

# Coaching to Accelerate Sales: Busting Common Myths

By Harriet Butler

Why are you not devoting more time and resources to coaching your team?

Three pressing questions keep many life sciences sales managers up at night: How to best leverage your sales team's talents and skills to hit important sales goals? How do you keep the whole team – including top performers – engaged and focused vs. drifting on auto-pilot? And how do you motivate top performers to step into next-generation leadership opportunities?

Coaching that reinforces your sales process provides the most significant opportunity to address those questions. That's not news for most sales managers and yet the question for many trainers is: Why are you not devoting more time and resources to coaching?

According to *CSO Insights*, organizations with a sales process that involves coaching have a greater likelihood of achieving their sales quotas. And yet when I ask sales managers if they value coaching, most typically say they do but they don't prioritize or practice it.

In fact, though many organizations value coaching as a key component of sales management, they grapple with a common challenge:

How to get managers to make the shift from managing to coaching? And more specifically: How to train managers how to coach to the attitudes and beliefs that influence sales success?

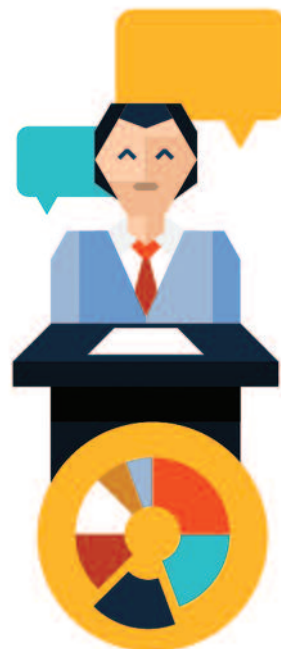
The three top reasons why coaching is so critical to your sales team's success are: You get stronger results; you retain top performers; and managers will be more satisfied.

**Stronger results:** Coaching's impact on results has been well-documented for years. One study from Bersin by Deloitte showed that organizations where leaders coached employees "very frequently" had 21 percent stronger business results. What's more, organizations with "excellent" cultural support for coaching had 13 percent stronger business results and 39 percent stronger employee results.

**Better retention:** Here again, the data makes a compelling case. According to research by Zenger Folkman, more than 60 percent of employees who report to managers who don't coach well are considering leaving their jobs. That compares to 22 percent of people who report to great manager coaches.

**Manager satisfaction:** Coaching is not just great for the person being coached. Most manager coaches will tell you that coaching improves their own performance, by bringing more dimension and meaning to their jobs.

There's no doubt coaching makes a difference – and it's an awesome responsibility. Why don't more managers coach their teams more consistently – or at all?



## SELLING SKILLS

I believe it's because coaching is clouded by myths – what it is, what it isn't and how it benefits an organization.

Busting the most common myths about coaching for sales teams:

1. **Coaching and managing are the same thing:** Simply put: They're not. Coaching helps sales leaders go from "managing people" to developing their highest potential. As we know, sales management is focused largely on planning and budgeting; organizing and staffing; motivating performance and problem solving. Coaching is different and involves a proficiency in asking questions and listening; in providing constructive feedback; in developing the whole person beyond just sales skills (including values, attitudes, and beliefs); and in helping people identify and reach their goals.
2. **Coaching is too difficult to measure:** Actually, coaching's impact on performance is not lost on companies with active coaching

cultures. The current debate about the value of performance reviews points a way here. According to FastCompany.com, managers who coach report a direct impact on team performance – including many with direct reports who are 24 times more likely to achieve their weekly goals. What's more, great manager coaches help people set and achieve goals beyond their comfort zones – which increases performance and helps individuals have more meaning in their job.

3. **Coaching takes too much time:** Coaching is not about setting aside huge blocks of time. In fact, in every organization – including yours – there are thousands of coaching moments every week.

In fact, think of two types of coaching opportunities: Coaching moments and more structured and planned coaching sessions.

Coaching moments are just-in-time coaching that can be anything from a follow up conversation to a fresh customer interaction, to a

response to an email or phone conversation. This is where the 1-2-3 of coaching is critical: Ask, listen, coach. When managers ask the right questions and listen intently, the coaching moments surface naturally and in a timely manner.

In contrast, planned coaching sessions should be scheduled at least once a quarter to develop a robust coaching culture and to embed coaching as a critical part of the organization's DNA.

A final thought: It's critical to remember that coaching does not happen in a vacuum. It's not a stand-alone exercise or a separate step. Coaching will strengthen your existing sales process, develop and engage your team members, and motivate your top performers. ■



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