

Sales coaching skills for Sales managers



The best place to train salespeople is in the field, observing the salesperson selling to real customers. The things sales managers typically get wrong are:

1. Training is not carried out on a regular basis
2. Training objectives are unclear
3. The manager jumps in during the sales call in order to save the day
4. Too much, often inaccurate feedback is given
5. The salesperson is left demotivated and unclear as to what to do next

In order for training to take place effectively there need to be clear ground rules set between trainer and trainee on how sales performance will be assessed.

The process of field sales training should be

- clear
- concise
- simple

Both sides need to be aware that changes in performance will not happen immediately and across the full range of selling skills. Because of this it is important to set clear training objectives that concentrate on covering a few training areas in depth, rather than a large range of objectives, with a view to producing quick results.

Field Training should be structured as follows:

At the start of the day

Gain agreement from the trainee to concentrate on a maximum of two sales skills.

Where sales training is continuous these will have been agreed on the previous training day.

Before each call

Agree with the trainee to concentrate on one of the sales skills, while noting other aspects of the call for informal feedback purposes. This will be called the Prime Training Area. Explain to the trainee that one other training area that occurred during the call may also be discussed. This will be called the Secondary Training Area.

We will look at what happens during the call later on. In the meantime here is a checklist to aid your preparation skills.

Preparation Checklist for Sales Coaches

Here is a checklist of actions to take that will help make your sales training preparation more effective.

Before the training day

1. Prepare the training day by speaking with the trainee yourself. Ensure a good mix of sales calls where possible.
2. Review the trainee's past performance the evening before. Look for evidence of sales activity, sales results, and commitments made on previous training days.
3. Decide your two training priorities (Prime Training Areas).
4. Arrange all necessary documentation.

At the start of the day

5. Be punctual, demonstrating that you have taken care and time in your preparation for the day.
6. Greet the trainee in a warm, supportive way.
7. Agree the objectives for the day, i.e. Your Prime Training Areas and the Trainee's own sales objectives.
8. Create interest by selling the trainee the benefits to be gained from the training day.
9. Encourage the trainee to talk about his or her progress, problems and any issues that may be of concern.
10. Give the trainee good news on company progress, but don't gossip.
11. Agree how you wish to be introduced to customers.

Before the Call

12. Establish what preparation and planning has been done by the trainee.
13. Establish what specific call objectives the trainee has set.
14. Question the trainee on any part of the call strategy that you consider to be a potential weakness.
15. Check how visual aids are intended to be used.
16. Rehearse. The importance of this cannot be over emphasised. The call for which you are both preparing is unique. It will only happen once. As 'Director', 'Producer' and 'Stage Manager' it is your responsibility to ensure that the performance of your trainee is first class.
17. Take role-plays seriously and try to 'think' yourself into the call situation.
18. Confirm your role in the sales call, which is to observe, so the 'trainee' knows what to expect.
19. Ensure that, by the time you have completed the call preparation, your trainee regards you as part of his, or her 'team'; not a manager, trainer or mentor.
20. Smile and give encouragement to the trainee prior to entering the sales call.

Performance during the call

During the sales call it is important for the sales trainer to remain passive and let the salesperson get on with the job. This enables the trainer to actively observe the call and make mental notes for the purpose of feedback after the call is over.

The most common mistake made by inexperienced trainers is to get involved in the sales process and interrupt the salesperson, effectively 'saving the day'. This is wrong for two reasons.

1. *It gets in the way of learning taking place.* The salesperson who has been interrupted will say *I was just about to say that* and will fail to learn from the experience.
2. *It causes resentment.* The salesperson feels frustrated and can be made to look foolish in front of the customer.

For sales managers, especially, this is a real dilemma. It is important to realise, however, that in a field-training situation learning should take priority over the sale. Also, from the manager's point of view, if the salesperson can be trained effectively many more sales will result over the long term.

Here are some examples of how to behave during the call if the training input is to be most effective:

Be Passive

1. Allow the trainee to make the introduction.
2. Sit out of sight of the trainee so he or she can relax and forget you are there.
3. Look at the trainee rather than at the customer. This focuses the customer's attention on the trainee.
4. Relax. With any luck it may be contagious!
5. Show no emotion. This will have a calming effect on trainee and customer alike.

Observe and Listen

1. If you do speak during the call make sure this has been agreed previously

with the trainee.

2. Be aware, at each stage of the sales call of what has happened and look out for points relating to the Primary and Secondary Training Areas.
3. Concentrate on the accuracy of your listening.

Make Mental Notes

1. Note the good and bad aspects of the call.
2. Look for skill improvements since your last training day.
3. Concentrate on observations relating to the Prime Training Area.
4. Look for observations on the Secondary Training Area (if any).
5. Look for the achievement of sales objectives.
6. Look for deviations from the sales call plan. Why were they made?
7. Look for examples of how the trainee's perception of the call during the preparation phase was different in reality.

Post Call Analysis

After the call is over it is important to analyse the call and give feedback to the trainee. The Post Call Analysis is most effective if carried out in the following way:

1. Find somewhere quiet to sit and analyse the call. Don't begin the analysis when the trainee is driving.
2. Compliment the trainee on one genuinely good aspect of the call but only if this is genuine.
3. Ask the trainee for his or her opinion of the call, before giving your feedback.
4. As with the sales process the most important skill in coaching is asking questions. Here is a sequence of questions to try:
 - How do you feel?
 - Talk me through the call. What happened?
 - What happened next?
 - We agreed that the prime training area was going to be objection handling. What objections did the customer raise?
 - How did you deal with the objection?
 - Let's go back to the training we did on objection handling. We said there were 4 stages to the process. Do you remember what they were?
 - You are right. The 4 stages are listen, clarify the objection, deal with the objection then close, or move on. How well did you follow the process during the call?
 - Why don't we have a practise. I'll be the customer.....
5. Demonstrate points that have been highlighted either by giving information or role-playing informally with the trainee.
6. Our aim is to get the trainee to appraise his, or her performance before we give our feedback. The first 2 questions settle the trainee down and get them thinking objectively about what happened.
7. We introduce the theory from the training course to make sure they are doing things right. This means that the sales manager has to know the theory well.

8. Get the trainee to agree (by self appraisal and self criticism if possible):

- What has been learned
- The action that the trainee now needs to take
- Commitments for progress in the future

Our aim is to get the trainee to appraise each call even when we are not there. When the manager gives feedback it is important that it is 3 things:

1. Relevant
2. Accurate
3. Specific

otherwise it won't be effective.

Concluding the Training Day

Throughout the field training day you will have been discussing a number of sales skills with the trainee that you consider need improving. You may have demonstrated or role played some of them.

When all the sales calls have been made for the day, it is essential to summarise the main areas on which you would like the trainee to concentrate. This end of day discussion may be compared to a close in a sales discussion.

The following procedure is recommended:

1. Thank the trainee for an interesting day. Mention any occasions when you noted the trainee using sales skills in a particularly effective way, plus any humorous incidences. Keep it light.
2. Review briefly:
 - a) The Prime Training Areas (maximum of two sales skills).
 - b) The Secondary Training Areas (one for each call thus a probable maximum of three sales skills).
3. Look for commitment from the trainee to work hard to improve further on a maximum of TWO of the sales skills areas. Emphasise what skills have been learnt by the trainee during the day in order to ensure that the trainee knows HOW to make the fullest use of the skills in question.
4. Confirm with the trainee what further action has been agreed to be undertaken and ensure you record the agreements in writing. Commit yourself to providing a written training report within an agreed timescale.
5. Emphasise your willingness to give practical advice between field visits.
6. Agree with the trainee the Prime Training Areas for the next field visit.
7. Conclude with words of encouragement and support.