



# THE 5 FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS OF WORLD-CLASS SALES MANAGERS



---

A WHITEPAPER BY THE BROOKS GROUP

---

The gap between sales managers' skillsets and their desire to lead and coach their salespeople is a serious problem that hinders the performance of many of today's sales teams.

It's not that sales managers don't want to lead their sales reps to success; the problem really comes from managers not having the knowledge or tools that are needed to help their team succeed.

Many managers have never gone through formal management training or have some seriously misguided ideas about what it takes to manage a sales team the right way. When their tactics fail, it leads to sales managers blaming their reps for a lack of sales performance instead of taking personal responsibility for low sales figures and working on their management skills.

Fortunately, sales managers can become much more effective and valuable to their sales team and the rest of their organization by sharpening their skills in three important areas:

- They can learn the fundamentals of management and become a coach who works with their team instead of a boss who tells their team what to do.
- They can engage specific members of the sales team by understanding their desires, motivations, and strengths, instead of creating blanket policies that may not apply to everyone.
- And, finally, managers can help their team focus on the activities that will provide them with the most return on their investment of time, which leads to a more productive sales force that has a better grasp of how to bring in business.



## 1 Understanding That Managing Is Not Directing

The biggest misconception that many sales managers have, especially if they are new to their management role, is that they are put in place to set reps on the correct path. Sales managers often believe that since they were successful as a sales rep, the things they did will help everyone become successful.

These kinds of managers believe that it is their way or the highway.

They focus on directing and telling their sales reps what to do, which leads to an emphasis on what the sales rep is doing wrong. As you may expect, consistently focusing management attention on a negative area like this can lead to bad feelings and hostility between sales managers and their team members. This approach is clearly not the most effective way to manage salespeople. In many cases, it can lead to resentment and high turnover rates, especially in the world of sales where professional pride is held in high esteem.

On the Dale Carnegie Blog, [sales managers are advised](#) to follow the coaching principle of adaptation.



Adaptation simply means that instead of just telling their team members what to do and how to do it, managers vary their coaching approach based on the individual needs of the person being coached. This gives managers a much more interactive approach to sales leadership that facilitates communication and feedback, two crucial elements of success for managers. It is vital that managers recognize that what works for one person may not work for everyone; this type of one-size-fits-all approach to management can cause serious challenges and will lead to frustration for sales managers and sales reps alike.

The good news for high-performing sales reps who are now managers and still want to show their current salespeople some of the best practices for success is that there is a much more effective way to do this: leading by example.

As a sales manager, the way that you act around your sales team, your customers, and the other parts of your organization has a significant impact on the way that a sales team behaves.

You must embody the principles of honesty, optimism, support, and other traits that you want your sales professionals to have.

One of the most important benefits of managing instead of directing is that it puts you well on the way to achieving success in the second part of being successful as a sales manager: engaging your team members.

## 2 Engaging Sales Team Members

Once sales managers come to the realization that effective management is not a one-way street, they can begin to come up with a plan to lead their specific sales team to keep them engaged. Sales is a field where being engaged and having a drive to succeed are crucial for high performance. A sales manager's job is to work with individual team members to discover how they can engage each sales rep and make sure that they are performing at the highest possible level.

Although working on an individual basis with each sales rep can be time consuming, it is also well worth it because of the importance of sales coaching.



The American Management Association reported in [a 2008 study of successful coaching trends](#) that 41% of companies today are using coaching as a way to improve employee engagement. Gone are the days when coaching was viewed primarily as a way to correct problems in the workplace.

Coaching is now respected as a valuable tool to create a cohesive office culture and commitment to a company's goals.

So what does a sales manager need to think about when working with individual sales reps? There are three things paramount to successfully understanding how best to coach someone in a professional context:

- **Knowing their values:** what do they think is most important about the work that they do? What do they think a good manager should be able to provide for them? Knowing a person's values will allow you to align a management style with what they need.
- **Knowing their motivations:** what makes them want to succeed at what they do? It could be money, respect, recognition, or the opportunity for advancement in their career. Understanding a sales rep's motivations can help you offer them the right kind of rewards.
- **Knowing their strengths and weaknesses:** every salesperson has some things that they do well and some things that they need to improve upon. Some salespeople are great at prospecting and finding new leads, but struggle at closing. Other salespeople might have an encyclopedia-like knowledge of product, but lack the motivation to prospect for new business. Having a good sense of each rep's strengths and weaknesses will better prepare you to design a coaching program for them.

It is important to note that none of these attributes are things that you should feel pressured to discover on your own. If you have met with your team members and still aren't sure about their feelings in any of these three areas, just ask them!





### 3 Focusing On High Gain Activities

Activity training is the more technical side of sales coaching and management.

After managers have spent some time learning about how to successfully manage and have become familiar with the needs of their team, they can focus on the activities that will bring their sales team more success. To understand which activities will help their team find as much success as possible, sales managers should understand Pareto's Principle, also known as the 80/20 rule.

Named after Italian philosopher Vilfredo Pareto, Pareto's principle came about when he realized that in 1906, 80% of Italy's land was owned by just 20% of Italy's population. Today, Pareto's principle applies to many different areas of business, but when it comes to sales activity, it can be best defined this way:

**20% of your activity is responsible for 80% of your results.**

Every salesperson has things that they need to do each day. Answering emails, updating their CRM, organizing their product literature, and reading up on new products and sales techniques are all activities that should get done as often as possible. These day-to-day tasks represent 80% of your activity.



The most important 20% that sales managers must help their team focus on is found in selling activities. What are some examples of sales activities in the 20%?

- **Prospecting for new business by sending messages on social networks or calling on existing customers to find referrals**
- **Meeting with prospects to talk to them about a proposal or help inform them about the features and benefits of the products and services that your company offers**
- **Negotiating a deal with prospects that are very close to becoming existing customers**

Helping your team get rid of some of the 80% activities and increasing the amount of 20% activities that they participate in will be extremely beneficial in your efforts to coach your sales team.

In [an article for Entrepreneur](#), Perry Marshall goes on to further discuss the benefits of the 80/20 rule by explaining that when you are more productive with the time that you do spend on work, you have more time to relax and refresh your brain. For your sales team, this translates to a better work-life balance that allows them to be more focused and sharper when they are participating in important meetings with prospects.

## 4 Accountability And Keeping Your Door Open

After you understand these three methods for improving the opportunity gap found in sales management, it is important that you take some time to periodically evaluate your management performance and the performance of your sales team.

THE KEY TO MANAGEMENT IS ACCOUNTABILITY.

In [a Forbes article about leadership](#), Victor Lipman writes that the most important element of management is accountability. Lipman cites a Harvard Business Review study that shows that 46% of high-level managers received a poor rating in the part of the study that measured how well managers held people accountable when they didn't deliver.



Part of accountability as a manager comes from setting expectations with your sales team. It is important that you and your team have a good understanding of what you expect from each other. To make sure there is no confusion about expectations, you should get them put in writing. Don't just have your salespeople sign them: incorporate the team in the process of creating these expectations as well. This will create buy-in and help everyone stay on the same page when it comes to what is expected.

On the other side of the accountability coin, you must make sure that you are always accountable to your team. Managers need to be open to address any questions or concerns that their sales team has. The best managers are the ones who constantly reevaluate their operating methods and tweak them based on what is and isn't working. Some managers make the mistake of not listening to input from their team members when it comes to evaluating their management tactics. Instead, you should be open to input about which of your management techniques are working and which ones need some improvement.



## Closing The Gap For Good

Sales and management are two closely related fields. Many of the best salespeople are actually great managers in their own right; they have to manage their daily tasks and responsibilities to customers, their supervisors, their support staff, and their family members.

Unfortunately, there is frequently a gap between what is required from an excellent sales rep and what is required from an excellent sales manager. This gap is tough to bridge even for some of the most intelligent and successful sales reps.

If you are looking to become a successful manager or successfully train a sales manager at your organization, make sure that you emphasize a focus on interactive managing instead of one-way directing. Get to know the individual needs of your sales team, and focus on making sure that they are maximizing the number of high level activities that they spend time on.

This kind of approach to sales leadership may be outside of your comfort zone, or you may be worried that it will take up a tremendous amount of time and resources. However, with the workforce today becoming increasingly diverse and the economy still recovering from the devastating recession, there is an extreme need for great salespeople in the modern world of business. Salespeople can become great in part thanks to managers who know how to keep them fired up about selling so that they can achieve their personal goals and ensure that their company is successful long into the future.



## Key Takeaways:

- Successful sales leaders understand that managing is not directing—instead of telling their team members what to do and how to do it, they vary their coaching approach based on the individual needs of the person being coached.
- A sales manager's job is to work with team members to discover how they can engage each sales rep and make sure they're performing at the highest level possible.
- Managers need to focus their attention on the high-gain activities that affect sales the most, and avoid spending too much time on lagging indicators.
- It is important that sales managers and their teams have a clear understanding of accountabilities and what behaviors are expected.

## About The Brooks Group

With nearly 40 years of industry experience, The Brooks Group achieves sustainable sales culture transformation for clients by delivering targeted training that becomes operationalized by threading into an organization's existing systems.

The Brooks Group takes a holistic approach to practical culture shifts and focuses on customized “street smart” sales and sales management programs, with a high level of relevance and practicality for the individual learner. Training gets reinforced with an industry-leading cloud-based sales and sales management coaching platform.

### For more information

The Brooks Group can be reached by phone at (800) 633-7762, by email at [Contact@TheBrooksGroup.com](mailto:Contact@TheBrooksGroup.com) or online at [TheBrooksGroup.com](http://TheBrooksGroup.com).

