

Sales Coaching: No Longer a Soft Skill

*Measuring the impact of the manager on
sales team performance*

402.805.4238 WWW.ECSELLINSTITUTE.COM
3201 SOUTH 33RD STREET, LINCOLN, NE 68506



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Introduction

“What does it feel like to be coached by you?”



INTRODUCTION

It is simple, succinct and should evoke great thought. Whether you are a front line sales leader or a Chief Sales Officer, challenge yourself by answering the following question.

What does it feel like to be coached by you?

Before you read further, stop and write down the question and your answer. Please, do it now.

This e-book will detail the extent to which sales leaders, managers, or as we call them, coaches, impact how much gets sold, which is why the above question is so critical to contemplate. EcSell research shows “coaching” as the #1 skill that impacts a sales person’s “motivation to sell.” Said another way, if a sales person believes their manager to be a great coach, they are motivated to sell more. However, the most disturbing component of our research, as it applies to sales managers, is that of the top ten “management” skills we ask sales people to rate, their manager’s ability to “coach” ranks dead last. So, the skill most needed to drive sales, coaching, is the skill that sales managers across the world are least likely to possess. And, to put this in perspective, this would be analogous to having sales people whose weakest skill is their ability to sell.

EcSell Institute’s Director of Research, Stacia Jorgensen, recently described this lack of coaching acumen as a “management paradox.” Since most managers came from a sales producer role, it’s not as if they have never been trained, or innately don’t know how to get people from point A to point B. Sales producers are educated, taught and will likely only survive if they have the ability to develop relationships, probe, ask questions and help their prospects/clients identify and solve problems (sounds like some foundational coaching skills). However, when the move to management is made, these former sales people no longer **pull** information, for some reason they now believe their role is to **push** expectations. This behavior perpetuates a low, or at best, average management model of performance, as opposed to a high performance coaching model.

What does it feel like to be coached by you? Perhaps like most open ended questions, there is never a single, proper answer, nor should there be. If sales leaders are candid in their responses, each answer will vary a great deal. So the litmus test regarding the quality of your response is to answer the following:

1. Are you comfortable with how you answered the question?
2. Would the outcome of what you wrote create and sustain a higher level of performance for those who report to you?
3. Is what you wrote something you would be proud to pin to your office wall for all to see?

The amount that gets sold each month, quarter, year, is a result of many things such as market conditions, product quality and service just to name a few. Some of the determinants are external factors that are challenging to control, but there are many internal factors that strongly impact how much gets sold, that sales leaders do control. This writing will focus on the latter, the human resource factor of performance, and specifically how the activities and behaviors of a coach (no longer a manager) impact sales results.

Keep in mind the obvious--nobody is a perfect coach! This should then motivate each of us to not only measure our value by how well we coach today, but also by how willing we are to give up what we believe to be effective coaching behaviors, and learn new ways to motivate those on our teams to sell more.



INTRODUCTION

What you are about to read was only possible with the entire EcSell team's commitment and passion to coaching. These authors are infinitely lucky to work with such talented people who challenge the way we think, act and serve our clients. Nothing you are about to read would have been possible without them.

Will Kloefkorn, Vice President of Sales

Kathy Collins, Vice President of Client Operations

Stacia Jorgensen, Director of Research

Kerstin Olson, Chief Operating Officer

Anna Schott, Director of Marketing

The team at Venture Tech

Dr. Mary Uhl-Bien, colleague, friend and renowned leadership professor

We thank you for your commitment, passion and for making us all better coaches.



Chapter

1

The Sales Manager Needs More Love



*“While always excited for the season to begin, two-a-day practices were never something any sane ball player looked forward to being a part of, especially given the August heat. After several days of conditioning, blocking, tackling and much more, the cramps would hit. If you were lucky they would last for just seconds, but many times minutes would seem like hours. The reason for the cramping, according to most every coach was an easy explanation, too much water. In the 1970s, water, most all believed was the reason for cramping, and inhibited the performance of athletes. As a result we would be provided about six ounces of water halfway through practice and then provided salt tablets. Following practice there would be a mad rush to the water fountain where we would guzzle water until we were out of breath. It’s amazing more people didn’t collapse and die. **How could we all have known so little? How could coaches have been so wrong?”***

Similar archaic beliefs and actions are alive and well in the sales world, and we witness them daily as individuals and teams do their best to grow revenue. Research and technology continue to challenge our perception of accepted best practices in every arena of business. But in the sales world, the sales people are the only ones being hydrated with the latest sports drink while the manager, the coach, is left with the Dixie cup of water.

Below are some startling statistics that certainly support the message that all organizations continue to have significant gaps in managerial performance.

- 65% of workers surveyed said they would rather have a new boss—versus an increase in pay (Forbes)
- Those who dislike their boss take an average of 15 more sick days/year (Forbes)
- 80% of managers do not have the talent or skills to maximize the performance of their teams (Gallup)
- Amazon search for books on “selling” returns 51, 862, “managing sales people” 189, and for “coaching sales people... 73” (EcSell Institute)
- Estimates of dollars spent in sales effectiveness training are \$20,000,000,000/year (American Society of Training and Development)
- Dollars spent on teaching sales managers a coaching process? No reports. So insignificant it has not traditionally been measured (EcSell Institute)

There is one more stat that should get your attention, and it should bother our profession: The average tenure of a sales leader at the time of this writing was 19 months, down from 24 months the year prior (ES Research). Not only is this scary, it’s embarrassing.

Perhaps cliché, but times have changed. Our world, our customers and specifically our workforce has evolved significantly, and evolved in a way that quickly makes a manager’s perceived skills obsolete. What has changed?

- Time demands
- The demographic and psychographic of the work force
- The way customers buy
- Our understanding of what motivates sales people to sell more
- The way teams want to be led, managed and coached
- Technology
- Data/information

It is clear that most sales leaders have not kept pace with the above evolution. There is still a strong tendency to only “manage” individuals or teams, with the primary focus being numbers. That leaves sales leaders acting like more compliance managers, as opposed to coaching the team members that actually produce the sales numbers.



“The average tenure of a sales leader at the time of this writing was 19 months . . .”

“There is still a strong tendency to only “manage” individuals or teams, with the primary focus being numbers.”

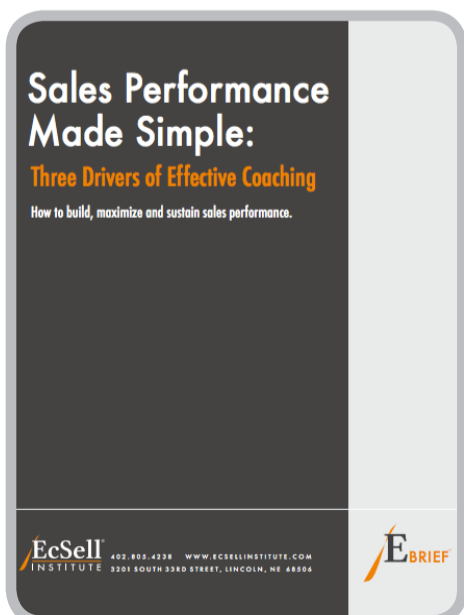


A sales manager's world has changed significantly already and will continue to do so. Today's sales reps are placing more value on engaging with their boss than ever before and our research shows that sales organizations are not equipped to handle the need today—a primary reason being the coaching skills needed to maximize the performance of an evolving sales team have not been learned. We know that over 90% of sales departments have no objective information on what a sales manager should do to increase rep performance, how often they should do it, or if they are effective in their management role. Given the above, the growing turnover of sales managers begins to make sense.

Sales departments have to quit trying to fix the symptoms (sales people) and focus on the real issue—the sales leadership team. As mentioned in the above statistics, estimates are that \$20 billion was spent on **SALES REP** effectiveness, while the amount spent on sales coaching effectiveness was too insignificant to measure. To be effective, a sales leader needs to be given the responsibility and accountability for the performance of a team, but to do this without helping them understand how they impact performance is beyond remiss, it is negligent - negligence that leads to an average tenure of 19 months.

To change the downward tenure spiral, sales departments must shift the focus. Whether working in sales ops, training, human resources or sales leadership, they must all force a fundamental, disruptive move—make educating, equipping and measuring the performance of the front-line managers the focus of the sales growth strategy. It won't be comfortable, nor will it be easy. Doing this will bring performance visibility to roles that have only been measured by whether a team hit a number. But, sales leaders will also know why numbers are going up, down or sideways, and knowing “why” provides ammunition to impact the “how.”

In 2010, EcSell Institute released our first e-book on sales coaching. In that book we shared our findings on how sales leaders impact performance, specifically how they affect a sales rep's “motivation to sell.” Management, leadership and the catalytic factor were all explained in detail as behaviors of a high performing coach. Our research has continued and while our original work is still completely relevant, there are now more layers we can add that further detail how a coach impacts performance.



Click [here](#) to read EcSell's first e-book on sales coaching. “Sales Performance Made Simple: Three Drivers of Effective Coaching.”

“We know that over 90% of sales departments have no objective information on what a sales manager should do to increase rep performance . . .”



Chapter

2

A Bit on Coaching Research



For more than seven years, the EcSell Institute has been surveying sales reps throughout the world to gain an understanding of what their managers are doing, not doing, and whether or not they are doing their job effectively. We realized awhile back that we can't rely on just the feedback of a manager or their boss regarding sales manager performance, because sales managers are not a good gauge as to their own effectiveness and their bosses rarely watch their sales manager's work. This is not to impugn the "higher-ups," for nobody has ever told them what skills, tools and activities their managers should act against; therefore, a senior sales leader would not know what to watch for or objectively evaluate.

When we started our research we were looking to discover what a sales manager did (or didn't do) that impacted a sales rep's ability and willingness to produce at higher levels. Now that we've discovered what it is, we continue our survey work to not only track shifts, but also to see if teams are executing against what we now refer to as the high performance coaching activities and tools.

Prior to sharing what the most effective sales coaches do, we will share a couple theories as to why there has been little emphasis on the evolution of the sales manager role.

Theory 1:

There is no understanding of the role of a coach

Is a "manager" versus a "coach" just a play on words? For most people, yes, for EcSell Institute, no. We have explained in previous white papers how the role of today's manager has not changed much from how it was originally conceived - in the industrial era.

Accordingly, the manager's responsibilities have not evolved to reflect what we now know about individual and team performance. Managers are asked to review sales rep activity, pipeline, CRM compliance, sales process compliance, forecasting and so on. So while most senior sales leaders will say they want their managers to coach their reps, there is no understanding of what it means to coach and as a result, effectiveness cannot be measured.

High performance sales coaches strategize, understand how to identify and acquire talent, constantly develop their talent, connect and bond with their team and are constantly seeking new ways to obtain discretionary effort from their producers. However, as mentioned earlier, our research shows that most of today's managers act more like compliance officers, making sure sales reps follow processes and systems. And while important, those structured coaching activities have little impact on getting a team to hit a number, which is the primary function of the role. Which is why it makes more sense to view a sales manager's role as more of a coach, as opposed to one who manages assembly line workers from the 1920s. Check your job descriptions and see if what you have written and expect from those who coach your teams sounds more like a 1920s management description versus an up-to-date high performance coaching description.



“ . . . it makes more sense to view a sales manager's role as more of a coach, as opposed to one who manages assembly line workers from the 1920s.”



Theory 2:

The Obvious

Most all sales coaches were promoted from sales production and, therefore, should know what to do as a coach, right? This is always the default reasoning as to why high-performing salespeople are moved into management roles. While the thinking makes sense on the surface, the results are most often disappointing. But it's not the act of moving a high-performing salesperson to a coaching role that is the issue. The issue is moving the wrong high-performing salesperson to a coaching role.

A ticket to admission for any effective sales leader is to intimately know the sales producer role and all the different ways salespeople can be successful, hence the need for a producer background. The challenge with poor-performing managers is they want to communicate "how I did it" and believe if a rep just does the same thing, they will also be successful. High-performing coaches understand that salespeople all have different motivations and strengths; therefore, how they are coached is unique to every individual.

Bottom line is this – all sales coaches should have a sales producer background to be most effective; however, there is less than one in 20 who could make the move from sales to management, and become a high performing sales coach. The good news is for those sales producers who do have the right skill set to be an effective sales coach, there is now a formula they can follow to become successful. In the pages that follow, we will share the activities, tools and behaviors that create a high performance coach.

"... there is less than one in 20 who could make the move from sales to management, and become a high performing sales coach."



Chapter

3

Coaching Not Measured is a Soft Skill

Coaching objectively measured becomes a vital sales performance metric



Imagine playing multiple games of solitaire—with real playing cards—not on your tablet. You get close, but after several games you have not yet won and are now getting frustrated. You decide to play just one more game. It starts off well, as you immediately get three aces up top, three kings are turned over and, in short order, they are followed by the right queen and jacks. You say to yourself, “Finally!” But as you again go through the deck you realize you are at a standstill, for you didn’t uncover the last king. Frustrated, you gather the cards to put them back in their box. That’s when you glance down to the floor and notice a single card under your seat. You expect it to be an unnecessary joker, but when you reach down and turn it over, you see it—the king of diamonds. The entire time you had only been playing with 51 cards...

Success in solitaire is measured by the ability to get all cards to the top. In the games you just played, you were never going to win. It was impossible with a partial deck. But, here is the kicker... while you were playing you were not aware a card was missing, so you naively continued with the hopes of achieving something that was unattainable due to not having all the right resources.



Our research shows that over 90% of executive sales leaders believe that the amount sold by a group of sales people is a direct reflection of how well they are coached; the better the coach the more gets sold. The challenge is that, historically, most all performance research has been done on salespeople, and not until recently are organizations beginning to comprehend how a manager impacts the performance of a team. This means that in the sales management world we weren’t taught how specific coaching activities and behaviors correlated to sales results. And, if nobody knew there were certain coaching activities and behaviors that caused sales reps to sell more, then those activities and behaviors certainly couldn’t be measured for quantity or quality. We didn’t know what we didn’t know—similar to the card under the chair.

Sales Leaders are Short on Data

This may be hard to comprehend given the volume of reports and dashboards reviewed by any sales leader on a given day, but critical information is still missing. Prudent decisions in business are usually made as a result of having data, and data is produced as a result of inputs. While working with sales leaders we often inquire as to what data they regularly review, and inevitably we will hear items such as:

- Pipeline metrics
- Forecasts
- Performance-to-goal by person/division/company/product line
- CRM dashboards

Yet, with all of this data, sales organizations are still only reviewing or measuring what they believe are the inputs of salespeople. NOBODY is reviewing or measuring data that applies to coaching effectiveness, so as a result there is no way to know how a coach is impacting sales results. To bring even greater clarity to this issue, EcSell Institute’s research shows that approximately 70% of existing sales coaches, even those who’ve had “coaching training,” are not executing the necessary coaching activities with the right frequency or quality that will lead a team to sell more. This means that the majority of a sales management team is PREVENTING sales reps from selling more. Without objectively measuring coaching performance, sales leaders simply “hope” coaches are executing the right behaviors and activities that lead to sales results—which would be like “hoping” to win a game of solitaire without knowing if all the cards were in the deck.

Coaching is no longer new and we see that many Fortune 500 companies have some sort of coaching program in place for their sales management team. However, the programs are woefully short on substance and resulting measurements. Don’t misunderstand that something is better than nothing, but our organization has yet to see a sales coaching program that fully provides what a sales manager needs to maximize the performance of a sales team.

“... the majority of a sales management team is PREVENTING sales reps from selling more.”



Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Does our coaching program teach our managers the high pay-off activities and tools to execute each day, week, month or year?
2. Does our coaching program train our managers how often to execute these activities and with whom?
3. Does our coaching program objectively measure coaching quality, coaching activity and overall coaching effectiveness?

It is likely “no” for every answer, as we have never seen all the above in place—ever. Every sales department that states that they have a coaching program provides little more than a methodology for effective feedback regarding a deal in the pipeline, or how to conduct a post-sales call review. And, while those are important activities, nobody is measuring if they are being done, how well they are being done and with whom they are being done. Said another way, nobody is measuring coaching inputs and outputs. And measurement of inputs and outputs is management 101. Coaching not measured is a soft skill, coaching measured becomes a vital sales performance metric.

Don't Play Solitaire With 51 Cards

There are four quadrants of data that every sales leader should have at their disposal and without them effective decisions cannot be made. These four quadrants are:

- What sales reps do (quantity of reps' work)
- How well they do it (quality of reps' work)
- What sales coaches do (quantity of coaches' work)
- How well they do it (quality of coaches' work)



	Sales Rep	Sales Coach
Measure what they do (QUANTITY)	✓	?
Measure how well they do it (QUALITY)	✓	?

Most front-line and executive sales leaders have access to information about what salespeople do through tools like a CRM platform or other data gathering technologies, which then allows them to populate the upper left quadrant. Some sales departments may have customer experience measurements and/or sales skills review documentation which then allows them to populate the lower left quadrant. **However, nobody has the information and tools to populate the right two quadrants which indicates, at best, most sales leaders are only supplied with 50% of the data they need to maximize sales growth.**



What we believe is almost every reason a team hits goal or does not hit goal is because of the sales manager, not the sales rep. And, if this is the case, what is the manager doing or not doing that causes the team to over-achieve or under-perform? Because nobody measures coaching performance, nobody knows. Sales departments are famous for providing salespeople all the success disciplines, measurements and methodologies, but until these same structures are brought to the sales manager role, sales growth will be minimized.

The solitaire analogy applies to every sales department we've seen, and we've seen many. Regardless of company size, management tenure, technology, learning and development teams, sales effectiveness departments, strength of leadership, etc., they have all had a card (or more) on the floor. They were all missing critical data that limited their ability to maximize sales.

How do coaches most impact performance? Or put another way, how does a coach get more discretionary effort from their team? Many times the minds at EcSell Institute have written, blogged, prophesized, researched and published the components of performance, specifically management, leadership and the catalytic-factor. As mentioned earlier, our research has continued to show their significance, but in practice they become insignificant if one cannot implement a coaching methodology that comprises the activities, behaviors and tools to drive success within these three themes.

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{Coaching Quality} \\ + \\ \text{Coaching Quantity} \\ = \\ \text{Quota} \end{array}$$



Chapter

4

The Coaching
Methodology:
A New Process
for Sales Success



They vowed that this time, victory would be theirs.

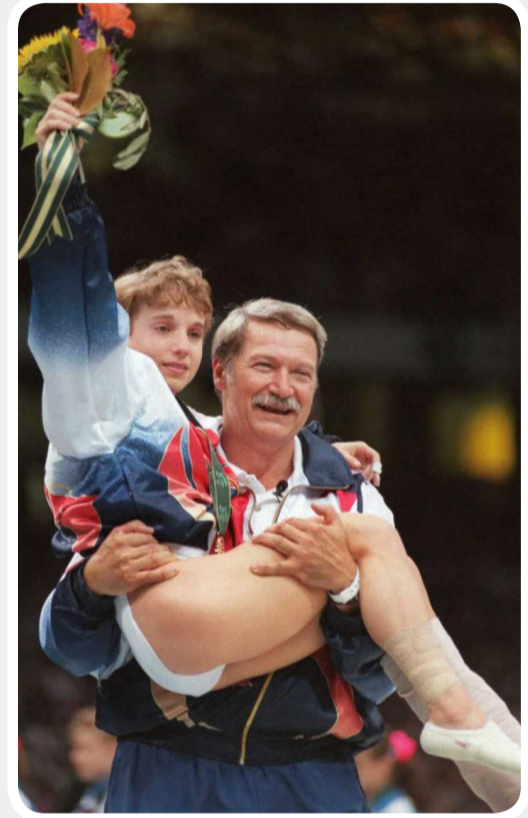
The year was 1948, the last time the U.S. had won the Olympic gold in women's gymnastics. Coach Bela Karolyi wanted different results than what had been produced from the past 38 years of U.S. gymnastics, and he knew little things would matter. Among many changes, the team of elite athletes didn't stay in the Olympic Village. Instead, Karolyi has his team stay at a fraternity house on the Emory University Campus, providing a retreat to further bond, focus, prepare, avoid distractions, and vividly imagine dreams coming true. The stately building was lined with police tape and a chain was draped across the driveway.

There, the gymnasts bonded like never before and they emerged from their sanctuary with the steely look of determination in their eyes. Though unsure of the outcome, the change in pre-game routine would certainly produce different results.

Because Karolyi had a method to train and prepare his team, they were all ready to perform. Even if a performance disaster occurred, the chances of them all melting was not likely. The U.S. entered the final rotation with a commanding lead over the Russians. They needed nothing heroic, just solid performances and seven young American women would be standing on the highest platform. Then, the unthinkable began to happen; they all began to fall and suddenly the Russians were back in the game. It came down to Kerri Strug and all she had to do was her part on the vault, a comfortable routine she had performed countless times.

Her first landing fell short, and she heard her ankle snap as she fell backwards onto the ground. Limping off the mat nobody could calculate the score quickly enough to know whether or not she needed to use her last vault. Don't vault (she had unknowingly tore the tendons in her ankle) and risk losing gold, or vault and risk much more. She removed the ice bag from her foot, Bella helped her rise and escorted her to the runway. What happened next will still bring goose-bumps to any human. Now quit reading and watch... (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZRYiOa5IM8>)*

**Excerpt from ESPN.GO.COM*



Whether or not one believes Coach Karolyi's method was tough, fair or even the best, we do know it was effective, for they won gold. But, the point is he had a method for preparing his team to perform, and it didn't start at the Olympic games. In an interview with Harvard Business Review the great Karolyi said, "Success depends on how much you are willing to sacrifice, how much you are willing to alter your everyday life for a particular goal. If I demand that the kids be 100% dedicated, I have to be just as dedicated." Bella's method for developing world class gymnasts involved disciplined work every day, and not just by his athletes, but also his coaches. When asked about selecting coaches, here is how he replied, "When they apply for a job, most of the time I give them an opportunity. I give them very clear criteria, and I watch them like a hawk. There is a system and a syllabus that they have to follow. If they don't, follow it, that's their last day."

Moving from high performance athletic coaching to high performance sales coaching, most sales leaders equip their reps with a sales methodology that fits how their customers want to buy. Then, they educate and train how to execute the methodology. They track adherence to the methodology and provide their managers with data to guide sales skills improvement conversations, as well as more accurate pipeline and forecasting. When sales departments execute their sales methodology well, more gets sold.



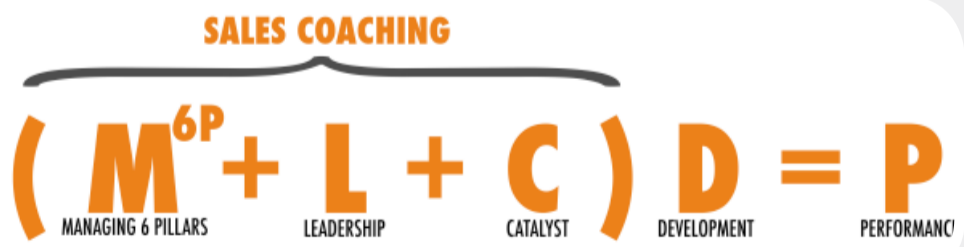
Executive sales leaders love having a sales methodology so they can more accurately predict revenue, have visibility into sales rep effectiveness and have insight into customers' buying patterns. A sales methodology also gives reps the confidence there will be more buyers and more money if they execute the methodology effectively.

If sales organizations can benefit greatly from having a clearly defined sales methodology for their reps, what about a methodology for sales managers? Like Bella, shouldn't they have a process that is proven to lead to a better outcome? Methodologies are not effective only for salespeople, they can benefit people at all levels. Indeed, methodologies are practiced in most every profession—medicine, athletics, manufacturing, professional services, etc. So, the answer is simple... YES. Sales coaches should have a coaching methodology that if trained, executed, tracked and improved upon will lead to more sales from their team.

An effective coaching methodology ensures a sales manager engages with a sales team in a way that leads to increased motivation to sell. Think about it... without a manager, sales people will still sell. So the question then becomes, how much more will reps sell as a result of the manager? This is ultimately the value a manager brings to a company. Implementing and utilizing the proper coaching methodology involves several strategic activities to be successful, but EcSell research shows it has a significant positive affect on a rep's motivation to sell. The key steps to implementation of an effective sales coaching model, in order, are as follows:

1) Measure manager's coaching acumen to create an understanding of current practices and behaviors:

Some time ago, the EcSell Institute realized the best way to measure coaching is to go to those being coached and ask the right questions. The questions we ask in our Through the Eyes of the Sales Rep survey have evolved, and will continue to do so as we learn more about how managers impact a rep's motivation to sell. Today the survey continues to follow the motivation themes mapped out in the **Sales Performance Equation** we detailed in the first e-book, the gist of which is we not only measure the frequency around key coaching activities, but also how well coaching is being done. An objective coaching baseline offers a sales leadership team several benefits - a) those who receive their coaching survey results realize they have strengths and opportunities for growth in their coaching acumen. b) Measuring creates a baseline to know if a manager is improving as a coach. - c) measuring anything is not beneficial and can have a negative impact if step #2 is not offered.



2) Educate and train managers how to become a high performance coach:

If a sales department believes managers who behave more like high performance coaches will cause their sales people to sell more, then there is an obligation to teach them how. There needs to be an understanding of how coaching impacts sales

“Methodologies are not effective only for salespeople, they can benefit people at all levels.”

More on the Sales Performance Equation can be found in this [white paper](#) which defines all the necessary management, leadership and C factor components you can employ.



results, research and the science of performance needs to be learned, and of course the high impact coaching activities need to be explained in detail. Sales managers need to know how to impact sales through better behaviors and quantity of coaching activities. Our research indicates that most sales managers (over 70%) don't know what to do or how often to do it regarding their work with the sales representative. This is not to say managers do nothing or that they are not busy, they just don't execute what most impacts motivation to sell.

3) Create a coaching execution plan with accountability partners:

Depending on what is read, most experts agree that what one learns is not retained or behaviors changed if reinforcement is not consistently applied within 30 days of the learning event. A plan of implementation should be created that promotes an evolution of coaching development as opposed to a revolution. New high impact coaching activities should be implemented each month with the support and involvement of the coach's coach, an outside partner or both. What we've witnessed at EcSell is that coaching activities not only need to be implemented over time, but coaching concepts need to be frequently reinforced to make the most impact. To teach them only once and expect needed change is a naïve development process.

4) Track execution of high performance coaching activities:

It wouldn't make sense to teach and train sales people how to sell without tracking whether or not it is being done. Without sales data, coaches don't know where to coach each rep and certainly can't see trends in sales rep performance. Likewise, it doesn't make sense to teach/train sales managers how to be a high performance coach without tracking compliance to high impact coaching activities. Similarly, without the knowledge of who is being coached, how often they are being coached along with other critical coaching metrics, executive sales leaders have no way of knowing how to help a coach coach. Plus, coaching that is tracked results in performance data that has never been seen before, but most importantly actionable improvements can be made that result in increased sales.

5) Measure effectiveness of the execution:

The final step is the understanding that just because coaching activities are occurring doesn't indicate they are being done well. As a result, objective coaching quality measurements must be taken as often as quarterly to assist in the development process. To achieve peak performance levels, sales teams need to know not just quantity of coaching, but quality of coaching. And, as we are seeing in our research, Coaching Quantity + Coaching Quality = Sales Quota.



“A plan of implementation should be created that promotes an evolution of coaching development as opposed to a revolution.”

Failure to follow through on all of the above and sales results will not be fully realized. Failure to do any of the above and sales leaders are negligent.



Chapter

5

The High Performance Sales Coaching Activities



“Baseball thinking is medieval. It is stuck in the dark ages. There is an epidemic failure within the game to understand what is truly happening. And, it leads people who run major league ball clubs to misjudge their players and mismanage their teams. They’re still asking the wrong questions. People who run baseball teams still think in terms of buying players. The goal shouldn’t be to buy players, the goal should be to buy wins. To buy wins, you buy runs.

You’re trying to replace Johnny Damon. The Red Sox look at Johnny Damon and they see a star worth \$7.5 million a year. When I look at Johnny Damon, I see an imperfect understanding of where runs come from. His batting average is ignorable. What matters is his on base percentage which in 2001 was .324. That’s 10 points lower than league average, and 17 points lower than Garcia’s. True, he stole some bases. But attempted steals in general have to succeed 70% of the time before they even start to contribute to run totals. In 2001 he cost you runs.

He’s got a good glove. He’s a decent lead-off hitter. He steals bases. But he’s not worth the \$7.5 million Boston is paying him. You’re lucky to have him off your payroll, it opens all kinds of interesting possibilities.”
Excerpt from the movie Moneyball

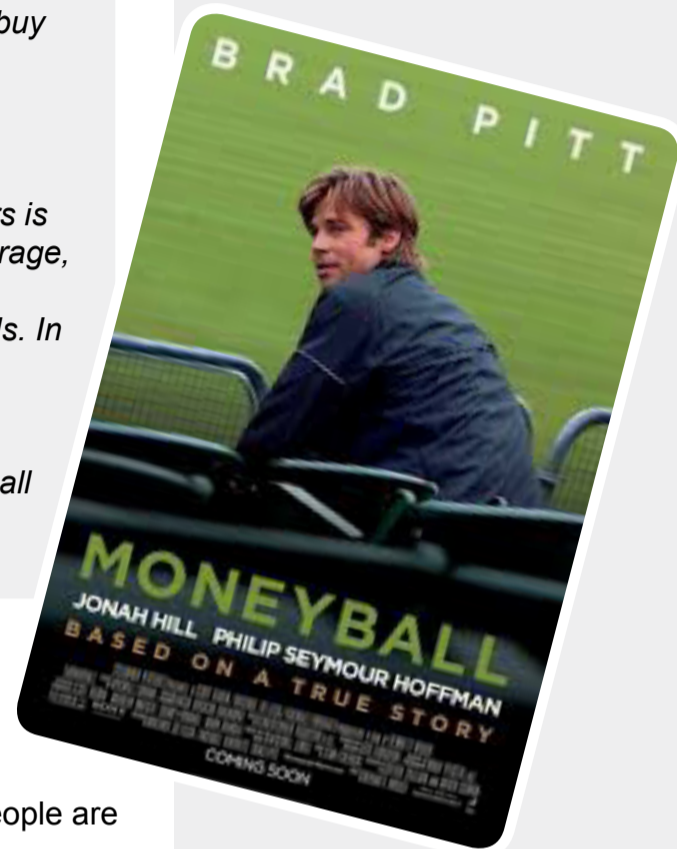
As alluded to earlier in this chapter, sales improvement thinking is medieval and sales leaders are looking at the wrong, or at best, incomplete data. If sales leaders truly wanted to understand why pipelines are increasing or decreasing, why some sales reps and sales teams perform at higher levels, they would stop looking at what sales people are doing and start studying the activities and behaviors of the manager. Specifically they would take a very critical look at the activities outlined in this chapter.

At EcSell Institute, our research has allowed us to establish a logical progression of sales coaching facts through the years such as:

- Nothing impacts the performance of a sales rep more than their manager.
- It is how well a manager behaves and acts like a “coach” that has the biggest impact on sales rep motivation.
- EcSell research shows there are three primary themes to sales coaching: management, leadership and the catalytic factor.
- There are five quantifiable, high performance coaching activities and tools that are associated with effectively executing against the three themes.

In the same way that an effectively implemented sales methodology yields more sales, when these five high performance coaching activities are done consistently and done well, it leads to increased sales team performance. These five activities are:

1. **One-to-one meetings:** Regularly scheduled, individual coaching meetings to proactively address business, personal and developmental needs.
2. **Team meetings:** Regularly scheduled team or group meetings to drive rep recognition, education, communication and motivation.
3. **Joint call plans:** Plans created by reps to communicate essential information to their sales leader about a joint sales call.
4. **Sales call evaluations:** Written evaluations completed by a sales leader and discussed with their rep to assess and improve sales skills.
5. **Career development plans:** Annual discussions to identify personal and professional goals, as well as development needs.



In the pages that follow, we will address each of these high performance coaching activities in detail, defining why they are critical to effective coaching, as well as how to execute them effectively with a sales team.

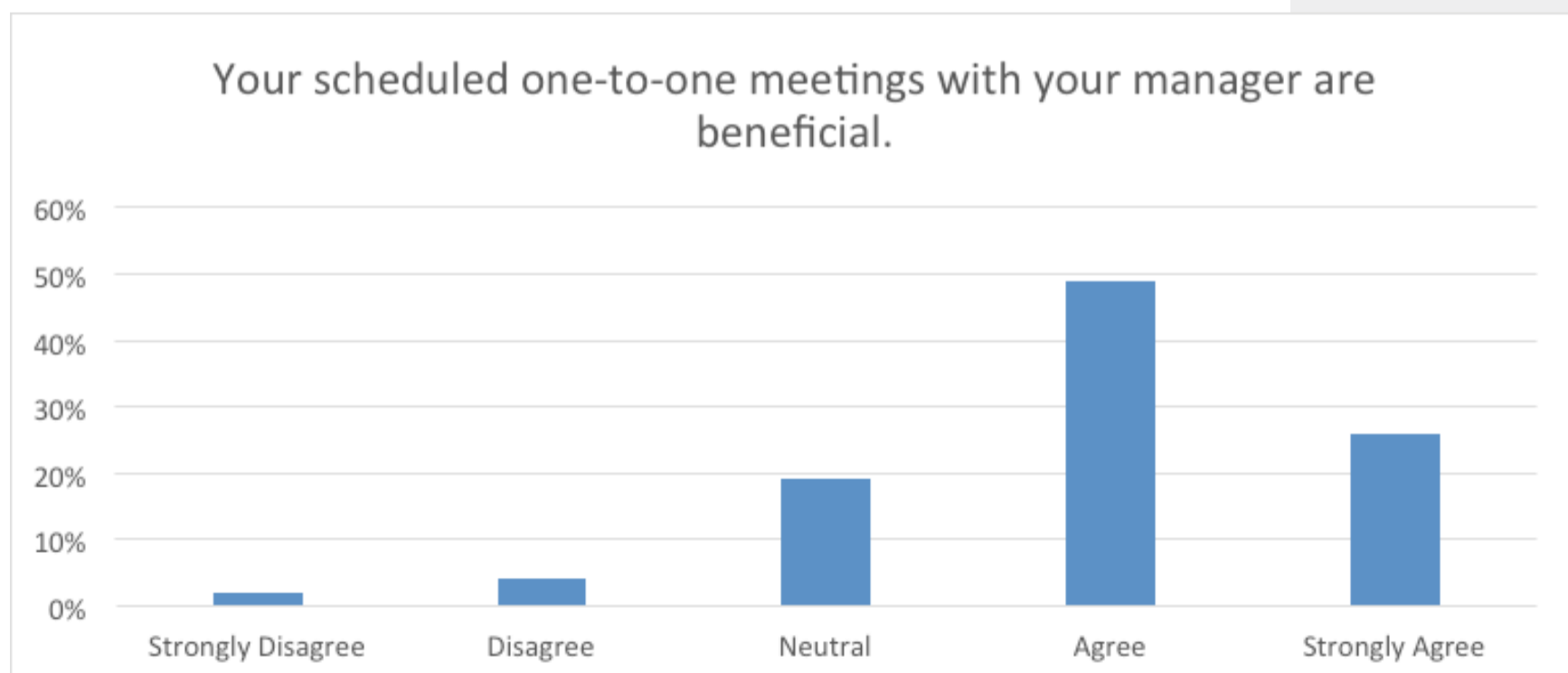
High Performance Coaching Best Practice #1

One-to-One Meetings

If you are like many sales managers, you have dozens of people vying for your time each day. You have a boss that needs an updated forecast from you. You have customers calling you to talk about a product issue. You have reps that need your help on an upcoming presentation. These are all important, urgent concerns that require your immediate attention. So in the midst of all this, something has got to give. And one of the easiest things to move off your calendar is your regular one-to-one meetings with your reps.

You may figure that you already talked to your reps numerous times this week so there's no harm in skipping the meeting. You may rationalize that you're traveling with them soon so you can make up for not connecting with them now. You may have even received an email from them saying that they're slammed and wondering if you guys can just talk next week. Sure, you think, no big deal. Well, you may want to reconsider because your scheduled one-to-one meetings with your reps are more important to them than either of you may have ever realized. According to research from EcSell Institute's Through the Eyes of the Rep survey that we have conducted with over 1,000 sales reps, there is a strong relationship between effective one-to-one meetings and increased rep motivation. Specifically, there is a statistically significant relationship between sales reps that "strongly agree" that their one-to-one meetings with the sales managers are beneficial and the sales reps that "strongly agree" their sales manager is effective at motivating them to greater sales performance. This strong relationship indicates that one-to-one meetings are a critical component of a manager's ability to motivate reps. However, only about 25% of sales reps view the value of their one-to-ones as highly.

"... there is a strong relationship between effective one-to-one meetings and increased rep motivation."



Furthermore, one-to-one meetings also have a strong impact on the reps' overall impression of their sales manager. Specifically, there is a statistically significant relationship between sales reps that "strongly agree" that their one-to-one meetings with the sales managers are beneficial and the sales reps that "strongly" agree their sales manager is an "excellent leader" and an "excellent coach." This relationship indicates that effective one-to-one meetings are one of the most critical activities in impacting overall management effectiveness as perceived by his or her reps.

Also, the importance of one-to-one meetings continues regardless of rep tenure. Indeed, effective one-to-one meetings are arguably even more important as reps become more seasoned. This is because coaching activities like helping reps build their product knowledge or selling skills isn't as necessary the longer the reps are in a role. But staying connected with them personally, discussing their progress against goals, and giving them an open forum to discuss needs, ideas and questions can help you stay more engaged with them.

In order to make the most of your one-to-one meeting times with all your reps, we encourage you to use a consistent format. You can make your one-to-ones much more efficient and still create a positive impact if you know what you want to accomplish. EcSell Institute has found that the following topics should be covered in a good one-to-one meeting:



- 1. Personal updates** – Letting your reps know you care about them as a person, not just a sales rep, is important to establishing trust with them. Take five minutes at the beginning of your one-to-ones to talk about what's going on in their lives. Listen to what they did this weekend. Hear about their family. Ask about their hobbies. Just get to know them better.
- 2. Activity/goal/pipeline updates** – Discuss the performance data you have. Look for trends with them. Talk about areas where they are doing well. Talk about what can be improved. Staying on top of the execution of activities drives accountability, as well as ensures that you are dealing with any performance issues as proactively as possible.
- 3. Customer/prospect updates** – Many managers and reps spend nearly their entire one-to-one on this topic. While that is too one-dimensional, it certainly is important to talk through issues and opportunities regarding current and potential customers. When talking about customer/prospect issues, your main purpose should be to ask questions to help your reps learn how to diagnose and solve these issues on their own.
- 4. Questions/where they need your help** – This last category is basically an open-ended discussion. Give your reps the opportunity to ask questions about anything that's been weighing on their mind. And be sure to ask them how you can help them in their work. Creating an open forum encourages them to feel comfortable discussing needs and issues with you and works to strengthen the trust and partnership between you.

In addition to using an effective format, it is also important to conduct one-to-one meetings consistently to receive the benefit from them. Many of our EcSell Institute members have found that the easiest way to ensure consistency of one-to-one meetings is to put them on calendars as a recurring event. This allows reps and their manager to plan around one-to-ones and, most importantly, not to let several weeks go by without putting a meeting on the calendar.

Topics to be covered in a good 1:1 meeting.

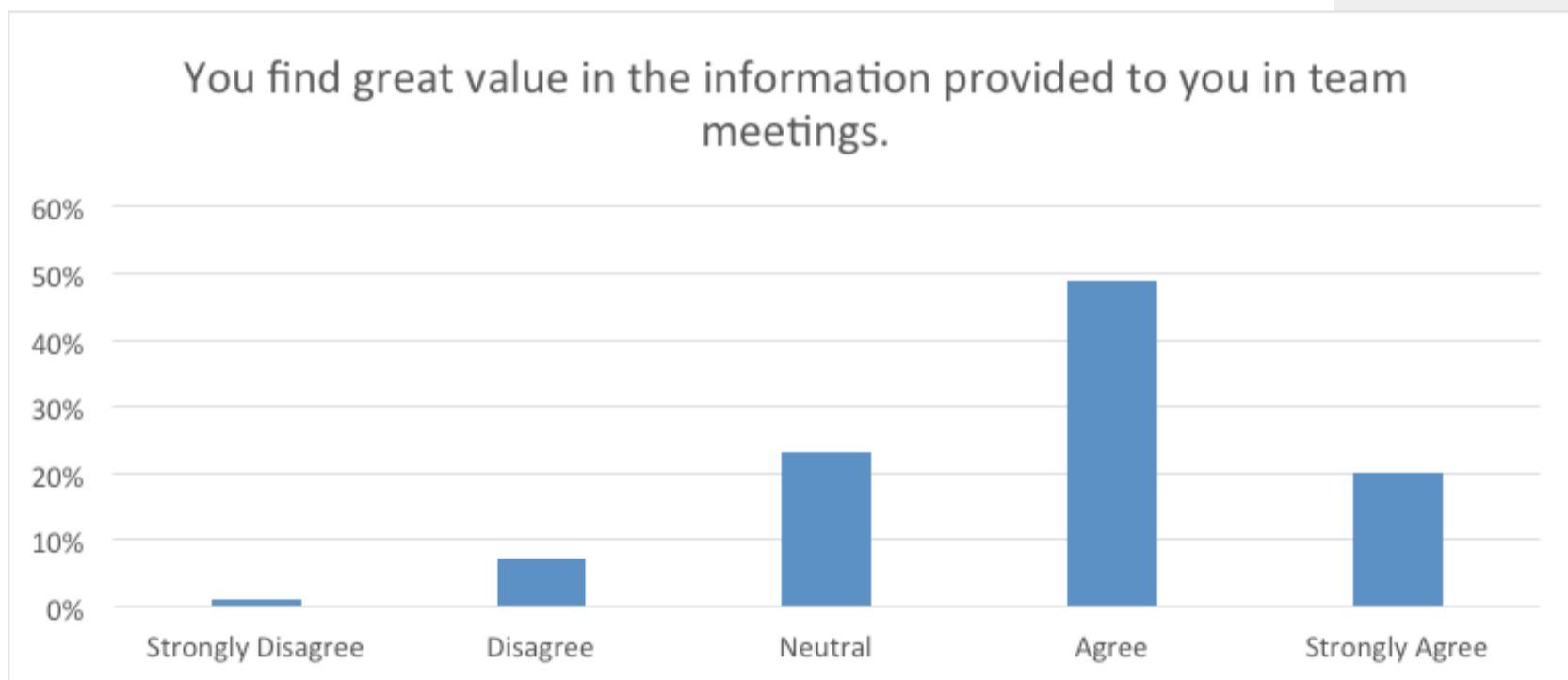
In conclusion, one-to-one meetings can be a highly effective activity that impacts rep motivation and their overall impression of their coaching relationship with you. By making some tweaks in how you conduct your one-to-one meetings, you can increase this effectiveness. Try using the above format with your reps in your upcoming one-to-one meetings and see if you are able to create a better dialogue that ultimately leads to better results.

High Performance Coaching Best Practice #2

Team Meetings

According to EcSell Institute research, reps that rate their managers highly in their ability to coach and help them improve their sales skills also report that their manager is effective at motivating them to sell more. This indicates a relationship between helping a rep improve their sales skills and increased motivation levels, which is why effective team meetings are so important. That is, team meetings provide a great venue for investing in the learning and development of a rep's skills, which in turn, increases their motivation to sell. However, only 20% of sales reps feel information from team meetings is as beneficial as it could be.

“... only 20% of sales reps feel information from team meetings is as beneficial as it could be.”



Too often team meetings are seen as just a communication vehicle to discuss sales numbers and share company information. They are usually led solely by the sales manager and rarely create much interaction from reps. All too often they involve one-way communication with a more formal presentation style. Further, there is little shared ownership among the team for facilitating the meeting or for sharing content. In this way, the sales manager really “owns” the effectiveness of the meeting, rather than the whole team. Finally, the meeting agenda also tends to be driven top-down, either by the sales manager or even from higher ups in the organization.



So what can be done different to make team meetings more engaging, developmental and helpful to increasing rep performance?

One of the first things that can be done to improve team meetings is to create more interaction. This doesn't mean just saving time for questions at the end of a powerpoint presentation. It means sharing information and driving discussion throughout the meeting. Another key idea is to share responsibility for meeting leadership and content. Managers should involve reps in leading different portions of the meeting and give them freedom to share information that is relevant to them. Along this same line, sales managers could also alternate between who creates an agenda for the meeting, with every other meeting involving topics identified by the reps rather than the sales manager. Finally, managers should make sure they set aside time each meeting for creating positive relationships among the team. This can be done through giving rep time to discuss ideas or issues, or simply to recognize each other's successes.



EcSell Institute suggests the following agenda for an effective team meeting.

1) Progress Toward Goals – Even though sales numbers shouldn't be the only focus of a team meeting, it is still important to dedicate some time to discussion of sales activities and outcomes. These regular updates help keep everybody on track. Plus, the public nature of the updates can inspire accountability and some friendly competition among sales reps. Managers don't need to get into too much detail, but rather simply present the data in a matter-of-fact way. This isn't a time for in-depth discussion about how to improve numbers, but more to update and motivate.

2) Best Practice Sharing – Team meetings present a perfect opportunity to share best practices among reps. Studies have shown that peer-driven information is often seen as more valuable and reliable than that driven by a manager. Managers can take advantage of this fact by making peer best practice sharing a consistent agenda item during team meetings. They can assign a rep to lead this section of the meeting and give them some freedom in the topic and teaching method they use to share their best practice. The team will enjoy having a different teaching style and content than what their manager would provide. In turn, this variety should make their learning more engaging.

3) Finding Solutions – Reps face numerous challenges and obstacles that make it more difficult for them to reach their sales goal, and team meetings provide a great opportunity to find solutions to these challenges. We suggest setting aside some time each meeting for "finding solutions." Reps should share challenges and obstacles during this time with the ground rule that they can only bring up an issue for which they want to find a solution. This isn't a time for complaining, but rather for sharing best practices and brainstorming solutions around problems.

4) Personal and Professional Development – This agenda item presents the sales manager with an opportunity to share information, education or resources to help their sales reps improve their abilities. Perhaps they want to have their team read and discuss an article. They could possibly share some sales stories to teach a particular best practice. Maybe they have their team take part in a role play exercise. Regardless of the content or how it's shared, it's an opportunity to help improve the reps' skills, motivation or performance, all of which can lead to improved performance.

"Studies have shown that peer-driven information is often seen as more valuable and reliable than that driven by a manager."



5) Recognition – According to EcSell Institute research, one of the most important things a manager can do is recognize and reward their employees. Indeed, sales reps continue to rate recognition as important regardless of their tenure in the role. Team meetings provide a perfect opportunity to provide this recognition on a consistent basis. This is why we recommend concluding a sales team meeting with recognition of sales activity or results. To make recognition most effective, find ways to personalize it. It's not the cost of the token that matters, it's the thought put into something that would be meaningful to a rep. When a sales manager can conclude a sales meeting with meaningful, personalized recognition, they not only reinforce the behavior they want to see from reps, but they also end the meeting on a positive, energizing note.

A final idea to make team meetings most effective is to have reps take turns taking notes during the meetings. Salespeople who travel may not be able to make every meeting, so it's important they have a way to catch up on any critical information. Also, having reps take turn with note taking will reinforce the point that the reps should be as invested in the follow-up from the team meeting as their sales manager.

In conclusion, team meetings present a great opportunity to build camaraderie, communication and learning on a sales team. However, they must be done well in order to have their desired impact. It's important to remember that HOW information is discussed and presented is as important as WHAT information is discussed and presented. If sales managers drive interaction, conversation and shared ideas during team meetings, their sales reps will likely start looking forward to them as a bright spot during their week.

High Performance Coaching Best Practice #3

Joint Sales Calls

Joint sales calls are a crucial coaching opportunity for a sales manager with their reps, as they allow a manager to observe their reps in a real selling scenario. This helps the feedback they provide reps on their sales skills be more insightful and effective. According to the EcSell Institute research, reps that report their sales manager provides effective feedback that helps them sell more are more likely to have an increased motivation to sell; therefore, doing joint sales calls well is not only critical to rep sales skill development, but perhaps even more importantly, it can significantly impact rep motivation.

Unfortunately, many joint sales calls are not as effective as they could be. The reason for this usually lies in poor planning. Indeed, one of the most common complaints made by reps in our Through the Eyes of a Rep survey is that their manager “takes over” when they ride along on a sales call. Of course most sales managers aren't taking over sales calls maliciously. Indeed, there may be moments when a manager's more active role is completely necessary to rescue a rep on a sales call that isn't going well. However, there are many times when this takeover of the call wouldn't have been necessary if a joint sales call plan, including clarity about the manager's role on the call, was in place. But most sales reps do not regularly create plans for joint calls with their sales manager.

“ . . . one of the most important things a manager can do is recognize and reward their employees.”



“Indeed, one of the most common complaints made by reps in our Through the Eyes of a Rep survey is that their manager “takes over” when they ride along on a sales call.”





Joint plans should provide the manager with the information they need to help the rep be more effective on a sales call and more importantly the role they should play to best support the rep. When done well, the joint sales call plan also helps model for the rep the type of pre-call planning they should be doing whenever they visit a customer, regardless of whether their manager is joining them. An effective joint call plan also creates a better experience for the customer, as they will not be in the awkward position of interacting with two people who are not on the same page.

For joint call plans to be most effective, they should be informative but brief. The joint call plan for a customer visit can typically be completed by a rep in about five to seven minutes. Among other items, the plan covers the following key items:

- 1. The role of the sales manager** – In most cases, the sales manager will play one of three roles on a joint sales call – (1) lead, (2) support or (3) observe. Any of these roles may be the right fit given the particular customer, sales rep or purpose of the sales call. What's important is to have clarity ahead of time to avoid frustrating the rep or confusing the customer.
- 2. Key logistical details** – A sales manager can play a much more effective role when they know what to expect. Knowing who they're meeting, their title, purpose of the meeting, key issues with the account and even the appropriate attire can help ensure the manager is prepared, knowledgeable and ready to contribute in a meaningful way.
- 3. Determine the customer's desired outcome** – As part of a joint call plan, it is important to define the desired outcome. The key aspect of doing this well is defining the desired outcome not only for the company, but more importantly for the customer. When reps and sales managers approach sales calls with the customers' needs, rather than their own needs, at top of mind, they are much more likely to reach an outcome that benefits both. As part of the joint call plan review, the sales manager and rep should discuss the questions, ideas and information that they will focus upon during the sales call to reach an outcome that helps the customer accomplish their goals.

A joint call plan covers these key items.

It is important that a sales rep creates a joint call at least a few days in advance of the manager joining them on the call. This provides an opportunity for the sales manager to review the call plans with the rep ahead of time. They can ask questions, provide suggestions and make revisions to the plan as needed. Also, a joint call plan should be provided for each individual, customer or prospect that the manager will be visiting with the rep.

By following these above tips to creating an effective joint sales call plan with their rep, a sales manager can ensure they are setting up their rep for a joint sales call that exceeds the expectation of all parties involved and most importantly, helps drive better sales results.

High Performance Coaching Best Practice #4

Sales Call Evaluations

Think back to when you were a sales rep. When did your manager typically spend the most time reviewing a sales call with you? If you were like most sales reps, feedback was more likely to come your way when something went wrong rather than when something went right. A sales call goes well and reps will get an “atta boy” and then everybody moves on to the next call. A sales call goes poorly (especially an important call) and reps get an earful on what they could’ve done better and need to do differently next time. Think of the connotation that this creates for feedback. Unfortunately, reps start to associate feedback with making mistakes. No wonder many reps are defensive when their manager coaches them.

By changing the consistency with which you deliver feedback, you can also change the perception of that feedback in the eyes of your rep. Debrief every sales call and feedback will start to become a normal part of the coaching process and will no longer have a negative connotation for them. It will simply be something that always happens, regardless of the outcome of the sales call. This will help feedback be received more positively, which in turn, means reps will spend more time listening to your ideas and suggestions, rather than being defensive. Winning play or losing play – if you review all of them, you will see that feedback starts to be perceived simply as a way to help them grow and improve their skills.

In addition to consistency in how often feedback is delivered, it is also important to have consistency in how it’s delivered. According to our rep surveys, one of reps’ biggest complaints about the feedback they receive from their managers is that it’s not in-depth or specific enough for them to take action on it. Indeed, most post-call feedback tends to be informal – often just done verbally in the car on the way back from a sales call. This type of informality can often lead to feedback that doesn’t address all key selling skills, that’s not very detailed and that doesn’t create buy-in with the reps around the techniques they need to improve. Indeed, only 18% of sales reps “strongly agree” that the feedback their manager provides helps them improve their sales skills.

“Indeed, only 18% of sales reps “strongly agree” that the feedback their manager provides helps them improve their sales skills.”



Using a consistent sales call evaluation form can alleviate many of these issues. An effective sales call evaluation form has three primary roles. First, it covers the key selling skills that a rep needs to exhibit to be successful. This includes such things as creating an effective call strategy, asking good needs analysis questions, overcoming objections and closing skills. While you want your evaluation form to be comprehensive, don't make it overly detailed. Evaluating 10-15 key skills is sufficient. Second, an effective call evaluation form should include a place for the sales manager to give numeric ratings of the reps' different selling skills. Assigning a number not only helps to ensure clarity between you and the rep on the strength or weakness of their different skills, but it also allows them to track their improvement over time. Third, an effective call evaluation should include a place for the manager to write down specific suggestions for further leveraging a strength or improving a weakness. Clear ideas and examples are necessary for a rep to be able to take action on the feedback you give them.

Finally, even though you should rate all key selling skills on your form, be selective in how many skills you review in-depth. Choose no more than three key selling skills upon which to give more detailed comments and recommendations. If you overload your sales reps with too many improvement ideas, they will be less effective at implementing the key changes you need them to make.

The final best practice for improving your feedback is to use questions to facilitate a more effective learning process. Asking powerful questions is likely one of the key techniques you teach your new sales reps and for good reason. Because questions help your reps learn customers' needs and business, as well as help customers self-diagnose their issues and how you can help solve them. A great questioning process can even create customer buy-in for a solution before the reps even suggest it. And in the same way that questions help your reps consult with customers more effectively, they also help you coach your team more effectively.

Now, obviously you have a different relationship with your reps than they do with their customers. But at the end of the day, they are people too. They want their opinion to matter. They don't like people to make assumptions about why they did what they did. They bristle at being criticized without context. And they want to learn rather than just being told what to do. This is why asking questions is just as important when coaching reps as it is when selling to customers.

One of the best opportunities to coach with questions is during your sales call evaluation. Many of us start a post-call coaching session with the most basic question of "how do you think the call went?" But after the rep gives their initial response, we quickly transition into giving our assessment of the call and what we think they could've done better.

Next time you are doing a post-call feedback, consider asking your rep a lot more questions such as the following:

- Why did you choose your strategy for the sales call?
- How were you hoping the customer would respond to your strategy?
- How well did you accomplish your goal?
- What could you have done differently to achieve your goal?
- Which aspects of the call do you want to replicate on your next call?

Asking open-ended questions like these encourages the rep to really consider the reasons behind their actions during the sales call. When you are able to get them talking about their ideas and beliefs underlying their actions, then you are better able to coach them. Because you will be dealing with the root cause of their behavior, whether it is positive or negative. Then you can reinforce the thinking and subsequent behavior that is on the right track or coach the thinking and subsequent behavior that is on the wrong track. You will also be helping them self-diagnose any issues, which is helpful in getting them to buy into the need to make a change. Above all, you will be showing how much you value their thinking and view them as a true partner in their success. This will create a much more positive and collaborative relationship between the two of you and ultimately help them in their development and performance.

"Asking powerful questions is likely one of the key techniques you teach your new sales reps and for good reason."



If you want a proven strategy for increasing your team's sales, our research indicates that you should learn how to deliver more effective feedback on reps' selling skills. Through making feedback a consistent practice, employing a thorough evaluation form and using questions to promote learning, you will be on your way to becoming a better sales coach, and ultimately, exceeding your sales target. And really, isn't that what being a sales leader is all about?

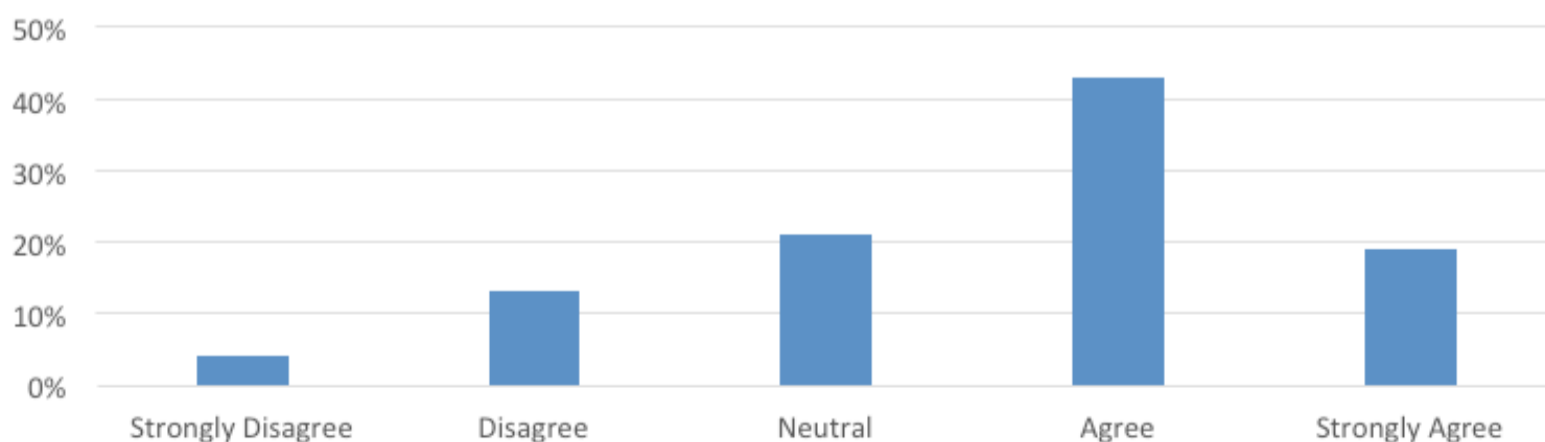
High Performance Coaching Best Practice #5

Career Development Plans

Effective career development requires an in-depth understanding of each of your sales reps – their needs, goals and how to help them achieve them. To do this, you can't just define a career path or development process that works for everyone. You have to learn and plan for each individual. This takes time, but is worth the effort because effective professional development is closely tied to increased rep motivation. Indeed, EcSell Institute research shows a strong correlation between how sales reps rate their manager as effective at motivating them to sell more and those who rate their manager as "very strong" at helping them with their career development.

This connection between career development and increased motivation is not surprising. This is because when you ask your reps to improve their skills and advance toward their career goals, they are likely to become more engaged in their work in general. And more engaged reps work harder and are more likely to perform at a high level. This tie between effective career development and increased rep motivation shows us just how important this coaching best practice truly is. Unfortunately, only a little over half of sales reps have an annual career discussion with their manager.

Your manager holds a documented career discussion with you at least annually.



As stated above, for career development to be truly effective, it has to be very individualized to the sales rep. This is why we believe that all career development efforts should begin with an in-depth conversation between a manager and rep about that rep's personal and professional needs and goals. For a career development conversation to be effective, it needs to include discussion in three areas:

- 1. Overall goals and needs** – First and foremost, a sales manager needs to have a deeper understanding of their sales rep as a person. What motivates them? How do they like to be recognized? What do they see as their greatest areas of strength? What personal goals do they have? When a rep shares this kind of information, they are sharing insights that can help their manager better understand them as a person and coach to their unique needs and abilities.
- 2. Current role goals and needs** – Asking about a rep's goals and needs in their current role is one of the most important aspects of a career development discussion. This is because most sales reps are unlikely to move into a management position, so talking about ways that they can continue to develop as a sales producer is essential to their growth. In this area, a manager will want to uncover their personal production goals, the support and motivation they need to reach those goals and how they can leverage their talents more effectively.
- 3. Potential future roles** – As stated above, most sales reps do not become managers. However, if moving into leadership or a different position is a rep's goal, it is important for their manager to know it. Then, the manager can help the rep determine if a different role is truly what fits their talents and, if so, how they can begin to prepare themselves for that role. Conversely, if a different role is not the right fit for the rep, the manager can help them understand what future direction fits them best.

Engaging, open-ended questions about the above areas can help create an effective dialogue between manager and rep. For the discussion to be most effective, we recommend that the manager not only shares the questions with the rep ahead of time, but also asks the rep to write down their responses to the questions (short sentences or bullet points are sufficient) and share them with the manager before the conversation. This ensures that reps have time to really think about their responses, as well as gives the manager time to consider those responses to determine how to best discuss them.

A career conversation is typically held just once a year, so managers should not be surprised if they last up to two hours. An important aspect of holding these discussions is getting to know reps on both a personal and professional level, so trying to squeeze them into a short time period would certainly send the wrong message. Managers should also not hesitate to ask additional or follow-up questions. Their pre-written questions are only intended to be a guide for the conversation.

After the career discussion is complete, the manager should ask the rep to take the key ideas that were discussed and use those ideas to create a career development plan. There is no certain format that the plan has to take, as each plan will be as unique as the skills, interests and goals as the rep completing it. The plan can be as simple as a few bullet points to outline the follow-up actions they are going to take with key steps and timelines outlined. Other reps may wish to create a more elaborate plan, which is fine as well, as the ultimate purpose of the written plan is simply for the rep and the manager to have something to reference to make sure progress is being made against the plan. On at least a quarterly basis, the rep and manager should revisit the plan to ensure necessary actions are being taken to drive the rep's development.

In summary, effective professional development is essential to helping reps perform better. Not only does it build their skills for their current role and build their abilities for future ones, but it is also essential to their motivation. The above recommended best practices can help ensure reps feel engaged, valued and developed to be successful in their career this year and beyond.

*“ . . . effective
professional
development is
essential to helping
reps perform better.”*



Chapter

6

Coaching Quantity

+

Coaching Quality

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QUOTA



It was 8:30 a.m. in south Florida and the humidity was already oppressive, but the young tennis players were moving with precision around the clay court as if programmed by the latest sports video game. They had been working since 7:00 a.m., Rene was barking encouragement, instruction, and though his strong accent made it challenging for me to understand, it was infinitely clear the students knew what he wanted.

There was little time for rest, as the renowned coach's intensity did not allow for complacency. The kids moved station to station, drill to drill with brief breaks to mop off sweat, make a quick change of shirt and guzzle water. Working hard is not an option. The players self-select in or out of his culture. If the kids are not playing with heart and soul, they are asked to sit or go home, and "home" means for good. The unwritten rule regarding an injury is if you are injured do not play, if you play you are not injured.

Rene Gomez has coached Andre Agassi, Jim Courier, Anna Kournikova, Monica Seles (and many more), so he knows what it takes to play tennis at the highest level. He doesn't talk to the kids about playing professionally. They only discuss and act against disciplines that take their game up one notch at a time, one day at a time. Once the next rung on the ladder is reached, coaches turn up the heat once again—more conditioning, more strokes, more mental toughness. For many of the teenagers here, according to Rene, the only difference between them and Maria Sharapova is toughness, both mental and physical.



Beyond Rene, the most important piece to this high performance puzzle are his assistant coaches. While the culture begins at the top, it is perpetuated by these assistants who also demand nothing less than extreme effort. Coaches are watched closely and how they interact and engage with the students is given serious consideration. Similar to players, coaches are just as quickly sent packing if they do not follow the coaching process.

It's 1:00 and the players are back on the courts playing games of keep away with a swimming pool toy. After 10 minutes of kids screaming as if participating in a summer block party, they are now back on the courts competing in competitive drills. If you win, you advance to the next court. If you lose, you go the other way. Most every aspect of their tennis game is worked on daily. There are approximately 20 players and each is called by their given name.

*When players are accepted into his program, Rene meets with them and discusses goals – what they wish to accomplish in the short term as well as their long term dreams. He gets commitments from them that they will work harder than they have ever worked. Their swings are videoed so progress can be measured and he goes out of his way to make connections with each player. **Rene and his coaches are keenly aware that quantity of coaching and quality of coaching impacts how far one is capable of progressing in their tennis game.***

Quantity versus quality...

What we've discovered is there is no "versus," there is only "and." When we review our data and study managers who are in the top 20% of performance to goal (performance to goal is defined as the sales goal the team is to achieve), versus those in the remaining 80% of performance to goal, what is endemic to the top 20% is they consistently score well in both coaching quantity AND coaching quality. While not overly surprising, it does support the following fact: high performing sales coaches consistently do more of the high performance coaching activities and they do them with significantly higher quality. The challenge then, that every sales leader of every sales team should overcome, is knowing how their sales managers are coaching (quality), with whom are they coaching and how often are they coaching (quantity).



Because of advances in technology, data is now available for sales leaders that illustrate the impact coaches have on sales. Sales manager effectiveness no longer has to be a guessing game and performance improvement for both sales rep and manager can be graphically detailed as in the real life examples below.

To understand the impact of coaching quantity and quality on a sales team's achievement of their quota, EcSell Institute looked at how top-performing sales managers coached differently. We hypothesized that the top 20% probably coached more often. We figured their coaching was probably better received by their team. But in order to prove this out, we had to study the difference in coaching behavior between the top 20% of sales managers (as measured by their performance to their sales goal) and all others. Over a nine-month period, we studied the sales coaching activity, behavior and results of 69 sales managers. These sales managers were from five different organizations, varied in both size and industry, and had an average sales team size of eight reps. What we found is a significant difference in the sales coaching between the best and the rest.

First, the top 20% of sales managers coach more frequently than their less successful counterparts. Each organization defined sales coaching activities for their managers to complete with their sales reps, such as one-to-one meetings, joint sales calls and career discussions. They also defined a frequency at which their sales managers should complete these activities and asked them to use EcSell Institute's One-Up Coaching Cloud for execution and tracking. At the end of the nine months, there was a marked difference in completion rates between the top 20% and remaining 80% of managers, with the top group completing 62% of their sales coaching activities at the desired frequency and the remaining group completing 48%. In total, the top 20% of sales managers completed 29% more sales coaching activities than the rest of the sales managers.

Second, top-performing sales managers also earned higher coaching quality marks from their sales reps. During the nine-month study period, the sales reps reporting to the 69 managers were asked 20 questions in a confidential survey about how well their managers were coaching them. The survey included questions about the quality of the managers' execution of their defined sales coaching activities, as well as about their coaching behavior more generally. The top 20% of sales managers received positive scores from their sales reps on 73% of the questions, while the remaining sales managers received positive scores on 62% of the questions. In summary, the best-performing managers received positive ratings 18% more often than lower-performing managers.

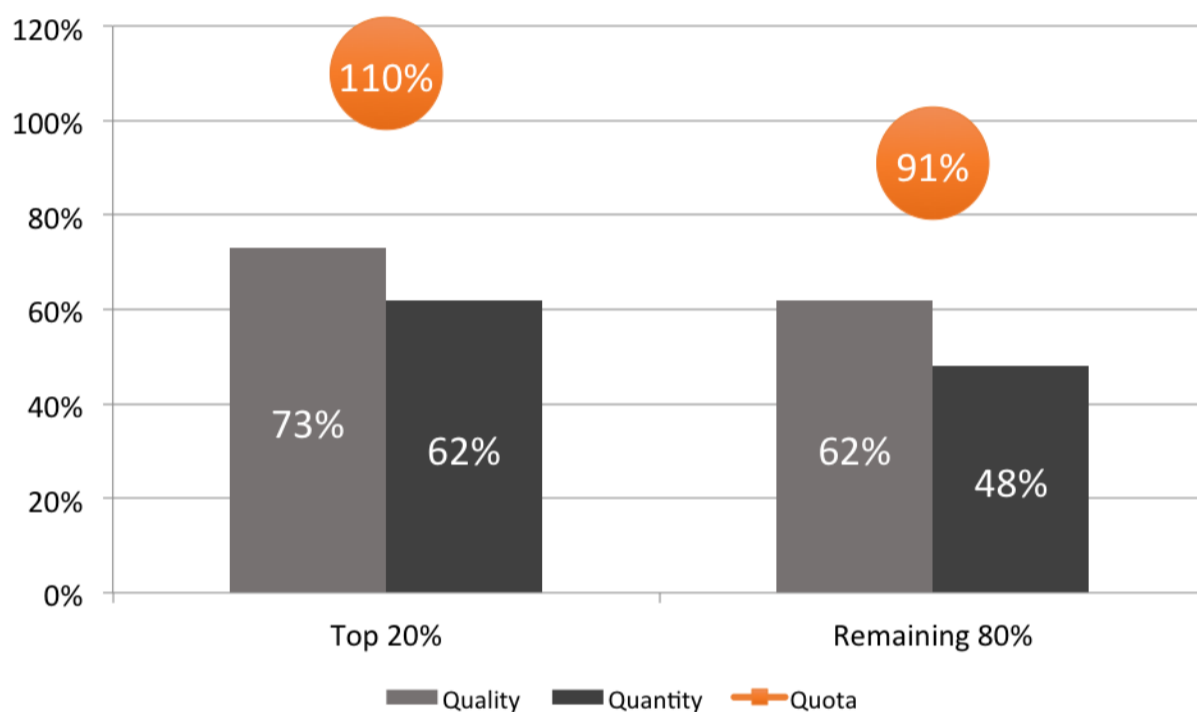
Most importantly, the difference in coaching quantity and coaching quality corresponded to a marked difference in the managers' percent to their sales goal. We focused on percent to sales goal because it is the most universal performance measure across all types of sales organizations. To identify the top 20%, we only considered managers' percent to their sales goal in comparison to other managers in the same organization. This was to control for sales organizations that tended to set extremely high or extremely low sales goals for their managers. Once we identified the top 20% of sales managers for each individual organization, we combined them into one group of top-performing sales managers. Then, we compared the sales results of these top sales managers to all others and found, on average, the best sales managers achieved 110% of their sales quota, while the remaining 80% of sales managers achieved 91% of their goal.

“ . . . the top 20% of sales managers coach more frequently than their less successful counterparts.”



Our final step was to compare manager performance across all areas, turning that data into a **Q3 Chart** (see below). In this chart, we compare the managers' **quality** score (the percent of positive scores on rep survey questions) and **quantity** score (the percent at which they completed coaching activities) to their **quota** (the percent to their sales goal). Ultimately, we see the difference is clear – higher quality and quantity scores correlate to higher percent to quota.

Q3 Chart



When you consider that the average sales manager in this study carried an annual sales goal of \$21,656,736, the difference between the top group being 110% to goal and the rest being 91% to goal is equal to about \$4,114,780 annually per manager.

Overall, it is evident that the top-performing sales managers coach their sales reps more often and more effectively than their lower-performing counterparts. And the difference between coaching quantity and quality corresponds to a difference in sales quota of more than \$4 million per manager on an annual basis. Simply stated, more coaching and better coaching means a 21% increase in sales.

The Close



THE CLOSE

It would have been easy to say “no” and I so wanted to utter those conversation stopping words. Cut off the dialogue and go back to the business at hand. “Focus Bill, don’t get side-tracked with non-revenue or non-client serving activities,” was what I muttered.

A little background: In addition to the obvious EcSell Institute responsibilities, I am a speaker for an organization called Vistage—a community of CEO’s and high level executives. The topic of how to coach and drive performance of teams is of obvious interest to their members which makes for great dialogue when I present. And, as a result of this engagement with Vistage I was asked by one of the Vistage chairs to consider becoming a member. The invitation was flattering considering the talented people I’ve met who are associated with Vistage. But, in spite of the ego boost, adding another item to my plate did not sound attractive.

Everyone needs a coach if they want to maximize their talents and grow exponentially. We need to be challenged, we need others to make us think about our impact, we have to get outside of our own worlds or we limit our teams from achieving great things. It would be hypocritical to preach those words and then not live them when the opportunity arose. The “no” I so badly wanted to say had to become a “yes.”

After just one meeting it is already obvious that my coach and my new team will be the change element I need (in EcSell terms, they are my catalytic factor). At work my focus is two-fold: helping our team maximize their talents, and helping our clients grow theirs. I look for my Vistage team to focus on helping ME grow personally, just as I commit to assisting my new teammates with the same.

During my first 1:1 coaching session my coach asked me a simple question—“What is your ‘why’?” I was so ready for this question! A couple years back our team at EcSell watched the Simon Sinek “Why” video together and it had a profound impact on our business. “No problem, our ‘why’ is ‘nothing impacts performance more than coaching,’ that statement guides and directs all we do at EcSell.” “Great, Bill, but I don’t want your company’s ‘why,’ I want to learn your personal ‘why.’ What guides and directs all YOU do? What do YOU always lead with? What is at the core of who YOU are?” Hmmm—now the question was not so easy.

The coaching session could, and perhaps should have ended at that moment, for I couldn’t get the question out of my brain. What the heck was my “why?” The meeting eventually ended and my coach filled in the action plan with a single item—write about your “why.”

While not totally self-aware (is anyone?), there are a few things I do know about myself. At my heart, I am a coach. I have what Dr. Peter Jensen refers to as a strong “developmental bias.” Whether on an athletic field or in a board room, I view people through a lens of what they could be. This is not to say they aren’t accepted at face value, but if you are on my team—prepare to be developed.

Was “coaching” the answer to this profound question? Nope. Though passionate about that word and its associated behaviors, it does not encompass all that motivates me to act. Then my mind moved beyond people to things like the outdoors and other living items. My eye caught a decorative tree that I’ve been nurturing for about five years when it hit me.

GROWTH!

That was it. I love to see things grow. I need to see things grow!

- A child learning how to take their first steps
- A first bike ride with no training wheels
- A young lady who never gives up on her dream
- A Labrador retriever who learns how to become a therapy dog
- A plant that I refuse to let die and blossoms into something beautiful
- A sales person develop into a great sales person
- An athlete who outworks all others



THE CLOSE

- *A spider who has a web outside my window that is much larger than he was a couple of weeks ago*
- *A clinically depressed young man who figures out how to live a fulfilling life*
- *A well-coached football team that starts to make progress*
- *A client who implements and witnesses first-hand the power of how coaching impacts results*
- *Anyone who grows into something they wish to become*

Growth is not about being the best, it is positively evolving at something, at everything. Growth happens as part of a journey where there is no destination. If growth is not occurring, change your job, change careers, change your hobbies, change how your brain functions.

At the age of 54, there are continued affirmations that there is still so much room to grow. And, knowing (and having to write about) my “why” has been an amazing growth discovery, an empowering growth journey.

Excerpt from a blog posted by Bill Eckstrom, Oct 2015

If you've gotten to this point in the book much has been digested regarding how to drive a team to sell more. Readers have learned that coaching is a critical role and not just a critical behavior, but also why managers need to behave more like a coach. We've shared the high pay-off coaching activities, and how when done with the proper quantity and quality, sales increase. In other words, if one is in a sales leadership role, it is in their power to positively impact their coaching acumen, and therefore revenue.

What now?

As the closing story describes, the easy route is to do nothing. In spite of what was read, it is more comfortable to keep focus on whatever you have been doing, it is predictable and what most who read this will likely do. It is human nature to stay in the mental state of order, a feeling of comfort.

Or, will you join the minority that elects to do something differently, those who choose a state of discomfort, also known as a state of complexity? As learned in our first book, it is this mental state of complexity, a state where inputs have been changed causing different outcomes, that can cause so much angst. However, it is only in this state of complexity where exponential growth occurs, and growth is not easy, for as the famous line goes, "...if it were easy, everyone would do it."

Bottom line: don't change the inputs and have the same outcome, or change the inputs and watch for an improved result. You are in charge. It is your team. What choice do you make?



About the Authors



Bill Eckstrom, President

beckstrom@ecsellinstitute.com

Bill Eckstrom is the President and founder of the EcSell Institute. Bill has spent his entire career in the sales profession, the first 10 in personal production and the balance in strategic sales leadership. He has walked in the shoes of most every sales coaching role, from being a front line sales manager up to SVP of Business Development for a publicly traded company. Bill is a renowned speaker on the topic of coaching and sales team performance, and has a passion on the topic that is unmatched.



Sarah Wirth, Vice President Client Services

swirth@ecsellinstitute.com

Sarah currently leads all client related services, education, content and research for the EcSell Institute. She spent her undergraduate years at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, graduated with a Juris Doctorate from the University of Michigan School of Law and is a member of the Nebraska State Bar. Electing to use her talents and skills in the business world rather than the legal one, she has spent 17 years in employee assessment, leadership coaching and customer service. She has coached and consulted with executives at numerous world-class organizations such as The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, The Estee Lauder Companies, The Cheesecake Factory, Mercedes-Benz and many more. Sarah is passionate about the science of performance and helping our clients maximize results through high performance coaching.



The EcSell Institute provides strategies for the continual improvement of sales management teams across the world by helping sales teams implement a sustainable coaching methodology that can be measured to test the consistency and quality of sales coaching effectiveness. Our clients are provided with a proven coaching process and discipline structure as well as the newest best practices, research and fact based information in order to grow sales on an on-going basis. All EcSell clients have one commonality: they want to improve how they lead, manage and coach sales teams in order to drive more revenue.

402.805.4238 WWW.ECSELLINSTITUTE.COM
3201 SOUTH 33RD STREET, LINCOLN, NE 68506



