



COACHING - IT'S AN ONGOING PROCESS

"Teams" win championships - not coaches or star players. What are you doing to build each individual into a stronger performer, and a more valuable contributor to the sales team?

Our goal here is to enhance your effectiveness as a builder of strong sales people. You can coach them to success!

"Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent." - Calvin Coolidge

Our job as sales leaders is not to grow sales - our job is to grow salespeople. And then it's their job to grow sales.

While it is true that our success is ultimately measured on sales levels, we personally aren't going to make that happen. Our job, then, is to help salespeople be better at what they do. We need to coach them.

By "Coaching" we are talking about field coaching - hands-on and in competitive situations. Think about the impact a basketball coach has during the game, compared to after the contest.

While the "after the game" sales meeting is important, it's working in the field with salespeople that holds forth our greatest opportunity. We see a sales leader working with salespeople on three types of calls:

1) **Training call** - Here the sales manager takes the lead during the call to show how it should be done. Other than being introduced to the prospect or client, the salesman is essentially a silent observer.

After demonstrating "how-to", the sales leader debriefs after each call. "What went right" and "What went wrong" are thoroughly discussed, so that the salesman can see the dynamics involved.

2) **Joint call** - A sales manager and salesman both participate in these calls. Each person contributes appropriately; and often these calls are used in re-establishing a relationship or introducing the sales leader to customers.

Joint calls also are effective for gathering information about market activity, the competition, and individual customer wants and needs. How well your company is meeting those needs can be ascertained on a joint call.

3) **Coaching call** - In these instances the sales leader plays the role of an observer, and the salesman conducts the call. The introduction of the manager usually should be done in a low-key manner. If he or she is unknown to the prospect, simply introduce the manager as an associate of the salesman.

On coaching calls the sales manager learns the most about how a sales person performs on his or her day-to-day calls. As a result, it is where the sales leader can offer the most.

But that is true only if the coaching call is conducted properly - and often that is tough for the sales leader to do. Even if the sales person is "blowing it", it is critical that the call be conducted solely by the sales person.

After the first coaching call, the salesperson will usually want to know how he or she did. But sales managers must resist doing a debriefing at this time. Instead, suggest that 5 or 6 more calls be made. Once they are all completed, the sales leader should sit with the salesperson and debrief. Identify those things that went well, and share them with the salesperson. Also identify what could be done better.

Rather than weighing down the sales person with too many suggestions, pick one or two that hold the greatest opportunity to increase his or her success. Discuss these two items thoroughly, suggesting specific actions for improvement.

You can't be helpful if you don't know what's going on in the field. It's not a control issue - it's an

information issue. Get in the practice of taking notes on each account executive you work with.

Start accumulating information about the account executive and his or her customers and prospects. Let each salesperson know your purpose - to help them grow professionally, and to grow their production.

Before You Start-Two basic points are important to make before going on sales calls with salespeople:

Fundamental One-Give plenty of advance notice. Surprise visits to the field are not appreciated by your sales team, as that implies a lack of trust. Set up your schedule at least a week in advance.

Fundamental Two-Go with a plan. Don't say to the salesperson, "Well, what should we work on this time out?" Instead, review your prior notes, current production, and call report- and then state where you think it best to focus. Always solicit feedback and agreement from the salesperson. Remember that if you demonstrate that you are doing your homework; salespeople will be more prone to do theirs.

Let's build on those fundamentals by establishing some guidelines to help keep your calls focused:

- 1) Begin by reiterating the objective of the day's calls. Be sure to show how your current objectives will fulfill the salesperson's overall game plan.
- 2) Build on the last coaching session. Review with the salesperson what you each agreed upon, and what got completed during the previous call. See if anything needs to be changed or discussed before setting out.
- 3) Let the account executive do the scheduling. If you are being "set up" with calls only to his or her best customers, you will know soon enough- and can correct accordingly.
- 4) Agree on the type of calls. Will they be training? Joint? Coaching?
- 5) Make the first call as positive as possible. Your presence increases the tension, so make this as easy as you can for the salesperson.

6) Before each call, ask about the purpose. There should be a specific goal on every call, and a specific approach for each one. Know it before hand, so you can better asses the call later.

7) Practice being a keen observer. Develop a mental checklist of what you are looking for, so you can avoid taking notes during calls. Make quick bullet notes in the car between calls. Focus on the primary changes to be suggested. The list could include:

- **Greeting**
- **Questions salesperson asked**
- **Questions prospect asked**
- **Percent of time talking versus listening**
- **Use of benefit statements**
- **Ask for business**

Remember your purpose, and never take over a call. If you do that, your relationship with the salesperson is on the way to destruction. Your primary reason for being there is training; not seeing how much can be sold.

8) At the appropriate time, depending on the type of call, describe what you observed. But remember-

- **Focus on one or two specific items**
- **Let the account executive talk**
- **Agree on what can be done differently**

9) At the end of the day, get overall agreement on what the account executive is to do and what you will do to help. Write it down. When giving feedback to the salesperson, ask yourself: What do I want to communicate? Where do I want to focus suggested changes? How can I communicate this information so that the salesperson will be receptive to it? What specific solution or goal may I offer, and how may I assist the recipient to achieve his or her goal?

Jack Daly is an industry expert in the field of Sales and Sales Management training. For more information call 888-298-6868

