



SALES COACHING

Integrity Solutions Research Brief

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Coaching is one of the hottest topics in business today, and for good reason. Many organizations have come to learn that it's critical for building skills and capacity. In fact, coaching is often cited as one of the top levers at hand for improving performance and driving growth. What's more, coaching is an important tool for developing excellence with sales teams.

So, why is coaching so often ignored, practiced unevenly, misunderstood or poorly executed?

Here's what we know: Despite high levels of awareness that they should be doing it, the vast majority of sales managers don't coach—or don't

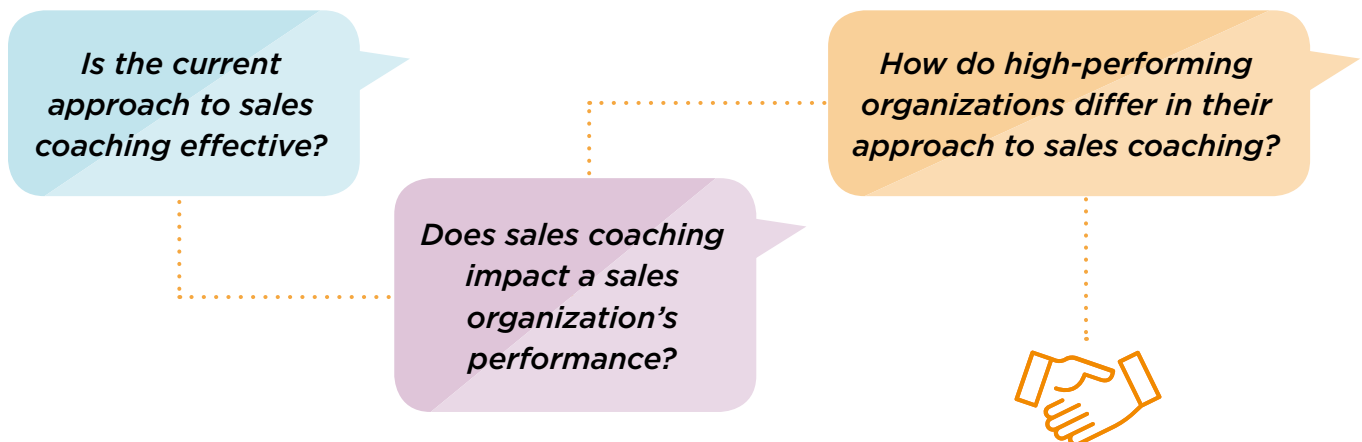
do it well. Managers today spend most of their time managing processes, not developing their people. Forecasts, spreadsheets, CRM reports and territory reviews can find a way to dominate their calendars. By contrast, those who do coach, and especially managers who are effective at it and coach consistently, see measurable performance increases with their teams.

However, there's a critical paradox around coaching: It boosts performance, many sales leaders know that it's important—and yet, despite this awareness, many still don't place a priority on coaching.

Why is that?

Integrity Solutions partnered with the Sales Management Association in a survey of over 200 sales leaders at 193 organizations to learn what lies at the heart of this dilemma.

Our research looks to answer these important questions:



This research brief explores those questions and specifically provides:

- **Details** on how coaching makes a measurable difference in performance
- **Insights** into why many sales leaders don't coach their teams
- **A quick guide** to assessing your organization's coaching proficiency
- **Specific steps** for building a robust coaching culture that drives performance

What do we mean by coaching, and how do we define it?

Effective coaching is, at its heart, about building and developing people so that they are able to realize more of their potential, both for the achievement of their own goals and the organizational goals of their role.

An effective coach will:



ASK well thought-out questions to build trust, help people tap into their own inner strength and build personal awareness.



LISTEN to help people find answers to their challenges and develop their problem-solving skills.



COACH to provide guidance, support and insights. Coaching helps salespeople engage in productive behaviors that open up new possibilities, help them enhance their life experience and enhance their effectiveness as salespeople.



PRAISE positives to build confidence and highlight desired behaviors.

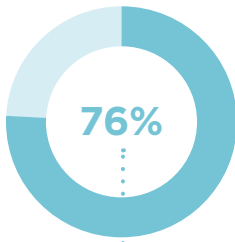


CHALLENGE people's thinking, assumptions, self-belief and attitudes in order to elevate their effectiveness.

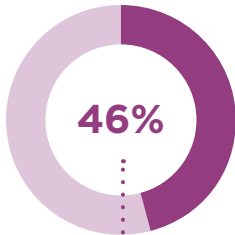
The final point needs special emphasis. Too much emphasis is often placed on coaching observable tactical sales skills. That thinking is, you observe your reps on sales calls or planning sessions and then provide them with specific feedback on what they did well and what they did wrong. While that can be important, it only addresses less than half the picture of what it takes for a sales rep to be successful. The aspect that is rarely discussed is not a sales rep's skillset but their mindset. Do your salespeople

have limited, negative thinking that's getting in their way? People need to change their thinking first in order to change their behavior. Almost every training program misses this critical point and therefore fails to help coaches develop this important aspect of performance. Helping to improve the conversations that they have with prospects and clients is important. However, the conversations that they have with themselves are just as important and too frequently overlooked when it comes to coaching.

DATA FAST FACTS

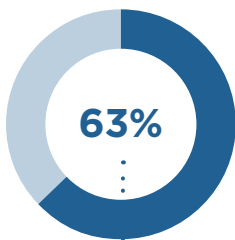


agree that **coaching is important**, but the same number (76%) also believe too little (and in some cases no) coaching is being provided.



believe their sales organization **is effective** at coaching and developing salespeople.

However, there is a **15% gap in sales revenue achievement** between firms that are effective at coaching their salespeople vs. those that are ineffective.



of companies have **no agreed-upon definition of coaching**. They let their managers determine what coaching is. In no other role or function would this level of inconsistency be permitted. The lack of understanding of what good coaching means undermines performance.



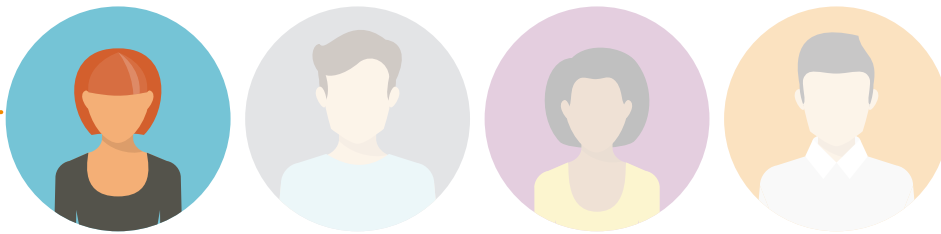
The amount of time spent on coaching matters to sales performance, more so than the effectiveness of coaching. Firms coaching 9 or more hours per manager per week—regardless of coaching effectiveness or quality—realize **12.6% better sales performance** compared to firms coaching less than 2.5 hours per manager per week.



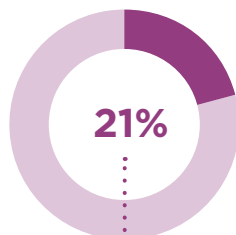
Several other interesting differences emerged between high-performing (“leaders”) and low-performing organizations (“laggards”) in attaining their sales objectives. For example, simply providing coaching for sales managers (i.e., “coaching the coaches”) accounted for a **23% gap** in variance in terms of firm sales objective achievement.

WHY COACHING, WHY NOW

If there's one thing managers and employees alike can agree on, it's that the traditional annual performance review process simply doesn't work. Not only does it fall short when it comes to improving performance, it can even [lower employee engagement](#). While Millennial employees have been the most vocal about [wanting more regular, ongoing feedback at work](#), this isn't just a generational issue. Across the board, top talent is looking for organizations and managers who will provide continuous coaching and development that clarifies expectations, builds on strengths and helps them connect their work to the broader business purpose. Yes, achieving sales targets is still important and not to be overlooked. But finding meaning in their work and personal growth are increasingly priorities as well.



Even so, according to [Gallup](#), only about one in four employees strongly agrees that their **manager provides meaningful feedback** to them, or that the feedback helps them do better work.



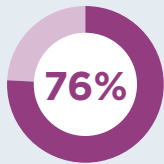
What's more, only 21% of employees strongly agree that their performance is **managed in a way that motivates them** to do outstanding work.

The urgency to move from once-a-year reviews and “catch-and-punish” style feedback to continual coaching that empowers them to solve problems is even more significant in the realm of sales. As companies compete in an increasingly crowded marketplace to meet the needs of a demanding customer base, salespeople need the confidence and tools to overcome self-limiting behaviors, take ownership of issues and make smart decisions. Building that confidence isn't a one-and-done proposition. It

requires an ongoing commitment—by both the sales manager and the salesperson—to grow and evolve those winning behaviors and skills. But the payoff is worth it. As Lou Cimini, Vice President of Human Resources at Samsonite, explains it, the power behind coaching is that it allows the leader and the salesperson to “arrive at a common path—an agreed upon output—and in some cases, the tactics to get there, and then the employee has what they need to go out and achieve those goals.”

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

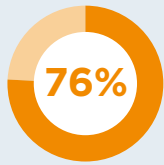
Coaching Drives Stronger Results



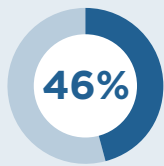
Most firms—76%—say **coaching is a critical driver of success.**



But Most Sales Leaders Fall Short



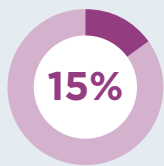
Don't coach enough: 76% of those surveyed say they do too little or none at all.



Don't do it well: Only 46% believe their coaching is effective.



The Result



The **revenue performance achievement gap** between leading firms effective at coaching and lagging firms seen as ineffective at coaching.

Why the Gap?

Reasons people don't coach:

- 1 No consistent view of coaching:** If you ask managers, “Are you coaching?” they may say *yes* or *no*—but *yes* or *no* to what? What's their definition of coaching? Only a quarter of those surveyed have a common definition of coaching. Three quarters of the organizations leave it up to managers to figure out what coaching means. That's a huge risk. As a manager, I might think that I am coaching by managing how people are handling calls or managing specific deals when those are only small pieces of a more robust approach to coaching.
- 2 No time:** Time is the biggest reason managers say they don't coach: “I'd love to coach, but I'm way too busy.” In some cases, a manager's workload is definitely an obstacle. In other cases, managers may quietly hint that they lack the confidence, self-belief and skills to effectively coach, especially their most senior, successful salespeople. Spending time doing reporting and other management activities is much less risky and more in a manager's comfort zone. “No time” becomes the *respectable* reason why coaching doesn't happen. Ironically, coaching ultimately frees up managers' time by providing sales teams with the motivation and confidence to handle new and varied situations. Smart managers invest time up front to yield massive dividends on the back-end.
- 3 No confidence:** 55% of managers report that they've never had any training in coaching.

What Coaching Looks Like

Here are two aspects of effective coaching:

1 Confront your “no time to coach” thinking. When managers were polled recently to identify the reasons that other managers in their organization aren’t coaching their people as much as they should, the number one reason was a lack of skills and confidence. When those same managers were asked why they personally don’t coach their people, the majority said “no time.” This is a curious discrepancy that provides an interesting perspective on the “no time to coach” dilemma.



2 Know the areas you can coach to. Here are the top five:

- **Who your sales rep is** – their passion, attitudes and assumptions, e.g.: Why did they choose a career in sales? Why your industry, your company? What do they most like about your company’s solutions? Dislike about them? Who do they admire in business or in your company? What gets them most excited about this career?
- **Their goals** – Have they defined clear goals that they can emotionally connect to? This is not just performance goals that are needed for their role, but goals that mean something to them, e.g.: If they achieve their bonus, what would they most like to do with it? Where do they hope their career in sales will take them?
- **Their commitment** – What is their willingness to commit to the activities that will achieve their goals? Notice their enthusiasm, energy level and what they say out loud about their performance. This can be a reflection of their mindset, which can power or deflate a sales career. Sales can be a tough profession if your reps are not fully committed to success—theirs, the company’s and their customer’s.
- **Their strategy** – How do they plan to achieve their goals? Is their plan realistic, written down and broken into smaller sub-goals with deadlines for achieving them? For example, if they need a certain amount of revenue to achieve their goals, have they identified where that may come from and what selling activities are required to achieve it?
- **Their tactical execution** – How effectively are they planning and conducting sales calls? Are their customer conversations achieving the desired commitments that will move their opportunities forward? Are they excelling in certain areas and falling short in others? Are they aware of where they need further development?

COACHING PROFICIENCY: KNOW YOUR LEVEL



Coaching proficiency is best understood across a spectrum—most organizations fall somewhere between novice and advanced. How can you know where you are, and how can you shift your organization to greater effectiveness with coaching?

Four levels of coaching maturity are detailed below:

Novice

Organizations at this level do bare-bones coaching, if they do it at all. Mostly, coaching is not on the radar screen of senior leadership at novice organizations. In fact, leaders at these organizations see coaching as a waste of time, holding the view that salespeople need to “be out there” selling, pure and simple. Managers decide whether or not to coach. It is not a part of the talent management strategy or practice. What’s more, salespeople don’t want anyone telling them what to do, which is how coaching is often misperceived at novice organizations. In terms of time and scheduling, if coaching happens at all, it’s mostly ad hoc, with managers providing two or fewer hours of coaching a week. Coaching is not systemic or recurring: Almost no one receives coaching in an ongoing, structured way at novice firms. When it does happen, coaching typically is focused around company information and administrative requirements.

Beginner

At this level, senior leadership is aware that coaching happens in scattered pockets, but they do not see it as critical to personal or firm success. Managers consider themselves too busy to coach more than quarterly. If salespeople ask for coaching, they may or may not get it. If managers are required to coach their people, they decide what “coaching” is and go from there.

New employees receive the most coaching, though this is mostly training (with some coaching). Coaching will often include extensive reviews of product/service knowledge. As for time spent, too little coaching is provided—managers typically allow for 2-5 hours/week of coaching. Coaching is ad hoc, though also mostly centered around quarterly reviews.

Mature

Senior leadership in organizations at this level typically see coaching as important. They encourage it and hold managers accountable to coach. Managers see coaching as a good use of time, though sometimes they are so busy that coaching sessions get canceled. Salespeople see coaching as important to their development. All salespeople are provided coaching, sometimes with a special focus on those involved in a big opportunity. The amount of time spent coaching at this level is the right amount: Each manager provides 5-10 hours/week of coaching. Coaching is a blend of scheduled and ad hoc. What's more, coaching sessions focus specifically on building and developing people, not just on their numbers, and managers improve their coaching skills with ongoing training and tools.

Advanced

Organizations at this level see the benefits of coaching across the board. Senior leadership views sales coaching as critical to success. They hold managers accountable and put them in a position to succeed at coaching.

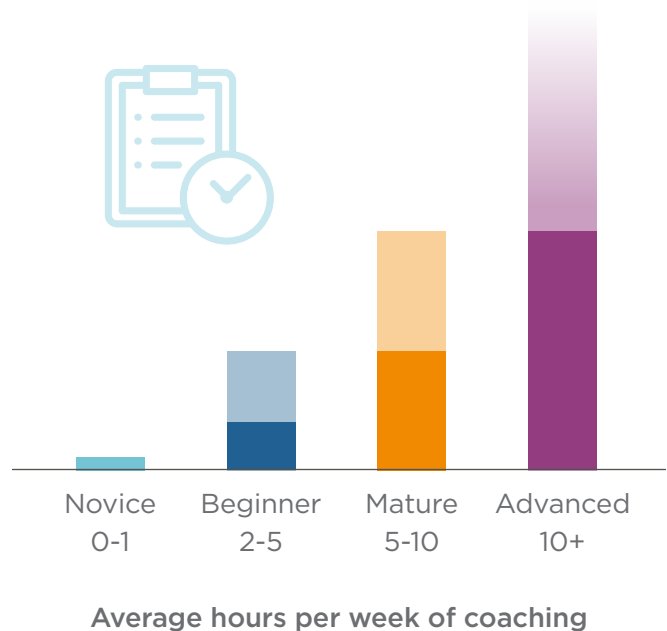
Additionally, managers have a high degree of coaching confidence: They know that coaching delivers results and frees up more time for them to focus strategically. An added plus is that managers look proactively for coaching opportunities in real-time. For their part, salespeople welcome coaching in these organizations. They know it's tailored to them, and they feel understood, supported and inspired in their experience with coaching.

Coaching is abundant at this level: Each manager provides 10+ hours/week of coaching. Coaching sessions are mostly scheduled and held sacred; very rarely are they canceled.

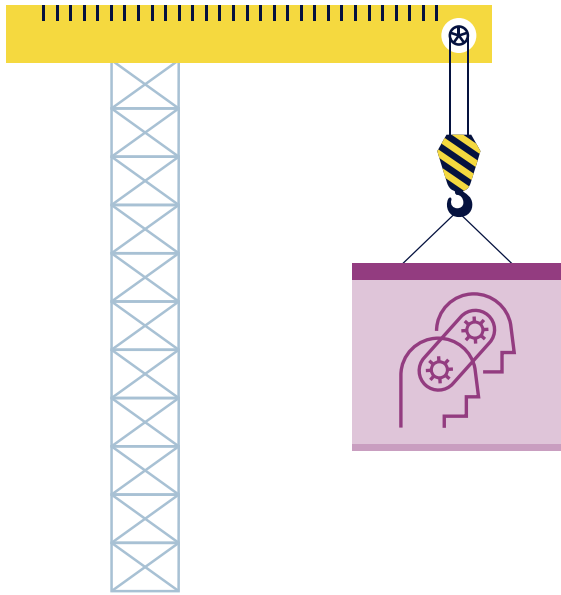
Everyone is coached, including high performers, who sometimes get priority. Managers are coached at advanced organizations. What's more, coaching is available regardless of size of opportunities. Coaching sessions feature a review of current performance, motivational work and skill development.

The bottom line for advanced organizations: Coaching is built in to the talent management system. Often, managers are selected based on their coaching abilities, and they're rewarded, in part, on their success in developing people.

To find out exactly where your organization is on this scale, [take this quick 10 question assessment](#). Then move on to the next section to identify ways to improve your sales coaching effectiveness and your results!



BUILDING A COACHING CULTURE: SEVEN STEPS



- 1 Define coaching:** What it is and *most importantly*, what it isn't. Coaching is about building people and developing them so that they can perform at a higher level. It's not performance evaluation.
- 2 Implement a coaching system:** A simple, structured approach to coaching that anyone can use—so they'll actually make time to do it—and that yields concrete results. This isn't time-consuming, but it's highly effective.
- 3 Build accountability:** Senior leaders need to be coaching managers and holding them accountable to coach. It needs to be part of everyone's performance evaluation. It needs to be clear that everyone has a coach, and that it's proactive vs. reactive. Not fixing—building.
- 4 Coach to Achievement Drive.** Overall, many sales leaders don't seem to grasp the importance of motivation (what we call Achievement Drive) as an outcome of coaching, ranking it among the least important topics associated with coaching. Yet, there is a 15% gap in attainment of sales objectives between firms where coaching to improve Achievement Drive is likely to happen vs. firms where coaching to improve Achievement Drive is unlikely to happen. [Our 2017 research with The Sales Management Association](#) also showed a 20% bump in revenue from organizations that effectively focus on developing Achievement Drive in their sales teams.
- 5 Don't forget your high performers.** In fact, the biggest lift can come from coaching the folks who are already good at what they do. Just look at our research data. When presented with seven scenarios, our respondents selected "high performers" as the least likely scenario to receive coaching (36%). And yet, of those seven scenarios, high performers receiving coaching is one of the two scenarios yielding the biggest bump in sales performance objective achievement (10%).
- 6 Coach your managers.** 55% of managers report that they've never had any training in coaching. As important as it is to train managers on how to coach, it is equally if not more important to continue to provide sales managers with coaching. There was a 23% gap in variance in terms of firm sales objective achievement between those organizations that took this "coach the coach" approach and those that didn't.
- 7 Know that not everyone is coachable.** If there's someone on your team you don't trust or who is not willing to take responsibility for his/her results, career and outcomes produced through the coaching process, then you aren't going to get results from coaching this person. You will be wasting both your and your sales rep's time. Your coaching sessions can easily become an environment for excuses, with the coach pushing harder to try and make their coaching efforts effective and the sales rep continuing to stonewall and resist.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In closing, let's definitively answer our research questions:

Is the current approach to sales coaching effective?

Overall, most organizations report that they **provide too little**, if any, coaching.



Does sales coaching impact a sales organization's performance?

Absolutely! No matter the measure—whether it's the effectiveness of sales coaching or simply the sheer amount of time spent coaching—there are clear correlations between sales coaching and achievement of sales objectives.

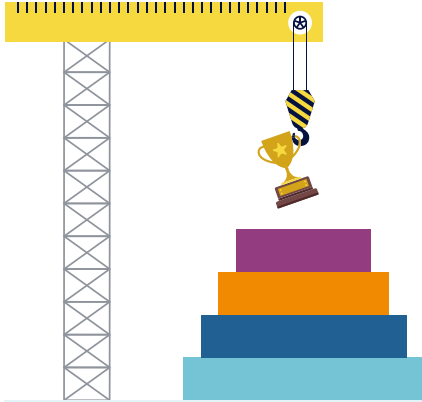


How do high-performing organizations differ in their approach to sales coaching?

The data tells us: **Coach your salespeople. Coach them early and often.** Coach your top performers. Focus on your team's will (motivation) as much if not more than their skill. Don't forget to coach your coaches (your managers)!

But it's not enough just to ask sales managers to coach more. **For truly optimal results, consider how coaching fits in a structured, defined approach to talent management.** For example, we saw a 9% performance gap between high and low performers when management is judged and rewarded based on success in developing salespeople.





ABOUT INTEGRITY SOLUTIONS

Integrity Solutions, the performance experts, equips sales teams to rise up and lead by building trusted customer relationships with integrity at their core. As the partner of choice for values-driven organizations, the firm specializes in innovative sales, service and coaching training solutions that fuel performance, grow talent, lift up customers and elevate leaders. Our experience spans over 50 years, 130 countries and industries including healthcare, financial services, manufacturing, energy and utilities, agriculture and more. Integrity was most recently recognized with multiple Stevie Awards for sales training excellence in 2020 and 2019 and as a 2019 Top 20 Sales Training Company by Selling Power and Training Industry.

Visit us online to learn more about our unique approach: IntegritySolutions.com



For more information, contact:

Integrity Solutions, LLC
1801 West End Avenue, Suite 530
Nashville, TN 37203
(615) 385 2246 | (800) 646 8347
IntegritySolutions.com