **Deliver coaching in person, and tailor it to the individual.** Put yourself in the position of your salespeople. Be prepared to see and understand the world from each of their unique perspectives. Give respectful, compassionate, and effective input. Be aware of your personal style and that of your people.
4. **Help your salespeople gain their bearings.** Know how success will work for each person and align their actions with that vision. Ask the right questions to lead each of them to find their vision for success. Discuss specific challenges and suggest alternatives—but have your salesperson work through which alternative is most likely to deliver results. Coach your salespeople to target the best opportunities and help them eliminate non-productive busy work.
5. **Bring the best out of your salespeople; don't push your best onto them.** Dedicate yourself to improving both individual and team results. Adapt your coaching style to the individual. Be prepared to make changes to your own style and approach as a result of what you learn.



Today, every sales manager must also be a coach—encouraging and leading sales teams in pursuit of customer-focused goals.

ABOUT CPS. Critical Path Strategies helps clients improve the effectiveness of their sales organization. Our portfolio of services addresses the strategic, organizational, and relationship issues that impact selling performance. Our powerful processes enable clients to transform their sales culture, enhance their competitive position, and accomplish strategic business initiatives. Our clients—emerging companies and members of the Fortune 500 alike—typically measure 100 to 500 times their CPS investment in revenue growth.



6. **Recognize achievements along the way.** Coaching is not only scheduled, but should also be just-in-time. Seek coachable moments to reinforce great work and, as necessary, to offer course-correction guidance when necessary. Recognize the importance of your people's job satisfaction as it can be dependent upon your coaching delivery and effectiveness.
7. **Listen actively and without judgment.** Let your people do 80% of the talking. Using open questions will help you understand, learn more, challenge, and develop ideas. Use closed questions to come to agreement and identify best next actions.
8. **Build the confidence to win.** Coach your people to stretch to accomplish the extraordinary, but recognize a pipedream when you see one. In helping them to do extraordinary things, ask them to identify "What will have to happen to make that come true?" Help them define the path to success.
9. **Get commitment to actions.** Hold yourself and others accountable for accomplishing agreed-upon goals. Create a clear and definitive development plan to build on strengths and address developmental needs. Establish agreed-upon metrics to measure personal, professional, and performance growth.
10. **Coach before, during, and after sales calls.** Different tactics are required for each step. Let's take a closer look at each of them.

Before. Help ensure the call plan is aimed at supporting your customer's most important initiatives. Check for questions that are both insightful and focused.

During. Coach during the ride along or as you observe the sales call. Be sure to maintain the salesperson/coach role. Let your salesperson assume the important role as relationship owner with the customer; only step in if something's been missed. Don't let your excitement about talking to a prospect take the power and influence away from your salesperson.

After. Debriefing after a call offers great coaching opportunities. Try the Continue, Stop, Start approach. Cite something your salesperson did well and suggest building on that skill. What did the person do that you suggest they never do again? What do you suggest your salesperson try in their next sales call? Seasoned sales professionals use the Continue, Stop, Start technique on each and every call.

Today, every sales manager must also be a coach—encouraging and leading sales teams in pursuit of customer-focused goals. By giving effective coaching, you'll enjoy the rewards of the positive changes in your teams' performance and results that arise from their sessions with you.

Visit CPS online . . . www.criticalpathstrategies.com
Join our LinkedIn Group . . . **The Best Best Practices in Sales Effectiveness**