



CHAPTER ONE

The Basics

OVERVIEW

- Defining sales coaching
- Why invest time in coaching
- The relationship between coaching and performance
- The big picture of coaching
- Why managers fail at coaching and how to prevent this

In this chapter, you will learn the importance of coaching and why sales managers must use it to help salespeople grow. There is a direct link between effective coaching and performance improvement; the key to improvement is behavioral modification.

WHAT IS EFFECTIVE SALES COACHING?

There is no one-size-fits-all sales coaching model. There are only approaches that have been shown to be successful in particular situations. The best idea is to identify each individual salesperson's personal "success code"—and use that code to unlock the salesperson's potential for success.

It is up to the coach to choose the right approach for the salesperson and the situation. Effective sales coaching adjusts to particular people and circumstances.

The chapters that follow offer an overview of the sales coaching practices I have found to be most effective over the past four decades, along with a discussion of the situations in which they are most likely to be useful. The "playbook" for effective sales coaching that you are now reading is based on the proven principles of the Sandler Selling System. It's intended for sales leaders who want to improve their performance within the special role we call "coach"—a role that is, as you will see, distinct from the other

SALES COACHING INSIGHT

In order for your sales coaching to be truly effective, first determine the individual salesperson's current level of skill in a given area. Be willing and able to coach to that level of skill, not to a future or desired level of skill. When coaching efforts are unsuccessful, it's usually because the coach has, for one reason or another, overlooked this principle.

three sales management roles of supervisor, mentor, and trainer. If you are such a leader, please do keep reading. You are the person for whom the Sandler Coaching Methodology was created. Whenever you see the words “coach,” and “coaching,” please assume I’m talking to and about you.



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Sales coaching is a formal process that uses one-on-one meetings to help salespeople achieve new levels of success by discovering hidden issues that inhibit their performance. Contrary to popular belief and practice, effective sales coaching is not “showing them how to do it.”

CRITICAL BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

Coaching salespeople for improved performance must begin with a clear understanding of: the individual salesperson’s current level of skill, the salesperson’s knowledge of the behaviors critical to success in certain selling situations, and the salesperson’s self-awareness during the sales process.

In order for your sales coaching to be effective, you must focus on critical behavior modification—not on the imparting of new skills.

The salesperson’s current level of effectiveness is always the starting point, along with being the benchmark for improvement over time.

BOB'S TRANSITION

My coaching client Bob started his business about ten years ago. Bob is a brilliant idea man. His business took off instantly. As he himself said, he “caught lightning in a bottle” and quickly built a customer base. As so often happens, the founder of a young company emerged as its first and best salesperson.

Bob hired a sales team. The company cruised along fine at the beginning, showing consistent growth over its first three years. The idea behind the business was so strong that the business model alone propelled most of the growth during this early phase. In the fourth year, however, the business slowed and eventually stalled.

Bob pushed his salespeople harder than ever before. You see, he knew how great the business could be once again if only his salespeople would do what he, Bob, would do in various selling situations. He “coached” them by telling them over and over again what to do.

By the end of the fourth year, some of Bob's best salespeople had quit because the pressure to perform was too great. The company's downward spiral continued in the first quarter of the fifth year, which was when Bob reached out to me for help.

We began with a one-on-one coaching process for Bob. I met with him weekly. I was eager to learn what was really behind the flattening of his business's revenue streams.

Bob was reluctant, at first, to be vulnerable during our sessions. He blamed his salespeople. It took a few weeks of discussion for us to reach a point where he understood that his salespeople were

not the enemy and that he himself played a major role in the problems his business was facing.

In time, we developed a new leadership model, one with which Bob was comfortable. It emphasized coaching, mentoring, and training, de-emphasized the supervisory role (which Bob assigned to someone else), and fit well with his personal management style. This new approach to sales management helped him encourage his salespeople to make and sustain important behavioral changes over time, rather than asking them to master, on the spot, the sales tactics with which Bob himself was most comfortable.

Bob soon gained a much deeper understanding of each member of the sales team's issues, and he stopped micromanaging. This new style worked well for the remainder of Year Six as well as all of Year Seven. The revenue trend improved. Eventually Bob decided to devote more of his time to running the company; he hired a sales manager with the specific skills necessary to work with the sales force. I still meet with Bob, but now we focus on more strategic issues. My coaching with Bob focuses on planning, communication, and Bob's business's image. This four-year relationship has transformed Bob as well as his business, and has put him on track to achieve the success he deserves.

LANGUAGE MATTERS

The language of an effective coaching session is vitally important, and understanding it is your first responsibility. This language is expressed both verbally and non-verbally.

The most effective coaches understand the nature of non-verbal messaging. They are good at reading body language and tonality to determine a given salesperson's level of buy-in to the coaching process.

As managers, we must understand that we cannot “sell” coaching to salespeople who don't yet associate it with success. Nothing good results from a coaching session where the salesperson sits quietly and gets involved on an intellectual level but has no emotional ownership of the process. Coaching is most effective when salespeople are willing to be vulnerable and share meaningful experiences. Once they realize that certain behaviors, if changed, will help them improve and create even greater success, they become equal partners in the coaching process. Not before!

Language—spoken and otherwise—is always the gateway to that partnership. The most powerful coaching moments, for salespeople and everyone else, involve individuals analyzing their own deeply held personal beliefs and considering whether those beliefs are driving them toward greater success—or holding them hostage. Far too many salespeople are prisoners of negative patterns resulting from broken personal belief systems that limit their ability to grow. The best coaches know that the language employed during the coaching session is a vitally important tool for creating breakthroughs around the assessment of those belief systems. Accordingly, they choose their words—and their non-verbal messaging—with great care.

Throughout this book, you'll be getting suggestions on how

to interact with salespeople. As you move from thinking about this advice toward putting it into practice, I'd like to ask you to remember this: the words you choose to speak during coaching sessions are important, but they are not the only communication the salesperson with whom you are working will process. The tone of voice you use, the facial expressions you employ, and the way you present yourself physically will also have a powerful impact. Truth be told, these nonverbal messages are more important to the success of your coaching than the words you choose to say. Ultimately, you are responsible for all of the messages you send to the salesperson you are coaching—not just for the recitation of the “right words” during the session.

FOUR THINGS SALES MANAGERS DO

Coaching is one of the most critical elements of leadership of the sales team—or indeed of any team. Coaching supports the other three major functions of leadership: supervising, mentoring, and training.

SALES COACHING INSIGHT

Coaching represents about 35% of the successful leadership role and has the single greatest impact on the future success of the salesperson.

Coaching has absolutely nothing to do with directing the actions of the salesperson. It is singularly focused on helping

salespeople generate a personal understanding of better ways to act while they are in the selling environment. The successful coach thoroughly understands the seven-step Sandler Selling System® methodology and uses that knowledge to help salespeople commit to better execution and improved behavior. David Sandler patterned his selling system after the compartments of a submarine. Each step of the selling system mirrored a submarine's compartments; each must be traversed in the proper order to move through the sales process.

The steps of the Sandler Submarine are:

- **Bonding & Rapport:** Building a relationship by developing a way to communicate effectively with the prospect and building trust.
- **Up-Front Contract:** Getting on the same page as the prospect by setting expectations and ensuring an outcome to each sales call.
- **Pain:** Finding the prospect's reason to buy and gaining a commitment to resolve any issues keeping the prospect from greater success.
- **Budget:** Determining what the prospect is willing and able to invest to fix their pain.
- **Decision:** Working with the prospect's process to make a decision on your product or service.
- **Fulfillment:** Matching solutions to each pain uncovered during the sales process.

- **Post-Sell:** Dealing with “buyer’s remorse” and blocking competitors from reopening a sale that has closed.

WHERE ARE THEY RIGHT NOW?

The effective coach recognizes the level of acceptance, openness, and commitment to success each individual salesperson brings to the coaching session. Specifically, the coach gauges the salesperson’s current level of commitment to implementing the Sandler Selling System. With each new salesperson, the coach first asks, “Where is this person right now?” It should go without saying that the effective coach is just as committed to the Sandler principles as the salesperson is—and is committed, too, to some core assumptions about effective management.

Among these assumptions is the idea that coaching is quite different from the other three functions of the sales manager. For one thing, it is impossible to coach in a group setting, such as a weekly sales meeting. Coaching always takes place in a one-on-one environment and is customized to the salesperson’s learning style and individual needs.

For another thing, coaching is not about particular targets. Many managers fail in the coaching role because they focus on achieving desired numerical results instead of supporting significant behavior modification and growth. The manager acting effectively as a coach shifts away from the need to direct change and fix problems and focuses instead on helping the salesperson discover for himself a more effective way to act in the selling situation.

BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING

Each coaching session begins with two assessments: one by the person to be coached, called the self-assessment, and the other by the coach, designated as the coaching assessment. You'll learn more about these a little later on in the book.

Just as important as the assessments is an understanding of the nature of the coaching meetings. The most successful coaches help salespeople understand that coaching is a developmental process. It's designed to help the salesperson become a better person, not just a more productive worker.

THE TIMING CHALLENGE

Coaching must be consistently scheduled at regular intervals for it to be effective and deliver the desired results.

Many managers fail because they view coaching as an event designed to correct some specific, narrowly defined problem and/or achieve a particular numerical result. Instead, the goal of coaching is continuous growth by the salesperson over a measured period of time. Managers who believe they don't have the time in their crowded schedule for coaching typically focus on micromanaging

SALES COACHING INSIGHT

The goal of coaching is continuous growth by the salesperson over a measured period of time.

sales quotas and selling activity. They only have one-on-one meetings with the salesperson for short-term emergencies rather than for long-term changes to patterns of interaction.

The successful coach has studied Sandler Identity/Role Theory, understands the impact of self-worth on achievement, and helps salespeople maintain a strong Identity and belief in self while at the same time helping them improve Role performance. If the concepts of Identity and Role are new to you, here's a brief overview.

The Sandler concept of self-worth is based on the separation of Identity (who you are) and Role (what you do). Role performance is based on the behavior salespeople perform in order to be successful in their jobs. Furthermore, coaching focuses on helping salespeople further develop their strengths and overcome blind spots that form unproductive patterns. This kind of relationship unfolds not in one or two intense crisis sessions but through consistent interaction—ideally, every two weeks.

A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Coaching must take place in a safe environment in which coach and salesperson have the ability to share open, honest, fact-based feedback. Many managers confuse coaching with training. They view the coaching process as a way to “fix” issues negatively impacting the bottom line, often creating an environment that feels unsafe for the salesperson. (How do you feel when someone tries to fix you?)

Training is the imparting of new skills. Coaching, on the other

hand, is a way of empowering salespeople to use their existing skill set more effectively in the context of the sales process and thus achieve greater success.

Like good sales calls, coaching sessions require a strong up-front contract in which participants develop and agree to a meaningful agenda. This agenda becomes the focus of the session. A time contract specifying the duration of the meeting is critical for the initial session as well as all succeeding sessions.

? WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

● Newcomers to the Sandler Selling System may ask, “What is an *up-front contract*?” The objective and intended outcome of a coaching discussion, the time element, and the role each party will play in reaching the intended outcome should all be agreed on in advance—preferably when the meeting is scheduled—and reviewed and reconfirmed at the beginning of the meeting.

Agreeing in advance about the topics for discussion, as well as what information will be provided and by whom, ensures against both misunderstandings and unfulfilled expectations. By establishing an objective for the interaction, the topics to be discussed, and the intended outcome, along with any associated next steps, this up-front contract not only sets the direction and tone of the discussion, but also provides a guidepost for getting the conversation back on track should it begin to wander off course. It establishes benchmarks by which to measure the progress made during the meeting as well.

A SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT UP-FRONT CONTRACTS

All Sandler trainers understand the power of the up-front contract in the sales process. This is equally important in the coaching process. In coaching, an up-front contract covers the timeframe for the session, the timing of the follow-up sessions, and the salesperson's agenda and coaching methodology. Lastly, the up-front contract ensures there are actionable next steps as well as accountability on the part of both salesperson and coach.

Here is an example of an up-front contract between the coach and salesperson.

Coach: Thanks for taking the time to meet today. This session will take approximately forty-five minutes. I have blocked the time so we won't have any interruptions. During the session we will focus on prospecting since you seem to be struggling in that area. We will both contribute thoughts on ways to improve your effectiveness in this key area and at the end develop some action steps for you to perform between this session and the next one. Are you comfortable spending our time this way?

Salesperson: Yes, I am.

Coach: Is there anything you'd like to add?

Salesperson: I'm struggling with developing a consistent prospecting methodology so I avoid doing it. Additionally, I have trouble dealing with the constant rejection I face on the phone.

Coach: I'll add those to the agenda, and we can deal with those issues during the session.

The salesperson must take accountability for executing any new behaviors discussed in the coaching session, and these actions should be specifically summed up at the session's end.

SALES COACHING INSIGHT

The coaching up-front contract incorporates:

- Purpose or goal
- Time: meeting and follow up
- Salesperson/coach agenda
- Coach's role and process
- Accountability and next steps

DISCOVERY-BASED THINKING

SALES COACHING INSIGHT

Coaching is not an event; rather, it's a process of ongoing discovery. Often, it fails because we look at it as a "one and done" session where change is supposed to take place instantaneously.

Coaching salespeople requires discovery-based thinking. In this kind of thinking, salespeople open their minds and determine their own solutions to any problems. The best coaching sessions involve the salesperson discovering new ways to modify existing behavior to achieve the desired outcome. This is impossible when the salesperson does not feel safe!

THREE CRITICAL ELEMENTS

The three critical elements to understand during each coaching session are **what**, **reason**, and **importance**. By this I mean the shared purpose of the coaching session (the what), why it is necessary to achieve the mutually agreed-upon goal (the reason), and the real-world impact the accomplishment will have for the salesperson (the importance).

Successful coaches are able to establish all three early in coaching relationships and to measure the level of trust the salespeople have in them. Trust is a key factor driving success and can be measured using the same symbols used in the Olympics: gold, silver, and bronze.

Gold level trust is achieved over time. This must be the coach's ultimate goal. The most productive coaching sessions involve the highest level of trust between participants. This high level of trust fosters internal exploration through openness and vulnerability and speeds growth and development. Silver level trust is that which exists when there is the potential for growth, but there is not yet complete openness and vulnerability. Bronze level trust is that which exists when there are no known barriers to constructive interaction, but the coaching relationship has only just begun.

STRATEGIC VS. TACTICAL COACHING

Most successful coaches conduct two forms of coaching sessions: **strategic** and **tactical**. Strategic coaching focuses on helping

salespeople plan for success. Tactical coaching helps them understand the skills and execution traps preventing them from greater success. Note that tactical coaching does not equate to, “Here, watch me do it!”

In both strategic and tactical coaching, the number one focus of the coach is to ask critical questions in order to help the participant fully understand the issues driving the coaching session.

Advanced questioning skills are key to successful strategic and

? WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

● *Active listening* is the process of reflecting back to the speaker the message you heard in order to confirm or correct your understanding. It can be accomplished by summarizing the speaker's message and asking for confirmation or clarification as needed. Active listening not only facilitates effective communications, but it also enhances rapport.

The Sandler concepts of reversing (answering a question with a question) as well as strip-lining (presenting an idea that is the opposite of the one your conversational partner expects to hear) play significant roles in gathering the information needed to help the participant achieve the desired strategic or tactical outcome. This kind of engagement keeps the focus on the salesperson's understanding of the situation. It is important for the coach to listen without prejudice and judgment in order to reflect back to the salesperson what is being said accurately. The coach must block predetermined opinions about the situation or salesperson since they will skew the results of the session.

tactical coaching sessions. They help the coach avoid the “telling/fixing” trap. The coach’s best friend is active listening. The simple query, “Tell me more,” gets the information ball rolling and allows the participant to “play a movie” of the events leading up to the session.

THE GAME PLAN

Let’s consider some basic ground rules for effective coaching. One of these is that every coaching session, without exception, should have a strategy or game plan designed to achieve a certain desired result. Coaching fails when one or both participants enter into the session with no goal or plan for success. While a good conversation may well be the result of an unplanned session and both parties may end up “feeling good,” nothing meaningful or lasting will have been accomplished.

Prior to the start of coaching the salesperson must have a clear understanding of what success in the position looks like. Often a gap analysis—a close examination of where the salesperson is now compared to where he wants to be—can be helpful. The top ten behaviors the salesperson must perform in order to be successful is also a good starting point. Each of these behaviors should have a clear expectations of performance associated with it. These behaviors are defined by analyzing success factors, activity, and key performance indicators.

Below, you’ll find a list of the typical top ten sales behaviors for field salespeople, a list we’ll be referencing often in this book. (Notice that the list can be considered either a list of **skills**—that

which is learned—or a list of **behaviors**—that which is executed during the course of the selling day—depending on which aspect the coach chooses to emphasize.) Identifying strategies for measurable improvement in one of these ten areas is a good goal for just about any coaching session.

1. **Lead generation:** Prospecting, the number one behavior, drives all the others.
2. **Building relationships:** Establishing a strong, open relationship based on trust.
3. **Qualifying opportunity:** Determining a reason to do business.
4. **Making presentations:** Presenting solutions to the prospect's problems.
5. **Servicing customers:** Delivering superior customer satisfaction.
6. **Account management:** Maximizing business in each account.
7. **Territory development:** Building a strategy to grow the territory.
8. **Building a cookbook:** Establishing productive sales activity.
9. **Continuous education:** Developing ongoing product, market, and sales knowledge
10. **Execution of the Sandler Selling System:** Mastering the sales process.

THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

Most salespeople are motivated by the pleasure principle. They want to attain a goal—owning a home outright, for instance—the attainment of which is expected to bring about pleasure and positive feelings in their life. This common dynamic makes salespeople quite easy to coach once the reward is determined. If you don't know what reward will deliver the pleasure, however, you're flying blind.

The pleasure principle focuses on the reward that salespeople receive for the behavior they perform. The problem is that the pursuit of the reward often has roadblocks associated with it. In these situations, the salesperson is similar to a machine that has a pebble in one of its cogs—a pebble that won't allow it to operate properly. Once the pebble is removed, the machine performs as it was designed. By the way, the same applies to the salesperson who has a behavior or belief impeding progress. Once the blockage is removed, the salesperson is free to pursue the goal that will deliver pleasure—and perform to the maximum level of execution.

WHY INVEST TIME IN COACHING?

Sales managers typically spend less than 10% of their time coaching salespeople and 90% of their time managing sales metrics. They view the formal performance review process as the number one form of coaching. They supplement this meeting with casual motivational conversations. Unfortunately coaching is seen as an

added burden on their already full workload, so they focus their time on problem-solving activities.

In reality, coaching only adds to the manager's workload in the beginning. Yes, it takes time to gain traction with the process. However, in the long term coaching greatly reduces the managerial workload. It has a significant positive impact on sales force development and is a key factor for growing the sales team. Coaching allows you to decipher each salesperson's personal performance code.

Let me explain why a more effective coaching routine is a net productivity gain for virtually every sales manager. Too many salespeople view their sales manager as the CPS: Chief Problem Solver. This focus on problem-solving prevents sales managers from fulfilling their true mission of developing the sales team. Unfortunately, managers usually accept this honorary title and consider it part of their formal job description. They spend a majority of their time focusing on dealing with operational and financial issues, leaving them little or no time to develop the individual members of the team. (A side note: Managers who ask the question, "How would you solve this problem if I weren't here?" find their salespeople usually have the answers and could act on their own. "Learned helplessness" prevents them from doing so.)

FIVE REASONS FOR EFFECTIVE COACHING

Here are the top five reasons high-performing companies build coaching into their sales culture:

1. Coaching develops proficiency, self-sufficiency, and time competency in salespeople. These three areas focus on the better usage of existing skills, improved competence during their sales calls, and ensuring time is an asset, not a liability.
2. Coaching is a sign of corporate investment and support, which are significant contributors to attracting and retaining sales superstars.
3. Coaching is extremely important in a salesperson's career development and overall job satisfaction rating.
4. Coaching impacts the ego, confidence, and self-worth of the sales team and help drive independent growth.
5. Coaching enhances the professional relationship between manager and salesperson and develops a healthy, effective work relationship.

My challenge to you is simple. Begin to look at coaching as a developmental tool that helps you be a better manager. Coaching frees up your day by allowing you to escape from the “warden” mentality—and focus on truly leading your sales team strategically.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COACHING AND PERFORMANCE

Performance coaching involves a dialogue between a trusted manager and willing salesperson, designed to impact both the salesperson's wellbeing (who they are) and personal performance (what they do). In Sandler terms, this involves working on the

salesperson's intrinsic Identity as well as external Role. It is impossible for a salesperson to achieve the highest level of performance unless these two critical sides of self-worth are addressed.

SALES COACHING INSIGHT

The coach's job is to help salespeople become the best possible version of themselves.

As I mentioned earlier, the performance coaching process is driven by the productive agenda mutually set by the coach and salesperson. The point bears repeating: This agenda must be clear and must receive full agreement by both parties before each session begins. Not only that: This agenda must have clear expectations and as well as a defined structure and methodology that allows participants to achieve the goal.

Effective coaching sessions are focused on facilitating the discoveries the salesperson will make. These discoveries must be driven, not by the manager's desire to impart best practices, but by the salesperson's personal commitment to work toward reaching full potential. The ability to focus on potential is the key to the performance coaching relationship.

Some example areas of performance coaching are: "next level" goal setting, career-pathing, belief examination and changing, behavior modification, recovering from personal and professional setbacks, removing subconscious roadblocks, etc. Salespeople

who benefit most from the coaching experience are driven to be the best and open to change. They also are serial goal-setters and personally introspective. High performance coaching helps salespeople explore their internal motivation as well as the external roadblocks that keep them from greater success. It focuses on supporting their current position in life and challenging them to grow beyond it.

THE BIG PICTURE OF COACHING

Every salesperson should develop a professional vision that guides behavioral choices and provides direction for decision-making. This vision must include personal aspirations as well as values. The coach must understand the professional vision and relate the salesperson's goals to the vision throughout the course of the coaching sessions. This is precisely the process I followed with Bob. It's the process that led not only to his breakthrough, but to countless breakthroughs experienced by sales professionals in other fields.

As we've seen, the most effective coaching strategies begin with the creation of a success profile clearly delineating behavior the salesperson must perform in order to be considered successful in the job. (If you don't have such a profile, you may want to use the list of Top Ten Behaviors in this chapter as a starting point.) Once this profile is clear in both the coach's and salesperson's mind, the coach's function is to work with the salesperson on ways to consistently improve performance. The coach does this by developing a plan for a series of sessions focused on identifying

specific behavioral opportunities for growth and by asking good questions.

ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL COACHING STRATEGY

There are three critical elements to creating a successful coaching strategy: the plan, the environment, and the methodology.

The coaching plan should be well thought out. I have to emphasize once again that a good session can't possibly be conducted in a "wing it" fashion. Coaching salespeople for higher performance is a process, not an event. Each succeeding coaching session must build off the previous one so the salesperson feels the velocity of change. Consistent follow up is critical to sustaining the levels of growth achieved in the prior sessions.

The emotional environment for the sessions must be open, honest and non-judgmental. For many managers, this is a major challenge. There are "3 Ps" associated with the coaching environment: potency, permission, and protection. Effective coaches resist any tendency to position themselves as authority figures, so that the salespeople assume full potency within their own career. Additionally, coaches give the salespeople permission to speak freely and provide protection from any reprisal from the ideas exchanged. This assurance allows each person the freedom to express all pertinent thoughts.

The methodology is the roadmap. It must be abundantly clear to both the manager and the salesperson. This eliminates

mindreading as a prerequisite for participating in the sessions. Salespeople must clearly see the roadmap by which a coach aids them in achieving their goals.

WHAT DRIVES THE SESSION?

The salesperson's goals must drive all the coaching sessions. It's virtually impossible to effectively coach a salesperson who is not 100% committed to clearly identified personal goals. Without goals, there is nothing driving the salesperson to take action.

When developing a coaching strategy, it is important to have salespeople clearly spell out the goals as well as explain why the goals have personal meaning for them. Then come the steps of building accountability and an action plan, followed by the equally important step of making sure salespeople reward themselves for all progress made. Too many salespeople wait until they have achieved the ultimate goal before they celebrate. Mini-celebrations along the way provide the jet fuel necessary for continued effort.

Salespeople who develop a personal vision to act as a beacon guiding their direction and their daily choices are the ones who experience the greatest success. This vision typically includes aspirations as well as values and informs behavioral decisions that drive performance improvement. Effective coaches support the identification and expression of this vision. Bob's vision, for example, was to create a certain kind of company, one that attracted the very best customers and team members.

WHY MANAGERS FAIL AT COACHING

Every manager has the ability to develop the skills necessary to be a great coach. However, many lack the willingness commit to the action plan necessary to help their own salespeople grow and develop. This book is meant to help you develop and execute such an action plan.

In my experience, a majority of coaches merely give lip service and a halfhearted effort to the coaching process. They default to being supervisors, assuming that this will help the members of their sales team achieve success. They use their authority as a club, imagining that they are pushing people toward success. Instead, they are creating a hostage mentality within their sale force. In this situation, salespeople focus on doing only what they are told, when they are told to do it—and they underperform.

Coaching takes a strong commitment by the manager to empower salespeople to grow. It creates a continuous learning environment, propelling salespeople past self-imposed barriers.

THE MOST COMMON TRAPS

Here are some common traps managers fall into that prevent them from being better coaches.

Unclear objectives for the coaching session. Each coaching session must have a solid, meaningful agenda that both parties agree to achieve. Salespeople must have an emotional tie to the positive impact that completing the agenda will have on them.

Poor follow up on the session. Unless the coach and the salesperson commit to the necessary follow up, the session will not be successful. This commitment has to be unconditional. It should have intermediate review points to make sure the salesperson stays on track.

Lack of trust. Meaningful growth cannot occur in the absence of trust. If there is not a gold or silver level of trust between manager and salesperson at the end of the first meeting, the coach should first explore why there is an absence of trust. It is important to get all the relevant issues on the table in order to ensure that a strong level of trust is present, since it allows the openness necessary for coaching intimacy.

Too much time spent fixing. Managers who habitually respond with, “Here’s what I would do if I were you,” or any variation, are not coaching. In such situations, the salesperson proceeds to do only what the manager says to do, and significant growth opportunities are lost.

Too much time spent telling. Some managers feel they have to have all the answers so they are constantly telling their salespeople what to do. In order to accomplish this, managers must develop a pattern of strategic questioning designed to make the salesperson open up, think differently, and speak freely.

Impatience if results take too long. The sales profession focuses intensely on achieving bottom-line results. Time is of the essence in achieving those results, so it’s not surprising that managers get impatient. Successful coaching sessions are based on the idea that becoming a great salesperson is a marathon, not a

sprint. Marathon runners understand that it is important to pace themselves and to watch the mile markers on the side of the road in order to create the proper pace. Sprinters, on the other hand, are more focused on running the race as fast as they can. The best coaches have the patience of a marathoner, and they encourage their salespeople to think the same way.

Coaching all salespeople the same way. Each salesperson is unique. Coaching is not accomplished in a one-size-fits-all world, and every coaching session requires a customized approach based on knowledge of the salesperson's specific needs. Assessments can provide great coaching roadmaps to guide the deep understanding necessary for success.

Successful coaches view coaching as an art form as well as a science. They adhere to a defined methodology and personalize that methodology to fit the individual needs of a specific salesperson. The chapters that follow are meant to help you do just that.

SANDLER COACHING RULES

- Benchmark the salesperson's current skill set before the coaching process begins.
- Keep the salesperson's Identity strong while you improve the Role.
- Develop a coaching up-front contract, and personalize a strategy for each session.
- Establish a high level of trust and openness with the salesperson.

- Remember that coaching is similar to running a marathon, since it requires a strong commitment to “go the distance.”

