

Mentor Group White Paper

Balancing the four elements of successful sales coaching

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The sales landscape is changing rapidly, with companies having to work harder to meet customers' growing demands, yet many companies are failing to keep pace, facing the prospect of falling behind the competition.

With less than 55% of sales teams hitting their targets, it's no wonder that seven out of eight businesses aren't achieving profitable growth. So what can companies do to avert this continuing sales and revenue crisis?

The answer lies in coaching. Despite such a challenging sales backdrop, research shows that 86% of companies with a clearly defined coaching process in place actually achieve their business goals. That's because those companies that have been successful in implementing coaching are reaping the benefits of more productive employees, lower staff turnover and stronger customer relationships.

So why aren't more organisations embracing the coaching culture as a way of driving business?

The answer is a lack of knowledge of how to integrate coaching effectively across the company. As a result, although coaching is one of the fastest growing areas of professional learning and development, very few businesses have managed to implement the discipline successfully. And this is particularly the case in sales-based environments.

The key to creating a successful sales coaching culture is taking a balanced approach above and below the line through the implementation of four critical drivers:



Below the line:

- business intelligence (IQ)
- coaching opportunity (XQ)

Above the line:

- emotional intelligence (EQ)
- coaching mindset (PQ)

Below the line

Integrating coaching successfully across a sales-driven business requires sales managers not only to have the necessary coaching skills and tools, but also the time and ability to apply them through a focused strategy. Below the line coaching refers to the basics needed for sales managers to become coaches, so that they can develop their teams to improve performance levels, staff retention and customer relationships.

To do this effectively, sales managers need two key drivers: business intelligence (IQ) and an opportunity to coach (XQ).

IQ

In most companies, customer relationship management systems and sales automation tools deliver IQ through the provision of reports and dashboards based on detailed sales and performance analysis. But the emergence of 'big data', where advances in technology mean that almost every known sales and performance statistic can be processed and analysed, has resulted in organisations drowning in information. Therefore, to use the data effectively, sales managers need to be able to cut through this clutter and identify the business-critical elements to focus on.

XQ

The next challenge is for sales managers to find the time and opportunity to coach their teams – XQ. Frequently, coaching is carried out reactively in response to particular event, which predominantly tends to be either a

crisis or an opportunity. However, a defining factor of successful coaching implementation is the development of a 'coaching cadence' through a proactive approach, where development is ongoing. The aim is to continually spread best practice and new learning across the team, so that each member is ready to deal with any problems and opportunities as and when they arrive, while staying on top of market trends and developing closer customer relationships.

The combination of IQ and XQ will have a positive effect on how sales managers coach their teams, but to maximise the impact they also need to acquire skills...

Above the line

To become a better coach, sales managers need to develop not only below the line, but also above the line through emotional intelligence (EQ) and a coaching mindset (PQ).

EQ

This is the ability to create useful and effective personal connections with others. Its importance has been recognised in business circles since Daniel Goleman's excellent book Emotional Intelligence was published in 1995. It is vital, as successful coaching must be built on a foundation of mutual trust and respect. Without EQ and the necessary empathy to understand the individual needs of your team, the traditional dictatorial culture takes over, one that is merely paying lip service to coaching.

While everyone has a natural level of EQ, and some more than others, it can be developed, and this should be a key component of a sales manager's coaching development and training.

Coaching models, like John Whitmore's GROW [link to? http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_89.html], are a great way to connect with the sales professional, and to use as a framework upon which to build EQ, as they give distinct steps that the sales manager can follow.

PQ

Developing the right coaching mindset is frequently one of the biggest challenges sales managers face when developing their coaching skills. A core principle of coaching is that it is non-directional and non-directive, as it promotes an 'inside-out' approach that allows the sales professional to develop their own answers. The net result is better decision-making, and more effective, longer-lasting decisions. Sales managers, however, by their nature tend to be directive and directional, which means that without proper training they lack the patience to go through a coaching programme. Looking at Whitmore's GROW (Goal, Reality, Options, Will) model, sales managers are usually adept at examining 'goals', and sharing the 'reality' of the situation. They struggle, however, with 'options' and 'will', as they like their

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team to do as they are told and believe their way is the best. Like EQ, PQ can be taught and developed, as it requires the sales manager to focus on their own positive behaviours in the first instance, removing the barriers that are holding them back.

Putting it all together

To develop a truly transformational coaching culture, organisations must ensure that all four elements of the coaching puzzle (IQ, XQ, EQ and PQ) are brought together in a balanced way, and that equal focus and attention is given to both below the line and above the line components.

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About Mentor

Founded in 1996, Mentor Group is now recognised as a leading global people and performance company that focuses on Sales Transformation and Organisational Leadership.

We create integrated coaching programmes that use no-nonsense tools and metrics, incorporate outstanding technology and are delivered by over 200 instructors and coaches considered to be the best in their field.

We enjoy long-standing relationships with our clients and work with over 70 active businesses, including FTSE100 companies, such as BP, British Standards Institution, Cisco, Computacenter, Dell, IGT, Microsoft, Skype, Amazon, Vodafone and Aon. Currently, we are operating programmes in over 57 countries worldwide in 20 different languages. Over 20 years, we have retained 90% of our clients through continually developing their core competencies.

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