

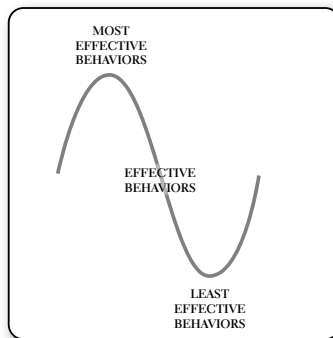
Ensuring Your Sales Coaching Gets Results

Salespeople sell more when they're coached effectively and regularly.

Results prove sales coaching increases sales, the *Harvard Business Review* has reported on it, and the Sales Executive Council documents it. Yet, you may be wondering how it works in your world.

Picture this: You have a new salesperson on your team. Joe's an average-performing sales guy, and you're about to have your first sales coaching session with him. He's just finished a sales interaction with a potential client, Susan. He's done some things well, and he's done some things that need improvement (like most salespeople).

Here's what the line graph of his sales behaviors with Susan looks like:



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The high point on Joe's sales behavior curve represents the most effective behaviors he engaged in with Susan. These include:

- Asking some great discovery questions.
- Providing relevant information at the ideal time in the conversation.
- Remembering to set the agenda for the next time they meet.

The low point represents the least effective behaviors Joe demonstrated with Susan. These involve:

- Forgetting to ask Susan which product solutions her company had tried unsuccessfully.
- Agreeing the product he suggested was expensive without illustrating its valuable ROI.
- Not sharing the success story of a client with a similar issue to Susan's company.

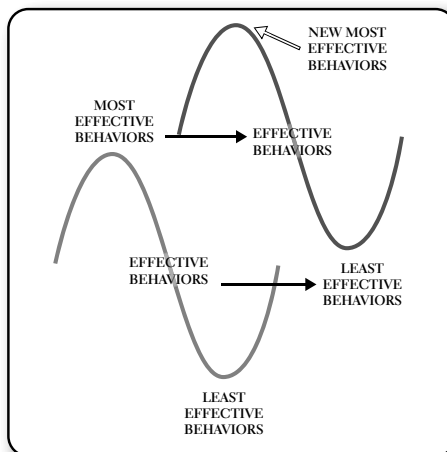
Despite Joe's efforts, Susan decided not to buy during their sales interaction.

The magic happens after you coach Joe and he sells to the next potential client with an issue similar to Susan's.

During the call with that next client, Maria, Joe does not repeat the ineffective behaviors from the low point of his interaction with Susan. His techniques that, on the graph, were labeled "Effective Behaviors" become his least effective behaviors, while the most effective behaviors from his interaction with Susan now represent his average performance. Overall, the standards of Joe's sales behaviors trend upward.

And here's the most exciting benefit of sales coaching with Joe: He engages in new, even more effective sales behaviors with Maria, so his most effective sales behaviors are stronger than they were previously. Therefore, Joe sells better and sooner in his sales conversation with Maria than he did with Susan. As proof of his success, Maria decides to buy during the interaction.

Here's what the improvement in Joe's sales behavior looks like:



The line graph to the left shows his sales interaction with Susan, and the line graph to the right is his interaction with Maria. Imagine the sales results Joe will get when you coach him on an ongoing basis. He'll incrementally continue to sell better and sooner. *Translation: He'll sell more.*

This kind of improvement is typical for salespeople who are coached regularly. I call this the Quantum Coaching Effect. If you maintain a coaching relationship with your team members, they'll continue to reach new sales heights. You'll find they'll let go of their least effective sales behaviors and engage in more and more effective ways to help potential clients with their buying decisions.

Sales coaching can be very rewarding for sales leaders and their team members when they experience this level of improvement. It starts with your coaching focus. It's not about you being the source of all answers; it's about coaching your team to improve sales behaviors. The following story illustrates this:

With an added glint in his eye from his blade's reflection, my brother finished off his third victim. And I was his accomplice. (*A melodramatic start, yes. Yet you'll find this holds an essential sales coaching lesson for you.*) You see my brother, Brad, was different. At the age of eleven, he was an entomologist (*translation: a very serious bug guy, into beetles, butterflies, moths, and spiders*).

Among the many creatures he nurtured, were monarch butterflies, which he bred in his bedroom. I remember watching in awe as dozens flew from one end of his room to the other. *Orange never looked so beautiful.*

Brad would get the monarch butterflies as caterpillars and let them mature. Every year, he and I would watch them go through their metamorphosis from caterpillar to butterfly.

When the caterpillars would reach their chrysalis stage, which is when they are in cocoons, we would patiently wait for the chrysalides to hatch. We'd watch the growing butterflies inside move around and struggle, and struggle, and struggle. Then finally each one would break free with beautiful wings and hang there before eventually flying off.

One year, Brad and I decided we wanted to help and make the metamorphosis easier on the butterflies, so when the next butterfly started to struggle to emerge from its chrysalis, Brad took out his X-Acto knife and very carefully cut open the side of the cocoon.

We waited and watched.

No struggle. Yes!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

We shared the kind of smile only co-conspirators can understand. I felt like a superhero in the world of nature. We had single-handedly saved the butterfly. I was so proud that I wasn't prepared for what happened next.

The butterfly fell out of the chrysalis with crumpled wings. It sat there and sat there, and sat there. And then, *flop*, it died.

I hate to admit this, but did it three times before we figured out that the butterflies' deaths had something to do with us. Brad went to the books, and discovered

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this: The butterflies' struggle gives their wings the strength to fly, and when we took away their struggle, they couldn't fly and they died. So much for being the heroes of nature.

How This Relates to Sales Coaching

Just like Brad and I enjoyed watching the butterflies mature and fly, you probably have wanted your sales team to fly; and just like we wanted to help and make it easier for the butterflies, you probably have wanted to help and make things easier for your team. Just like we thought it was better for the butterflies not to struggle, you may have thought it was better for your team members not to struggle. Just like we had good intentions when we cut open the butterflies' chrysalides with an X-Acto knife, you probably have good intentions when you give your team members all the answers because you thought you were making it easier for them. Just like we learned that taking away the struggle for the butterflies kills them, you might have discovered that telling your team members the answers doesn't necessarily improve their thinking or their sales skills.

What No Struggle Means

For the butterflies, no struggle means no strong wings, which translates into no flying. For your team, no struggle means no new neurological connections, which means the same old thinking, which translates into no flying and the same old sales results. *Not good.* Each time you tell your team members what to do, recognize you're just like Brad and me. You're killing your team members' abilities to think and sell better.

The OSF Cycle

As you've probably already discovered, it's easy not to sales coach. It's far easier to fall for the struggle and resort to providing answers. If you fall for their struggle, you create the OSF cycle. What's the OSF cycle? It's the *Oh-So-Familiar* cycle of:

- A problem arises.
- Your team comes to you for the answer.
- You give them the answer.

And next time they have a problem, they come back to you for the answer and you give them the answers. Then you are officially trapped in the OSF cycle.

Consequences of the OSF Cycle

If you get caught in the OSF cycle, your team members' thinking and sales skills don't usually improve. They become dependent on you, taking up more of your time than you would like, and they continue to get the same sales results. *Not very productive for either of you.*

Transforming the OSF Cycle

Avoiding the OSF cycle positively influences your team members' thinking and sales skills. They take up less of your time in the long run. They become more self-reliant. *They get better sales results.*

Your role as their sales coach is to help your team members make new neurological connections so their thinking is stronger and, consequently, they yield better sales results.

Sales coaching is about helping your team make new neurological connections.

Academic research indicates that struggle is essential for improved performance. I won't bore you with citing the details, but suffice it to say, it's similar to a light switch. You don't need to know why electricity in the light switch works. You just use it *because* it works. The same holds true for the use of struggle in sales coaching. You don't need to know *why* struggle works; integrate it into your sales coaching *because* it works.

Struggle is essential for improved sales results.

Telling Them What to Do

Does this mean you never tell your team members answers? No. I'm not talking about leaving your team members out to dry and never giving them a helpful piece of information. There are times when it is appropriate to share and provide guidance. We'll touch more on this shortly.

I'm talking about helping your team members develop their mental strength (as the butterflies developed their physical strength) so they can fly with the best of them—and surpass their sales targets.

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When you hear, see, or feel someone on your team struggling, don't fall for it. No matter how rushed they may seem, no matter how long they are taking, and no matter how poorly they are doing. Instead, here's the secret: Focus on asking questions! This will instantly put you in an ideal position for sales coaching.

The goal is to ask enough questions to give your team members a chance to make more neurological connections and you a chance to determine—of all the things in your sales coaching toolbox—what will be most helpful for you to share (or not share) with your team members.

Effective Sales Coaching Looks Like This

The most effective sales coaching is about listening to your team members first. Providing information for them is a distant second. For many sales leaders, this may seem counterintuitive, but like the light switch, it works.

Just like the most effective way for your team members to sell more is to listen to prospects to determine what from their toolbox is most helpful for their prospects. The most effective way for you to sales coach is to listen to your team members while they process their sales thoughts and develop more effective approaches to use next time they're in a similar sales situation. You share additional information only when appropriate.

To help you understand what this means to the allocation of your sales coaching time, mentally divide your sales coaching time into percentages.

Your behaviors in a typical sales coaching session would be:

- Demonstrating listening: 70 percent.
- Asking questions: 20 percent.
- Providing relevant information: 10 percent.

Demonstrating you're listening (driven with your sales coaching questions) is your first and primary focus during your sales coaching conversations. You'll find your team members will often come to a sales solution that is an improvement over what they chose to do during the sales conversation. This is why providing information can sometimes be optional. They may have just needed the space to find the more effective solution rather than have you be the supplier of the answer.

While you're listening to your team members during sales coaching, you may also discover they knew exactly what to do, but they simply didn't do it. If this is true of your team members, this is another example of how your team members don't necessarily need additional information. Instead just ask them to walk you through their plan of action. We'll talk more about this later.

Think of supplying answers to your team as an optional part of your sales conversations, and instead put your focus on getting your team members to process

their sales thinking, selecting more effective sales approaches, and committing to what they are going to do differently. Only if you find a gap in their knowledge, do you share relevant information.

Put yourself in the position to be listening during 70 percent of your sales coaching conversations.

Another way to look at the allocation of your sales coaching time is from your team members' perspective. During a typical sales coaching session, your team members' behaviors should be:

- Talking and processing ideas-70 percent. (This is when you are listening.)
- Listening: 30 percent. (This is when you are asking questions and sharing information.)

When you focus on your three sales coaching behaviors (demonstrating listening, asking questions, and providing relevant information only when appropriate), you help your team members to make stronger neurological connections between their sales ideas, which improves their sales thinking. This puts them in the position to learn more from their experience and, in turn, change and improve their sales behaviors and sell more effectively.

You Probably Do This More Poorly Than You Think

Almost everyone I've worked with thinks they are better listeners than they actually are. It really doesn't matter how good a listener you *think* you are. The reality is, when it comes to measuring your listening, your opinion doesn't matter. Listening is really measured by *the person you are listening to*.

The most important element may not be the skill of listening but the *feeling* of listening. The measure of your success as a listener is based on how much the person *feels* you are listening. To help you become a better listener, let's not review techniques to improve your listening skills, but instead, let's get really practical with assessing and developing your listening, with an emphasis on how your listeners *feel* about your listening.

Where to Start

To assess your current level of listening, get feedback from your family, friends, peers, and team members. Ask them to rank your listening on a scale of 1 to 10,

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where 1 is a terrible listener and 10 is an outstanding listener. This will give you a baseline to measure the improvement of your listening (and give you a reality check).

Then, get live, in-the-moment critique from these same people, so you get immediate feedback. The quicker you get the feedback, the quicker you can improve your listening. As you know, it's all about the listening you demonstrate (as opposed to your listening potential).

What Your Live Feedback Could Look Like

Your live, in-the-moment listening feedback can be a simple hand gesture. Many of the leaders I work with choose a tug of the ear or a touch of the cheek. When your chosen individuals feel you're not listening as well as you could, they will raise their hand and tug their ear or touch their cheek. This response could be triggered if, for example, they notice your response indicates you didn't hear the details accurately, your words interrupt others, or your comments don't naturally fit the conversation.

This way, you get immediate feedback so you can quickly adjust your listening appropriately. And *presto*, you're on your way to listening even better (getting closer to a coveted 10 ranking).

Why Is Listening So Important?

One of the complaints I hear from many sales leaders is they wish their team members would let them know more of what is really going on, so they can be more helpful. Well, guess what? Your team members will tell you more of what is going on if they trust you. How do I know? I have surveyed hundreds of team members and my research indicates that trust is a major component of performance improvement. Yet, what is trust? And what difference can it make to your team's performance?

Here's what I've discovered: If team members trust their leader, they will share more, provide more feedback, participate more, treat clients better, and so on.

Trust building is essential to sales coaching.

This begs the question: How do leaders develop trust? My research indicates the number-one behavior leaders can engage in to earn the trust of their team members is to listen to them. Out of more than 52 specific trust-building behaviors, listening

is ranked most important. If you would like to know which specific trust behaviors will earn your team members' trust, go to www.CoachingandSalesInstitute.com to arrange to have your team take the CSI Trust Survey.

Listening to improve performance is a simple concept—and as a bonus, it easily fits your budget. Listening more effectively to your team members encourages them to share with you what is really happening and, it bears repeating, it helps them treat clients better.

What's the Lubricant?

The key to transforming behavior is your ability to ask meaningful sales coaching questions to position you to listen more effectively. Your questions are the lubricant to get the listening going between you and your team members. Without your sales coaching questions, it's virtually impossible to keep your team members talking and sharing what is going on for them.

In some ways, you can liken the importance of sales coaching questions to the importance of sales questions. Imagine if your team members didn't ask sales questions. How well would they be able to sell? They wouldn't know their clients' needs to ensure that what they would say is relevant.

Imagine if you didn't ask sales coaching questions. How would you be able to sales coach effectively? Without knowing your team members' needs, you can't ensure that what you say is relevant. *You get the picture.*

In each chapter of this book, you receive sample sales coaching questions to assist you.

Then Comes . . . What Do You Say?

After you've demonstrated your great listening (peppered with your sales coaching questions), it is time to determine if and what information your team may need. *Why if?* As I mentioned earlier, you may find by simply asking your sales coaching questions, your team members become aware of a more effective solution, and don't need any additional information.

Before we move on to supplying information for your team members, I would be remiss in my duties if we didn't talk a bit about the timing for providing information in your sales coaching conversations. I'd like to caution you: Providing what you *think* is helpful information too early in your sales coaching process is like salespeople telling clients something about a product before asking any or enough questions. As you know, this can be a recipe for a lost sale. The same holds true for sales coaching. You want to ask enough questions to get your team

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members thinking more deeply and to ensure that the information you are about to share is relevant to their needs.

If you've asked enough questions and you know your team members need some information, your role is to make sure it fits their current sales needs. To help them sell more effectively and profitably, provide the information in a coach-like fashion.

How You Do That

Ensure the information is relevant. If you find yourself doubting the relevance of the information you are about to provide, you need to ask more questions. And when you are sure your team member needs some information, ask. You do this to check that what you are about to share is of interest to them.

Delivering the information in a coach-like manner may sound like, "Joe worked out a system for that. Would you be interested in what he did?" or, "What product manual do you think we would find that information in? Shall we take a look?"

By checking their interest level for the information, you know with certainty whether it's relevant to their current needs. At the same time, you increase their engagement in discussing how the information can help them sell more effectively.

When you provide information, either give them time to process it or help them plan what they are going to do with it. This is another part of your coach-like strategy when providing information. Don't give them information without the opportunity to utilize it. As you know, just because you tell them something doesn't mean they know how to use it.

Just because you said it, doesn't mean they can use it.

Coaching your team members to practice using new information in faux sales conversations ensures they can apply the information with clients. It may mean asking them to walk you through a product demo. It may mean asking them to read aloud the new product specs step by step, explaining why this or that is important to the client. Or, it may mean you role-play the conversation they are about to have with a client.

Something for You

Each chapter of this book includes an exercise for your team members. These exercises will help prevent your team from committing sales mistakes. However, this chapter's exercise is for you. It will help you determine which sales mistakes your team has committed and where to start in the book.

Every team makes sales mistakes. The question is: Which ones are your team members committing, and how quickly can you help identify and prevent them from occurring so your team can sell more?

Start with reading over the following sales mistakes to see if any of them seem familiar to you.

1. Not being clear who's buying
2. Forgetting why people buy
3. Being self-focused
4. Telling mistruths
5. Being ill-prepared
6. Taking too much of the client's time
7. Sharing what's not relevant
8. Missing prospects' buying cues
9. Acting like a traditional salesperson
10. Treating clients as enemies

Do you recognize any of your team members' sales mistakes? If not, it doesn't mean the sales mistakes are not being committed by your team. It may mean you're like most sales leaders who don't know which mistakes are being committed by which team members.

To help identify what is happening on your team, use the Sales Forensic Evidence Audit, which focuses on the symptoms of the sales mistakes. You may recognize the symptoms more readily than the sales mistakes.

Circle all the answers that apply for you. Then go back over the ones you selected and prioritize where you will begin. Beside each statement in parentheses are the chapter numbers to best assist you.

What do you need to increase each of your team members' sales?

Circle all that apply.

1. Get clients to return/take more of my team members' calls. (2, 4, 7)
2. Reduce the length of my team members' sales cycles. (2, 6)

(continued)

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3. Get clients moving more quickly through my team members' **sales funnels**. (2, 7)
4. Increase my team members' **close ratios**. (2, 6)
5. Reduce my team members' **unprofitable busyness**. (2, 9)
6. Increase the sales results from my team members' **sales activities**. (2, 9)
7. Increase the amount of **repeat business** my team members earn. (3, 6, 8, 11)
8. Reduce the number of **price objections** my team members get. (3)
9. Increase my team members' **quote to sales ratios**. (3)
10. Increase my team members' **conversion of prospects to clients**. (2, 4, 5, 6, 10)
11. Increase the number of **referrals** my team members earn. (3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11)
12. Reduce the number of client **complaints on the Internet**. (5, 11)
13. Reduce the number of client **complaints the company gets**. (5)
14. Help my team members **sell more**. (3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10)
15. Increase the effectiveness of my team members' **prospecting** efforts. (6, 10)
16. Increase the number of **sales appointments** my team members book. (7, 10)
17. Increase the number of **follow-up appointments** my team members receive. (7, 11)
18. Reduce the **length of time** it takes my team members to close. (7, 8)
19. Increase my team members' **long-term business**. (8, 10, 11)
20. Increase the results my team members get from **referrals**. (11)

As you read this book, think of your team members and which ones are committing which sales mistakes.

Enjoy your venture into sales coaching. And, as you know, the goal is not to shame guilty salespeople, but rather to prevent sales mistakes and rehabilitate perpetrators on your team. Ultimately, your team members will sell more than they did before you engaged in regular sales coaching.

Action Items from This Chapter

1. Embrace your team members' struggle.
2. Avoid the OSF cycle.
3. Work on the percentages in your sales coaching.
4. Improve your demonstration of your listening.
5. Leverage your sales coaching questions.
6. Get ongoing, live in-the-moment feedback on your listening.
7. Work on the timing of when you share information.
8. Provide information in a coach-like fashion.
9. Get your team using information.
10. Determine which sales mistakes are being committed by your team.

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