



Coaching



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Coaching

In addition to sales leadership and management, coaching is a key competitive differentiator for consistently successful selling organizations.

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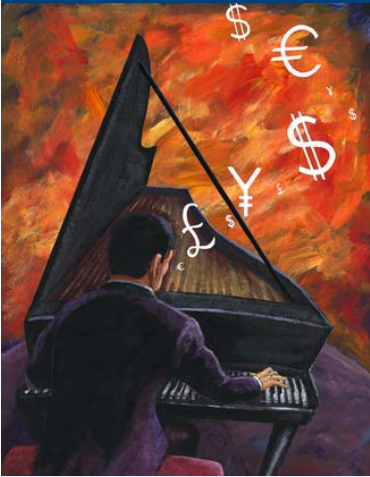
ABOUT CPS. Critical Path Strategies helps clients improve the effectiveness of their sales organization. Our portfolio of services addresses the strategic, organizational, and relationship issues that impact selling performance. Our powerful processes enable clients to transform their sales culture, 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.



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Management Rhythm

by Ken Evans



One of the keys to success for any company is the leadership their management team provides.

Most all of our clients find themselves in the midst of change. Managing that change – moving from the current state to the future state – and still making the numbers is no small task. An executive I had the pleasure of working with at IBM, when we were just beginning to transition the company from hardware-centric to services-centric, called it “wing walking.”

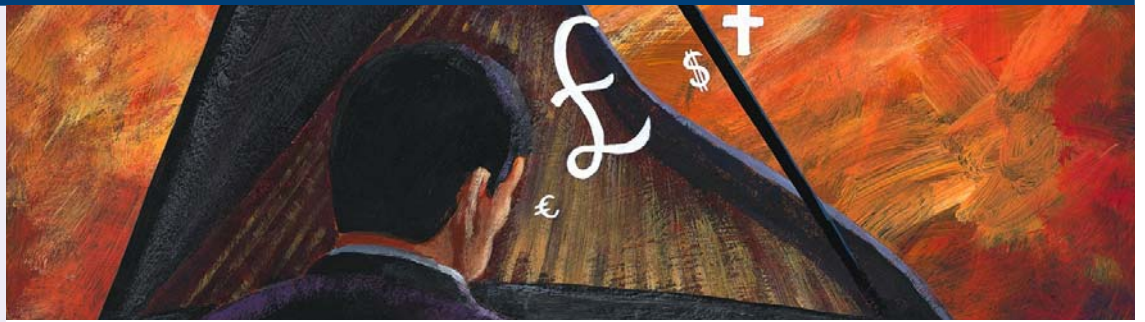
The executive described an air show with two biplanes flying side by side and a wing walker endeavoring to walk from one biplane wing to the other biplane wing. He measured his steps carefully as he braced and steadied himself with the struts of the wing. The critical moment was when the wing walker had one foot on the wing of each biplane and one hand on each of the wing struts. Taking that last step over and releasing the wing strut from the “old” plane to the “new” plane was the mission—even though at that moment it would have been tempting to hold onto the “old” plane.

That analogy resonates with executives engaged in change management. They are working to transition their company to a new strategy and simultaneously “keep the wolf away from the door.” Their dilemma is determining what the management team must do to lead their sales teams from the old biplane to the new biplane—and not crash and burn in the process.

This type of encouraging leadership, frequently called “management rhythm” as opposed to “management discipline,” is required to coach sales teams to a new platform for growth. The word *discipline* has some good and bad connotations. The bad connotation is that the threat of punishment may move people from wing-to-wing, but jumping is also a possibility. In contrast, the good connotation of “discipline” is training and developing to prepare people to accomplish the mission.

Management *rhythm* (or cadence) better describes what effective change management leaders are trying to do. Rhythm, per Webster, is a movement or activity in which some action or element recurs regularly. Their people are looking for some courage, as well as a measured demonstration of how to move from plane-to-plane.

Let’s move from the wing walking analogy and get a little closer to the ground. What must a leader do to establish a rhythm for their sales team?



- The first step is to *declare their intent*. They are clear about it. They walk through the answers to the “what, why, how, and when” questions.
- The next step is to *develop some metrics* for the journey and supplement those with a *review process*. The reviews are designed for dual learning. Management learns by creating a crisp review format that encourages discussion on key performance indicators. The sales team learns from management because these reviews create “coachable moments.”
- Reviews are especially valuable if the environment is one of *trust*. One executive I know starts each review session with a reference to “Truth Serum.” These reviews are calendared, predictable, and crisp.
- Finally, a valuable part of the management rhythm concept is to *acknowledge success*. Not only do reviews provide a means to enlighten managers, but they also provide an opportunity to “catch someone doing something good.” Managers can publicly acknowledge achievement—large and small. This recognition provides a way to communicate success throughout the sales team and sales organization.

If your sales organization is struggling with change and what might be close to chaos, management’s greatest contribution may be to provide some predictable and structured rhythm for their team.

Management Rhythm-Part 2: The “Secret Sauce”

by Ken Evans



We compare notes with many sales executives about the “secret sauce” of winning sales organizations and, as you might imagine, various theories abound but these conversations usually settle into several common themes. This article will touch briefly on each of these five “must do’s.”

Strategic Intent

Whatever your strategy, it will probably work if it is framed in a value proposition that is well defined, clearly communicated, and well understood by customers, salespeople, sales support people, and your partners. The proposition is value-based for the customer. It can be tuned for changes in the marketplace by being developed and tested from the outside in.

Organization

Most of us have agonized over how to lay out our sales organization (geographical, segments on size, segments on industry, deployable specialists, aligned specialist, etc.) Whatever the organization, it will **probably work if it makes life simple, promotes teamwork, sharing of market intelligence, and places the highest value and is rapidly responsive to the people closest to the customer.** Getting the best resources in front of the right customer at the right time is one organizational principle that is a consistent design point.

Culture of Performance

Winning sales organizations establish and **expect accountability for high performance.** Managers and salespeople are inspired by and rewarded for achievement. These organizations empower people closest to the customer to make decisions and to discover innovative ways to improve the “business of selling” sometimes called sales operations. The environment is exciting and challenging. The rewards are not only financial, but get to the “heart” via recognition.

Great People Your Customers Can Trust

Winning sales organizations attract and retain the best people. They enable these talented people to have a **rewarding career as close to the customer** as long as possible. They create opportunities for the best and promote from the best internal role models. Senior management is proactively engaged in career management. They have outstanding training and development programs. Success is defined in terms of making their customers successful.

How are you doing? At your next “roundtable” meeting with a group of salespeople, ask them to grade your company on your environment based on these five “must do’s.”

- Management Rhythm
- Strategic Intent
- Organization
- Culture of Performance
- Great People You Can Trust

Sales Leaders as Coaches

by Ken Evans



Coaching can make the difference in the effectiveness of a sales team member, the sales team, and the selling organization. Coaching will bring about results that you could only imagine and hope to achieve.

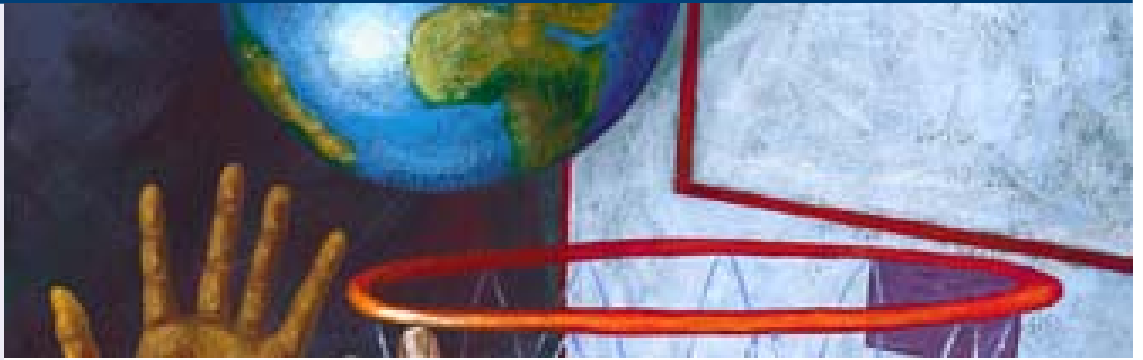
What happened to the “good old days” of Sales Management? The days when a Sales Manager had a dozen salespeople in the local branch office and their goals were clear – make your quota. Most resources needed were at their fingertips, the pace was measured and predictable, products and services were solid and had life cycles of five years with juicy margins. Coaching amounted to the branch office meeting where big producers were recognized, and everyone else looked at the quota board and knew they were behind. We managed by objectives; we told them what to do and left them to do it – sink or swim.

Coaching can help manage business complexity. Today's business environment has become much more complex. Teams are virtual. Resources are deployed globally and matrixed. Objectives are shared and are adjusted quarterly. Product life cycles are nine months or less, margins dissipate rapidly, and the pace is kinetic. Learning and knowledge are a competitive advantage. Sales managers of the old days are trying to swim with a lead life preserver.

In today's environment, sales management must operate differently. Rarely will you find a case of one-on-one manager-to-sales representative, or sales representative-to-buyer. More likely, you will find a matrixed selling and delivery organization lined up on a matrixed buying organization. Sales teams must perform to higher levels than in the past. Sales leadership that elicits from the team greater commitment, creativity, and flexibility, while communicating a sense of urgency, can provide stimulus for the team. Today's sales manager must also be a coach. He or she cannot drop a “quota letter” on a salesperson's desk and tell them to “get to it” - it doesn't work.

Best Practices of Sales Leader Coaching. CPS has observed the following six key best practices of sales managers as they coach their teams to become world-class collaborative teams.

- 1) Help the team **build shared goals and vision**. Sales teams should aspire to extraordinary goals, the achievement of which will require different views of the environment, different resources, and different ways of operating as a team.
- 2) **Empower and inspire** the team, which will improve accountability to the goals and vision. By removing perceived roadblocks for the team, you allow them to focus on what they can impact, while the manager/coach accepts internal obstacles.



- 3) **Encourage and promote** creative thinking and risk-taking, which further enables commitment to action. Coach on new approaches or skills required to execute, challenge for logic, and help model successful plans and actions.
- 4) **Drive the team to just-in-time planning and action.** Think in terms of tomorrow and this week on actions, which will incrementally build momentum toward the goals. Break the goals into milestones and get the team members started on each milestone.
- 5) **Provide recognition.** Affirmation is not enough intra-team; extra recognition of small and large achievements is critical to keeping the team's energy, enthusiasm, and commitment high.
- 6) **Help the team communicate** as though their life depends on it. Help them "major on the majors." Engage them with questions, provide structure for regular communication, and help them learn and capture knowledge about the selling environment.

Selling is not just selling anymore. It takes a team, a leader/manager, and it takes a coach.

When I was very young my father used to tell me that an army of deer led by a lion will defeat an army of lions led by a deer. At Duke, Coach Krzyzewski was our lion.

- Grant Hill



Coaching Your Team for Extraordinary Results

Coaching, in its purest form, is facilitating people in their own commitment and enthusiasm to accomplish their objectives, either as individuals or teams. The classic coach provides a learning environment structured around practice sessions that include repetition, simulation, and review of fundamentals necessary for success. Many examples from the sports world provide models for coaching a sales team to extraordinary results. The success of many famous coaches is based on their commitment to fundamentals, the recognition of their specific team talents, and the ability to transform the team talents to achieve extraordinary results.

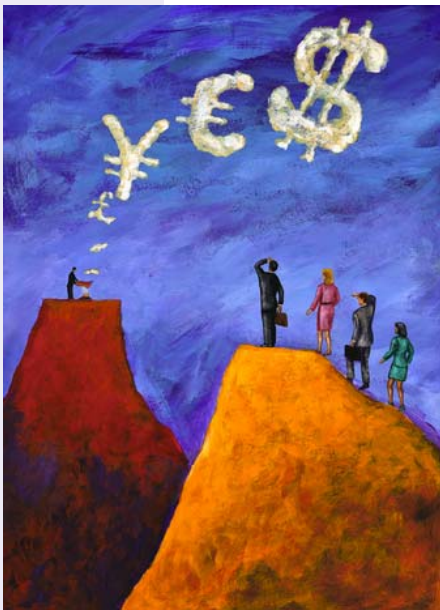
Fundamentals. A prime example is Herb Brooks, coach of the 1980 U.S. Olympic Hockey team, who took college players and produced the "Miracle on Ice," a Gold Medal against professional national teams. In selling situations, a successful coaching strategy should include emphasis on fundamentals, strategy, competitive analysis, addressing the needs of all the team, and a focus on the customer needs. A manager/coach must lead by example and provide an environment that enables collaboration within the team and generates contributions from all team members that are focused on the customer's needs. Today's competitive environment requires a team to possess an in-depth understanding of product and service knowledge, including features and benefits and the ability to demonstrate and articulate value to the customer. A successful coach has the team demonstrate this ability in practice environments in order to ensure success in "game conditions." Preparation can be accomplished with role-playing exercises or by reviewing with team members, one-on-one, their basic knowledge and challenging them to respond to a variety of situations. Review of best practices of past successful teams will also enhance basic skills.

Strategies. Successful coaches spend a great deal of time and energy evaluating game plans to prepare their teams to respond to a variety of competitive situations. A strategy is determined based upon the strengths of your products and services and how they align with the needs of your customer. The coach assists the team with evaluation of their best alternatives and development of an implementation plan, as well as preparing the team to react to environmental changes within the customer organization. The coach encourages team planning and evaluates the progress of the strategy by measuring the completion of milestones toward the final sales objectives and assists the team with the adjustment of their plans.

Competitive Analysis. Selling teams today, regardless of their industry, face a competitive rate of change that includes reduced barriers to entry, the ability of competitors to meet or beat pricing, add com-

ponents, develop alliances that enable quick turnarounds and, seemingly, respond to any customer need. These conditions, if not met with a clear understanding of what the team can do to overcome them, can create a difficult if not impossible situation. The coach creates an environment that fosters the analysis of competitors that allows the sales team to anticipate their every move and prepare the customer for those propositions. The great coach never underestimates the level of competition and prepares the team for the appropriate responses to competitive actions and reactions.

Focus on Team Contributors. Whether a team consists of average players, a single superstar surrounded by average players, or a team of all superstars, the successful coach will ensure that all individuals contribute to the success of the team. Strength and collaboration at all levels toward the development of common goals will produce results that are more extraordinary than any individual contribution. It is critical that the coach creates an environment that allows every individual the opportunity to contribute.



Customer-Centric Focus. The coach constantly checks for alignment to the goals and objectives of the customer. The team focuses on the customer's goals and objectives as they relate to the team's product solutions or services and how those offerings match up with the overall business needs of the customer. The coach keeps the focus of the team directed outwardly at the customer, not inwardly toward their own goals.

The style of coaching for extraordinary results that you choose will clearly need to be adapted to your style of dealing with team members, but many lessons can be learned from successful coaches in many fields. One model that emphasized the fundamentals of the game, solid strategies, competitive analysis, focus on the importance of the team over the individual, and produced extraordinary results over a long period of time was the style of coach John Wooden of UCLA basketball fame. The coach achieved national championships for his teams year after year and was most often seen sitting calmly on the end of the bench with a rolled up program. For him, it was clearly about the team. He coached fundamentals and prepared the team to play competitively during the week. When it came to game time, they were prepared to successfully execute and respond to a variety of situations.

We have all experienced the impact, whether positive or negative, that a coach has had on us. Whether a parent, teacher, team coach, or in a professional relationship, the values and lessons learned from good coaching have a significant and long-lasting impact. The best coaching provides the tools and the motivation for a team to achieve more than expected and certainly much more than could be accomplished as individuals. Take a proactive, hands-on approach and determine the appropriate way to deal with each individual and to deal with the team as a unit. You will be able to move your sales team toward the achievement of their goals and to results well beyond expectations.

The Importance of Coaching

by Don Pearson



The establishment of a “coaching culture” can help address many of the dilemmas of modern sales leadership. This article is an extract from a chapter interview with Art Wilson, founder of Critical Path Strategies, from the book, Masterful Coaching Fieldbook by Robert Hargrove.

Is sales management about to become a part of the coaching revolution?

In many organizations, hierarchical sales management structures have been or are being replaced by self-directed selling project teams. These teams are composed of people from various places in the organization. Today, major account selling usually involves a coach, who may not be the sales manager at all. The implementation of a coaching “culture” is emerging as a competitive differentiator in bringing these virtual teams together around extraordinary sales goals, enabling value recognition by the customer, and profitable growth for the sellers. The role of the coach has traditionally fallen primarily on the shoulders of the first-line sales manager, but this is quickly changing because so many salespeople, and particularly the non-selling professionals who are involved to make the sale, do not report directly to the sales manager. Managing large accounts and large, complex sales is no longer the responsibility of just salespeople and their management. It is the job of everyone in the organization who interfaces with the client.

What is your coachable point of view on teaching salespeople and teams?

My overall coachable point of view is to learn from the best. What I have found, over time, is that the best salespeople did only a few things differently, but that they have had substantially higher results. At CPS, we have distinguished four coaching habits for coaching in the complex team-selling environment.

- Establishing high-value coaching relationships
- Identifying “coachable moments”
- Helping teams develop extraordinary goals
- Getting commitment to actions

How is a high-value coaching relationship established?

Whether the coaching relationship is requested by the “player” (the person being coached) or by the potential coach, it is very important that this relationship (and the act of coaching itself) be clearly separated from any other, pre-existing relationship. Otherwise, the conversations quickly revert back to the previous relationship.

Also, it should be a cardinal rule of every coach to ask permission to give coaching, every single time. A player who has given permission to be coached will always be more receptive.

I have found it best if the coach:

- *Listens hard!* Coaching is a conversation, not an interrogation.
- *Offers and suggests, rather than tells and dictates.* Mutual trust is extremely important.
- *Asks thoughtful questions.* Count to five slowly before interjecting.
- *Helps the player find out what is missing to move forward.*



How can a coach tell that a coachable moment may have occurred?

One signal of this may be when the player says something like any one of the following: "Do you have a minute?" "There's something I would like to run by you." "What would you do in a situation like this?" or "I'm stuck." A key to discovering coachable moments is being centered on the player, not on yourself as coach. This "other-centeredness" becomes a measure of the coach's maturity.

Tell us about helping teams develop extraordinary goals.

Nothing inhibits "right actions" by salespeople and team members more than not having a clear goal and a target date for completion. The coach's role is to help players set extraordinary goals that are clearly stated and, even though the plan to accomplish them is not yet clear, are possible.

There are three aspects to setting goals that I believe are important: (1) everyone on the team understands clearly the goal of the project and the target date for completion, (2) there are a few clearly identified milestones (with target dates) that will ensure successful completion of the project, and (3) everyone associated with the project (including the customer) understands his or her accountability to short-term actions that will accomplish the targeted milestones.

What is the best practice for gaining commitment to action?

As a sales leader, the best-practice coaching habit for gaining commitment to action is to transfer, by example and mentoring, your best practices in coaching to those you coach, for in today's virtual teams, coaching the coaches is really the job of sales managers and sales leaders.

How would you sum up?

The highest-impact selling organizations of the future will be made up of relatively few selling professionals and many others who will focus on, develop, and execute customer-centric selling strategies for their major customers. They will manage these strategies and the virtual teams that execute the work plans as projects.

Leadership and management will continue to be vital. But in conjunction with leadership and management, *the implementation of an unencumbered coaching culture is the key to creating successful selling organizations and will be the key competitive differentiator for organizations that continue to prosper consistently.*