



**SALES
MANAGEMENT
ASSOCIATION**

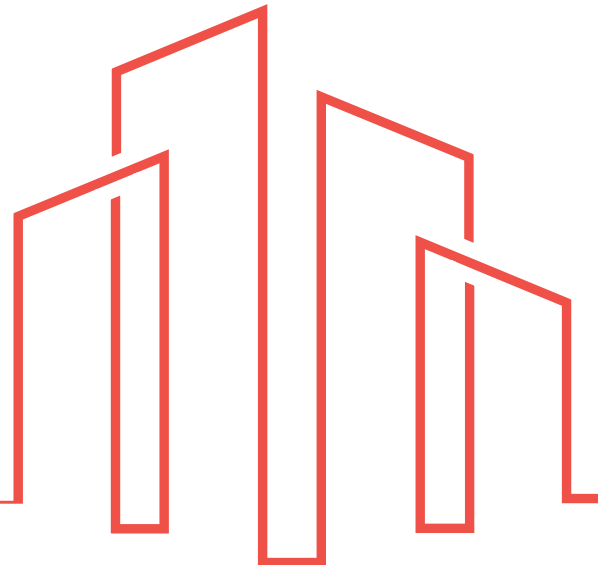
RESEARCH BRIEF

SALES COACHING PRACTICES

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Solutions



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Research Brief: Sales Coaching Practices

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About The Sales Management Association

The Sales Management Association is a global, cross-industry professional organization for sales operations, sales effectiveness, and sales leadership professions. We provide our members with tools, networking, research, training, and professional development.

Our research initiatives address topics relevant to practitioners across a broad spectrum of sales effectiveness issues. Our research is available to members on our site at www.salesmanagement.org.

In addition to research we publish best practice tools, archived webcasts, and expert content. Visit our website at www.salesmanagement.org to learn more.



CONTENTS

- 5** THE STATE OF SALES COACHING: AN OVERVIEW
- 6** WHY COACHING MATTERS
- 7** COACHING PRACTICES
- 11** GAPS IN COACHING ACTIVITY AND EFFECTIVENESS
- 14** PROGRAMMATIC SUPPORT
- 15** COACHING PRACTICES' IMPACT ON PERFORMANCE




LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS TOPIC

This document summarizes a portion of our research findings on this topic. For association members interested in more detail, the complete report on this topic is available at [salesmanagement.org](https://www.salesmanagement.org).

As study participants, members receive access to detailed research reports, a comprehensive set of charts, exhibits, and commentary in both report and slide format.

ABOUT INTEGRITY SOLUTIONS

 This research was made possible in part through the underwriting support of Integrity Solutions. Integrity Solutions helps clients win more customers, keep more customers, and grow profitable revenue. They develop excellence in sales performance, coaching, leadership, and customer service.

The firm increases leadership's ability to align and engage their teams while igniting a passion among sales and service professionals with a specific focus on the leadership mindsets of selling and coaching and their teams' attitudes, values, motivations, and beliefs. Core solutions are grounded in values, trust, and ethics.

Integrity Solutions works with clients globally in industries including healthcare/life sciences, financial services and insurance, energy and utilities, manufacturing, hospitality and more. More about the firm at www.integritysolutions.com

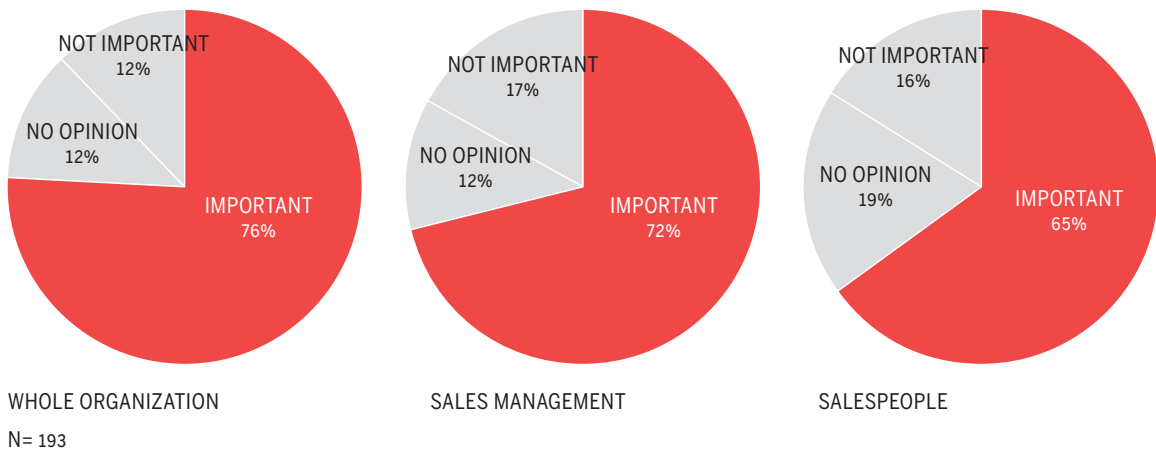


THE STATE OF SALES COACHING: AN OVERVIEW

Few activities are considered as important to the sales organization as sales coaching. More than three-fourths of firms (76%) consider sales coaching important, as do 72% of firms' managers, and 65% of firms' salespeople.

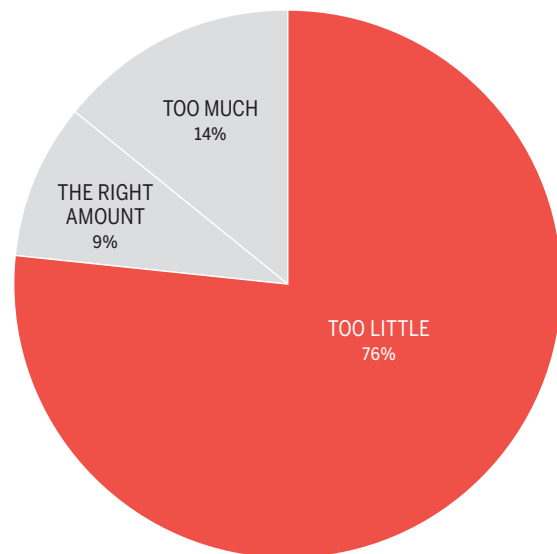
COACHING'S RATED IMPORTANCE IN THE SALES ORGANIZATION

PERCENTAGE OF FIRMS



LEVEL OF SALES COACHING PROVIDED

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF FIRMS



N=173 FIRMS

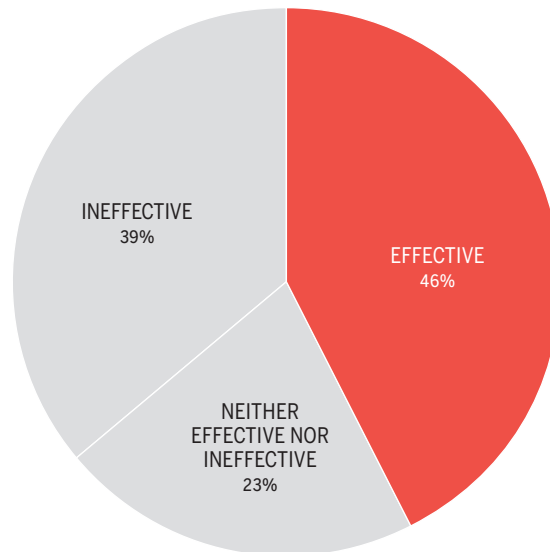
Yet despite coaching's importance, managers do too little of it. Among all firms, managers' sales coaching activity averages 7.2 hours per week (5 hours is the median value). And more than three-fourths of firms (76%) say the coaching provided by their firms' managers is too little.

Worse yet, what little coaching is provided is too often ineffective. A minority of firms (46%) consider their sales coaching efforts effective (39% consider sales coaching ineffective in their sales organization; and 23% consider their sales coaching efforts somewhat effective).



SALES COACHING EFFECTIVENESS

PERCENTAGE OF FIRMS



N=193 FIRMS

WHY COACHING MATTERS

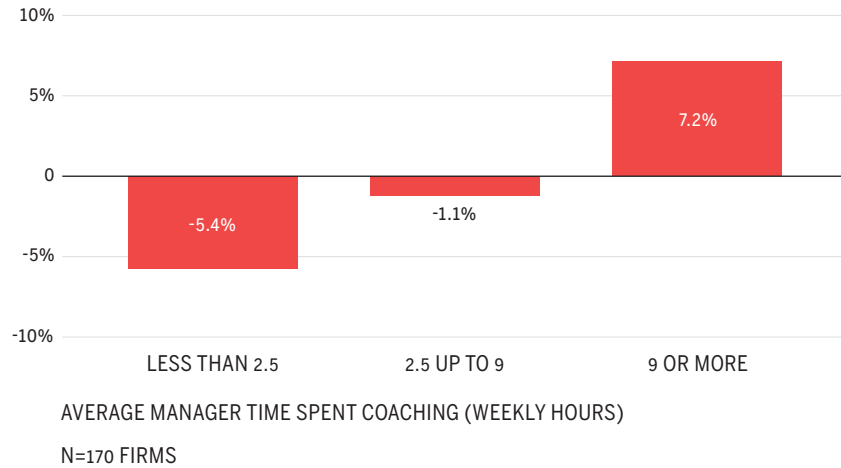
Firms effective at sales coaching achieve sales objectives 9% higher than other firms, while firms ineffective at coaching suffer rates of sales objective achievement 6% below those of other firms¹.

Sales performance also increases with coaching activity, even without regard to its effectiveness or quality. Firms with managers coaching salespeople more than nine hours per week, on average, outperform other firms by 7% in sales objective achievement; firms with corresponding rates of weekly coaching of less than 2.5 hours underperform other firms by 5%.



MANAGER TIME SPENT COACHING AND FIRM SALES PERFORMANCE

VARIANCE IN FIRM SALES OBJECTIVE ACHIEVEMENT



Given the clear advantages accruing to its practitioners, sales coaching represents an important management activity. Our research also finds that it is not well understood, poorly supported, and its value overlooked.

COACHING PRACTICES

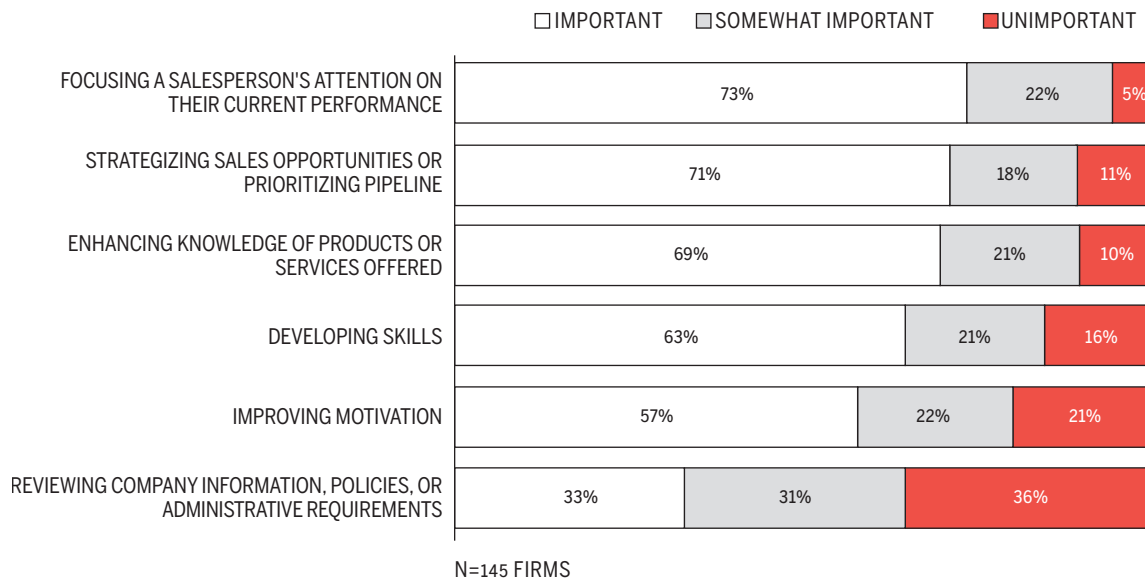
Coaching topics

Managers are likely to prioritize certain coaching topics over others. Our research measured such priorities in two ways: the rated importance of coaching topics, and the frequency with which they are coached. Coaching topics considered most important are focusing coachees' attention on performance (considered an important coaching topic by 73% of firms), prioritizing sales opportunities (71%), enhancing knowledge of products and services offered (69%), and sales skill development (63%).



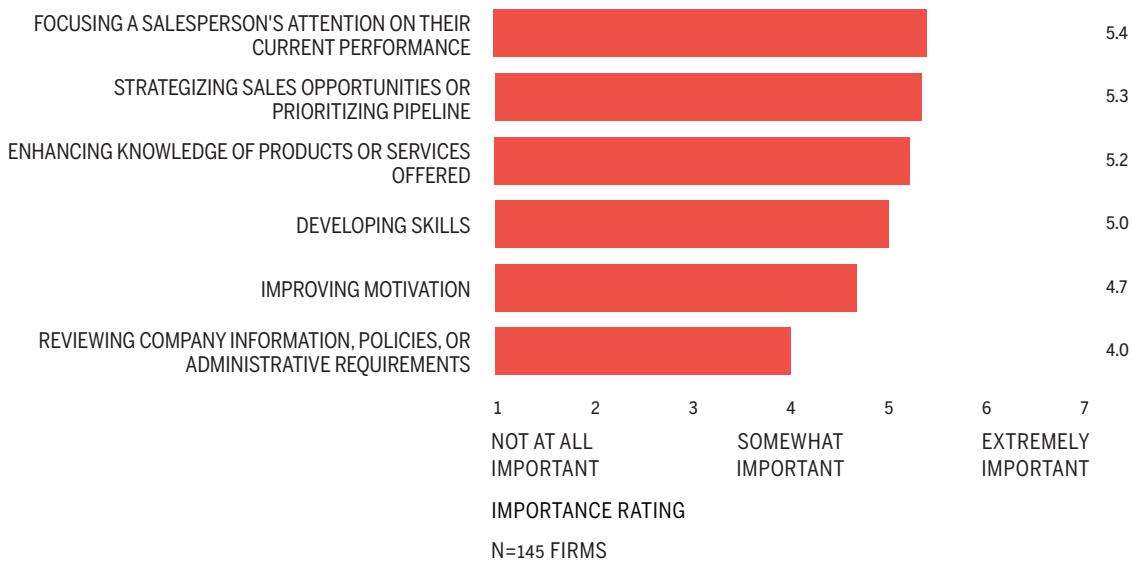
IMPORTANCE OF SALES COACHING TOPICS

PERCENTAGE OF FIRMS



COACHING TOPICS' IMPORTANCE RATINGS

AVERAGE IMPORTANCE RATING



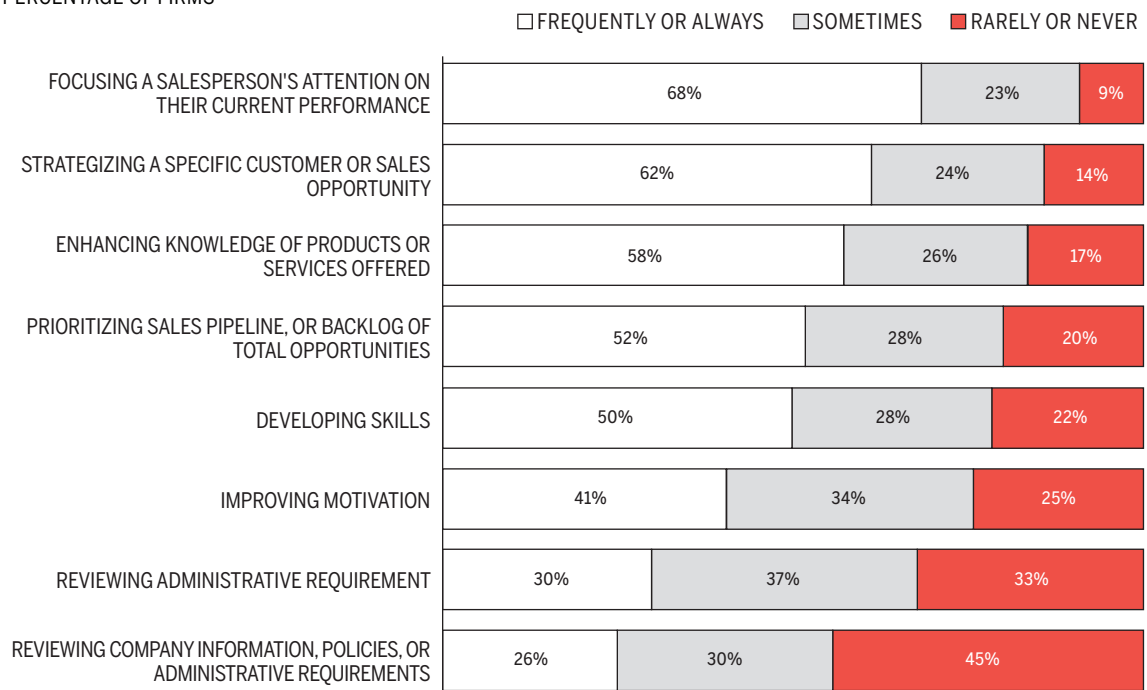
RESEARCH BRIEF: SALES COACHING PRACTICES

Of six coaching topics considered, five are rated important; these five garnered mean importance ratings of higher than 4 on a seven-point scale (where 1 is not at all important, 4 is somewhat important, and 7 is extremely important). Important topics, in descending order of rated importance, are focusing a salesperson on current performance (average importance rating of 5.4), strategizing a specific opportunity (5.3), enhancing knowledge of products and services offered (5.2), skill development (5.0), and salesperson motivation (4.7). The sixth topic, “Reviewing company information, policies, and administrative requirements” is rated 4.0 in importance on average.

Coaching topics’ emphasis is similarly reflected in the frequency with which they are the subject of coaching interactions. Focusing a salesperson’s attention on current performance is emphasized frequently in coaching interactions by 68% of firms, strategizing a specific opportunity by 62%, enhancing knowledge of products or services offered by 58%, prioritizing total opportunity pipeline by 52%, developing selling skills by 50%, and addressing motivation by 41%.

FREQUENCY OF SALES COACHING TOPICS ADDRESSED

PERCENTAGE OF FIRMS



N=145 FIRMS

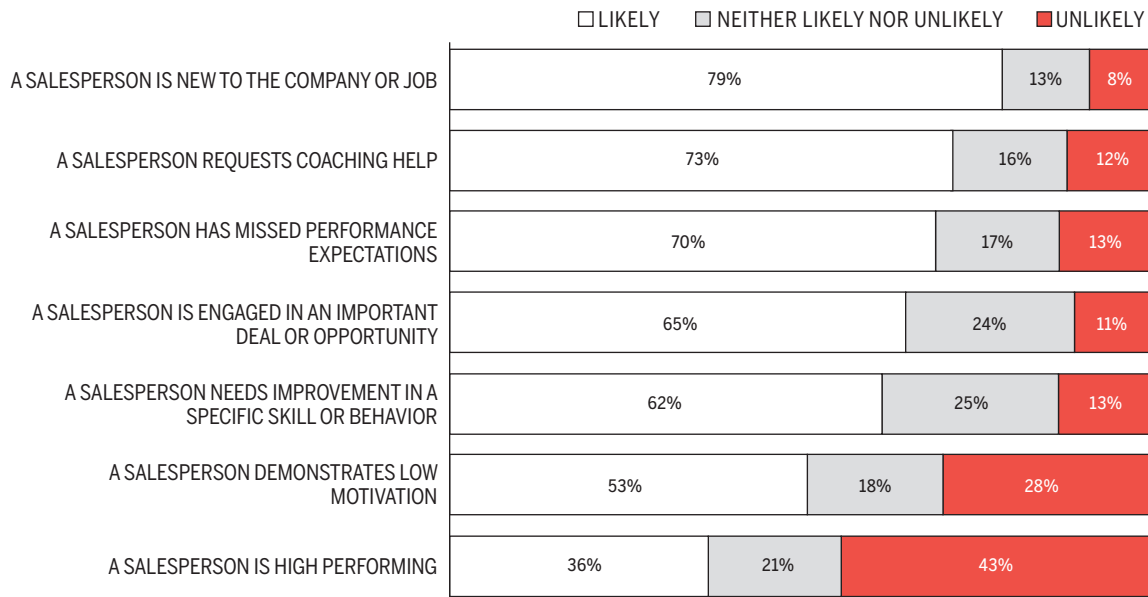


Coaching delivery

In the typical sales organization, coaching is likely to occur at the beginning of a salesperson’s tenure, and at its presumed end, if performance expectations are unmet. 79% of firms offer coaching to salespeople new to the firm, the most likely occasion to garner coaching. Management is likely to respond to a salesperson requesting coaching in 73% of firms. A salesperson missing performance expectation is likely to receive coaching in 70% of firms, a likelihood almost twice that of a high-performing salesperson (likely to receive coaching in 36% of firms). By a sizable margin, coaching occurrences that are reactive occasions seem to outnumber those that represent developmental opportunities anticipated in advance.

LIKELIHOOD FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF COACHING

PERCENTAGE OF FIRMS



N=174 FIRMS



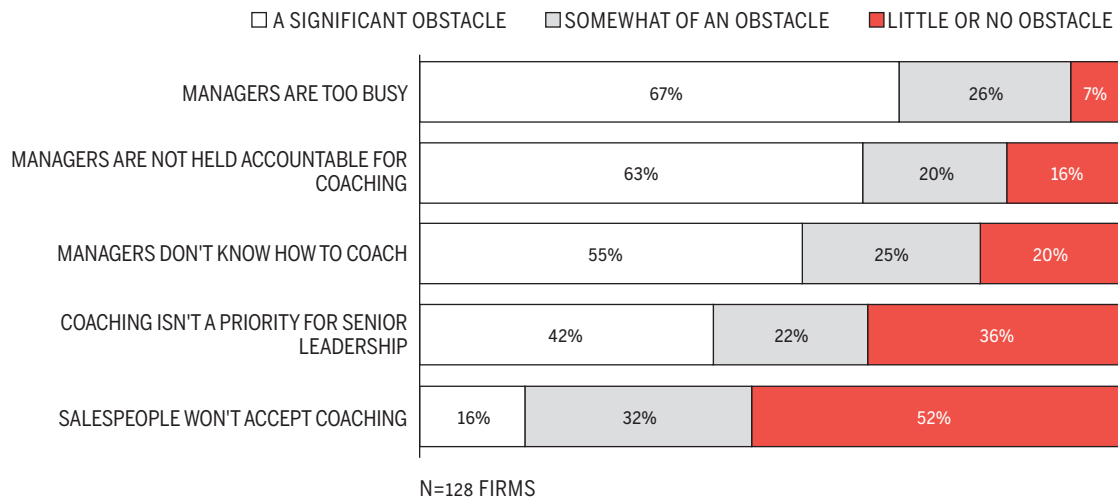
GAPS IN COACHING ACTIVITY AND EFFECTIVENESS

Activity

Our research suggests multiple root causes for insufficient coaching activity. More than half of firms (55%) say managers do not know how to coach, evidence of a significant management education gap.

MANAGEMENT OBSTACLES TO PROVIDING MORE COACHING

PERCENTAGE OF FIRMS

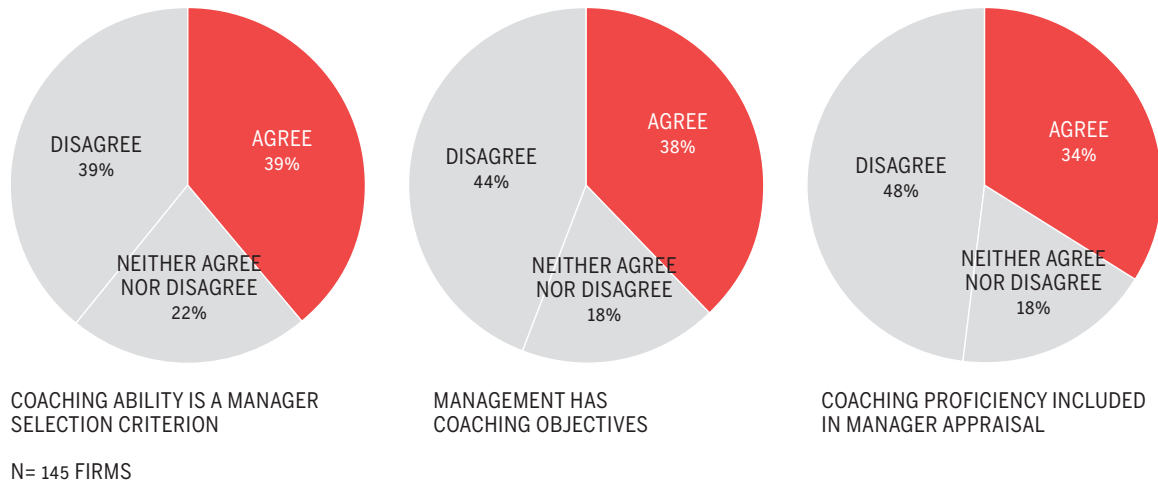


A more fundamental, and more prevalent issue: coaching isn't considered a sales management responsibility, or is prioritized far below other responsibilities. This is best evidenced by the 67% of firms who say sales managers don't offer more coaching because they are too busy (presumably with management tasks considered more appropriate, or more important). More firms cited managers' preoccupation with other matters (i.e., being "too busy") than any other obstacle to increased coaching. Its underlying issue is reinforced by the number of firms that identify coaching ability as a criterion for selecting sales managers (just 39% do), that set specific coaching objectives for managers (just 38%), and that include coaching effectiveness in managers' performance appraisals (just 34%).



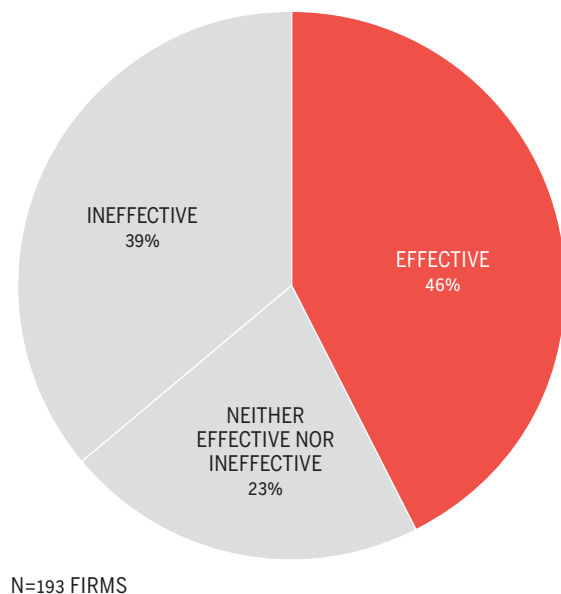
MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTABILITY FOR SALES COACHING

PERCENTAGE OF FIRMS



SALES COACHING EFFECTIVENESS

PERCENTAGE OF FIRMS



Effectiveness

Just 46% of firms consider their sales coaching efforts effective overall.

Of six coaching topics researched, firms are least effective in improving motivation and developing selling skills. Coaching effectiveness in these topics garnered average ratings of 4.1 and 4.3 respectively, on a seven-point scale where 1 is not at all effective, 4 is somewhat effective, and 7 is extremely effective. Just 42% of firms are effective in developing salesperson skills, and just 39% effective in improving salesperson motivation. (Reviewing company information and administrative requirements is also rated low in effectiveness (4.3), though is also rated substantially lower in importance than other topics.)

Developing salesperson skills stands alone among all topics researched as being rated in the top half of coaching topics based on importance, and also being rated in the bottom half of topics based on managers' coaching effectiveness. As such, it could be considered management's most important sales coaching improvement priority.



RESEARCH BRIEF: SALES COACHING PRACTICES

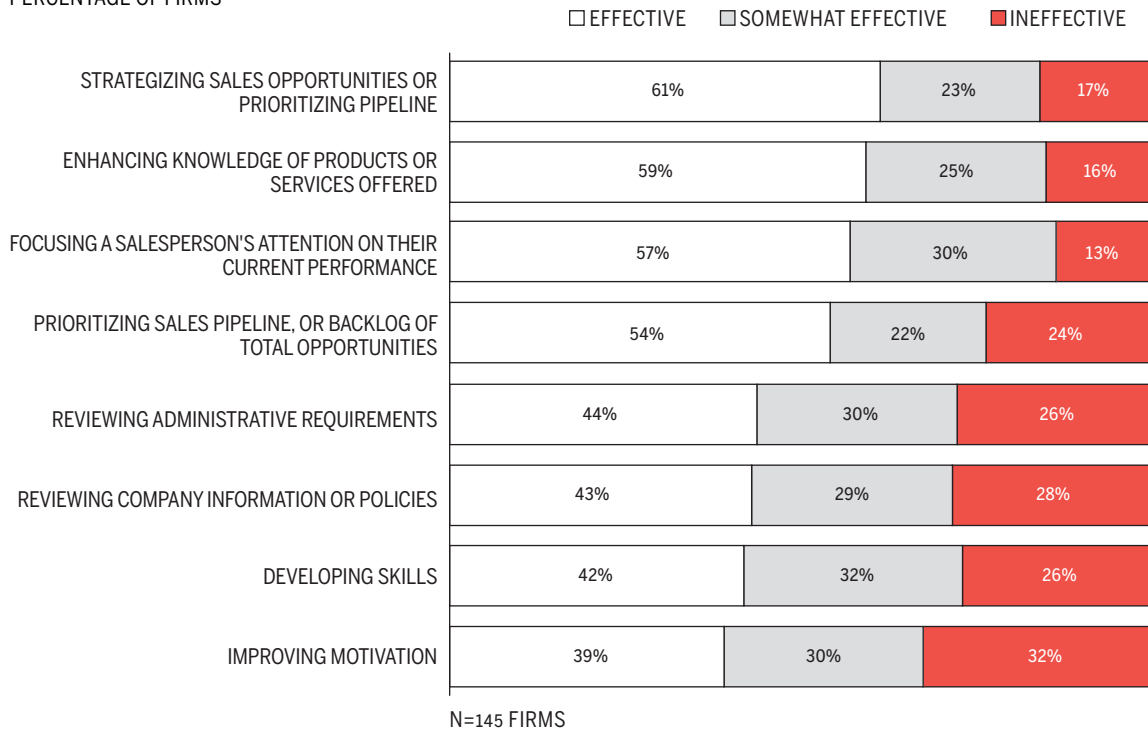
IMPORTANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF COACHING BY TOPIC

AVERAGE RATING FOR IMPORTANCE OR EFFECTIVENESS



COACHING EFFECTIVENESS BY TOPIC

PERCENTAGE OF FIRMS



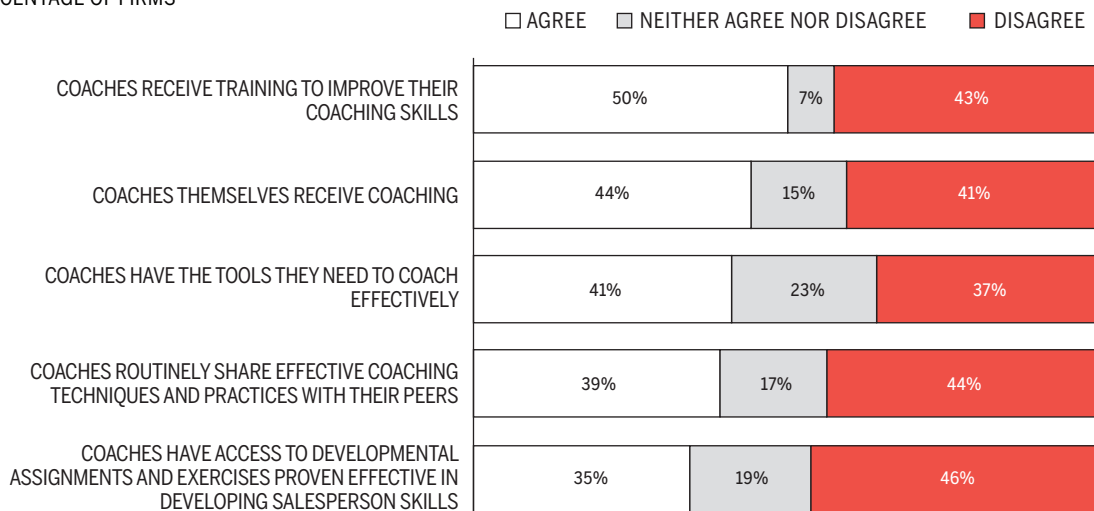
PROGRAMMATIC SUPPORT

Our research suggests that sales coaching in most firms is treated less as an organizational priority than as a discretionary management style, as evidenced by inadequate or missing programmatic support.

Coaching is inadequately supported and reinforced by many firms. Managers receive training in coaching in only 50% for firms, and are themselves coached in only 44%. Just 41% of firms provide coaches with tools required to coach effectively, and just 35% maintain an inventory of developmental assignments useful for coaching activity. Coaches share best practices among themselves in only 39% of firms.

COACHING DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

PERCENTAGE OF FIRMS



N=145 FIRMS



COACHING PRACTICES’ IMPACT ON PERFORMANCE

In two independent analyses on our research data, we found firms coaching salespeople effectively enjoy a +9% achievement advantage over other firms. And firms coaching nine or more hours per manager per week – regardless of coaching effectiveness or quality – realize sales performance improvement of 7% compared to other firms¹.

COACHING EFFECTIVENESS, COACHING ACTIVITY, AND FIRM PERFORMANCE
FIRM SALES OBJECTIVE ACHIEVEMENT



We therefore suggest that for the majority of firms, improving coaching effectiveness, or simply coaching more frequently (assuming current coaching activity levels fall short of nine manager hours per week) are aspirations likely to yield a significant performance benefit.

With regard to coaching activity levels, our research also suggests management may underestimate the benefits of additional activity alone. Though 14% of our research sample indicated their managers spent “too much” time coaching, these firms nevertheless outperformed peers by 9% in sales objective achievement – a higher differential performance advantage than those “Goldilocks” firms

¹ This isn’t to suggest that “effective” coaching accounts for only 1.5% variance.



providing “just the right amount” of coaching, whose performance advantage was 6% over other firms’. (Firms providing “too little” coaching underperformed other firms by 9%.) Indeed, too much coaching may yet be not too much for firms after incremental performance improvement.

SALES COACHING SUFFICIENCY AND FIRM PERFORMANCE

VARIANCE IN FIRM SALES OBJECTIVE ACHIEVEMENT

