

HOW TO BECOME A BETTER SALES COACH

If salespeople report directly to you, coaching is your number one job. Even if you have account responsibility, coaching your salespeople is still your primary job function. This is how you add value to your sales team.

- If you believe you are too busy to coach, reread rule number one. Imagine saying to your family, "I am too busy to spend time with you."
- If you believe that hiring experienced professionals relieves you from coaching, reread rule number one. Even Tiger Woods works with a golf coach. Are your salespeople better at their jobs than Tiger is at golf?
- You cannot coach from the locker room. You must be in the field with your reps to provide them with accurate and meaningful direct feedback. How many professional sports team coaches sit in the locker room during a game and wait to give feedback until after the game? They understand the importance of being on the field with the team. Coaching from the field gives you the opportunity to provide feedback when it can still make a difference in the outcome of the game.
- Coaching is for the salesperson's benefit. This is not the time for you to unload pent-up frustration with the sales force. Your objective in coaching is to guide your salespeople, provide corrective feedback, and inspire them to rise to the challenge. It is about them, not you.
- The quickest way to change behavior is to reinforce the effort initially, not the results. Profit follows performance, and performance follows effort. If salespeople put forth the effort you desire, they will create the results you want, and they need your on-the-spot coaching to adjust their performance to work more effectively.
- Don't be a desk jockey! Get out of the office and in the field with your salespeople.
- Coach behavior and shape attitudes. You have greater control over your sales force's behavior than you do their attitudes. However, the more you coach their behavior, the greater the likelihood you can influence their attitudes. If you coach them to perform at a certain level, their attitudes will shift to fit their behavior. Cold calling is a good example. When the sales force realizes that cold calling is not as difficult as they had imagined, their attitudes will shift to parallel the calling behavior.

Tips for Delivering Feedback and Coaching

Providing feedback is coaching your salespeople. Use these ideas for delivering feedback to your staff:

- Inspect what you expect. Since behavior is maintained by its consequences, joint calling and feedback are important. If your salespeople recognize that you are not following through on your commitment to inspect what you expect from them, they get sloppy on their calls and paperwork.
- Be specific with your feedback. It does not matter whether you are praising or delivering "corrective criticism," the salesperson must know exactly what he is doing right or wrong.
- Ignore the small stuff. Often, managers nit-pick. Focus on major critical issues that affect performance.
- Use a variety of reinforcers. Don't assume that commission or bonus on a sale is reward enough. Praise and recognition are effective complements to money.

- Focus on behavior. Avoid vague criticisms and references to attitude. If your salesperson's attitude stinks, cite behavioral examples (e.g. cynical comments, tardiness, or frowning). It is easier for the salesperson to change his or her attitude when he or she understands which behaviors signal a negative attitude to others.
- Explain the feedback. If you are having a problem with something the salesperson does or does not do, tell him why it is an issue.
- Lend a helping hand. Help the person change the behavior. Change is easier when someone offers assistance.
- Give three times the praise as criticism. The objective is to reinforce (a lot) the behavior you desire. If you are like most managers, you are not doing this enough.
- Do it often. Ongoing dialog between the salesperson and manager is critical to your success also. Nothing you say in your annual performance reviews should be a surprise. If you have been doing your job all along, the salesperson has heard it before. Any surprise means you failed to deal with the behavior in the past.
- Show empathy. Everyone gets nervous and a little defensive when the boss starts handing out criticism. Most people feel anxious when they are performing on stage. Be understanding of this reality; it demonstrates your humanity.
- Standardize your feedback. When joint calling, have a standard format for delivering your feedback. This helps salespeople know what to expect and on what they will be evaluated. Also, it keeps you focused on mission-critical behavior.

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