

## Performance Coaching Cliff Notes



The word “coach” connotes sports or sales management to many of us. But consider the many types of coaches and how similar their jobs are when it comes to enhancing performance. According to reference guru, Daniel Webster, to coach means, “an instructor or trainer, as of athletes, actors, or singers; Sports - of the person in overall charge of a team and the strategy in games; To instruct - in a subject, or prepare for an examination by private tutoring, to train.” So, regardless of which coaching job you have, by Webster’s definition the lion’s share of your job as coach means training— and therein lies the rub!



If coaching really means training, the question becomes asking yourself...how much time do I *really* spend “training” vs “telling” my Salespeople what to do? If you’re like most, the brutally honest answer is that most time is spent giving direction or telling and very little time training. Most Managers can’t find the time to do as much coaching or training as they’d like to do. If this resonates with you, you’re in good company. The issue is so prevalent in feedback from sales surveys that a company adopted as their slogan, “Don’t Tell Me...Show Me” because training, more than telling or giving feedback, was consistently a top need of Salespeople and high frustration among Sales Managers. Because there’s never enough time, it’s easy to rationalize that training is a corporate or individual responsibility. If Webster is right, training is clearly the # 1 job of the coach; a role far too important to delegate much less abdicate.

We would never be so Pollyanna as to advise you to, “Just Do It” when it comes to training because that doesn’t change the fact that you are pulled in too many directions regardless of how good your intentions are. What we mean to impress is the importance of making the most of what precious little time you do have with your Salespeople. Training and coaching are so closely intertwined that there seems no discernable difference. In a nutshell, training is teaching what, why, and the how tos while coaching reinforces the training with ongoing learning, creates expectations, motivates, and reinforces expectations through behaviorally-based feedback. So how to make it all happen? Use these quick reference tips adapted from the Fire ‘em Up™ Training and Coaching Programs and gleaned from years of proven, real world training and management success.

Managers and Trainers often find it easy to identify opportunities for development. How often do veteran salespeople get away from the basics of strategic pre and post call planning or open a call poorly by saying, “So how’s it going with my product?” How often do they fail to clearly identify a need before steamrolling benefits or worse still, respond to an objection they expect thereby raising another objection? The two sides of the coaching coin are literally heads and tails. If identifying development opportunities is easy, the flip sign of the coin is that changing selling behaviors is hard.

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Getting veteran Salespeople to buy-in to the need for improvement and welcome coaching isn't usually a snap. That's why coaches know how remarkably fulfilling it is to celebrate success when they were able to partner for improved performance. To become a true performance partner, it's equally important to ask yourself how you may have gotten away from some of the basics. Professionals never 'arrive' when it comes to developing and improving. Even Academy Award winners need rehearsal just as the best of pro athletes need continuous coaching and development.



The following is provided to provoke thought about what you could be doing more, better, or differently to fire up sales performance.

- Do you have a clear focus for skill development during every field contact or do you just comment (tell) about what you observe? To make the best use time, select one (or no more than two) skill(s) for focus during each field contact. The phrase TMI (Too Much Information) can easily be applied to many training sessions – TMI! A popular book title, *"Telling Ain't Training"* makes the point because the human brain can only process and retain so much information. Having a skill for focus allows the Salesperson to truly understand, digest the information and put it into practice. It makes the interaction more comfortable and effective because you can provide meaningful, memorable feedback.
- Earlier, we used Nike's catch-phrase "Just Do It" to acknowledge that telling you to just find more time for training would be a bit Pollyanna, it's exactly the same when it comes to changing adult behavior because telling Salespeople to "Just Do It" "won't get it done! To make precious use of coaching opportunities, give an overview of your qualitative, and quantitative expectations. Define what success does and does not look like; behaviors and skills that you expect to see, hear, etc. What criteria will you use to assess them? How often, with what type(s) of Customer, under what circumstances, will you be looking at? Setting clear objectives, expectations and criteria for evaluation allows them to prepare, you to measure, and both to evaluate progress.
- Allow adequate time for preparation. It's a well documented fact that people learn best when relaxed. In fact, most of us don't think clearly or do our best when anxious or nervous. Even if you have a great relationship with your Salespeople, knowing their actions are being evaluated adds a dimension of stress. If they don't know exactly what you're looking for or if surprises are sprung on them without adequate notice, you can expect to see lower performance than if you were not there. So just let them know. Do you want to reinforce a skill learned at a recent training, or follow-up on progress made in a skill area from your last field contact? Once they know the skill focus all you need to tell them is your objectives and what 'good' looks like.

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- Remember that the Salesperson may look awkward when trying out new skills. Encourage them to rehearse the skill, literally trying it out and making mistakes by reminding them that's the best way to increase the comfort and confidence they need for a winning performance. One of the biggest problems with teaching and coaching adults is that they are uncomfortable when trying something new...so many won't try at all or if they feel incompetent, stop trying!!!



- Over the years many reps have told us that the Managers they valued and learned the most from were those that encouraged trial and error. Remove the potential for "performance anxiety" and allow your reps to make mistakes. Simulate the good, the bad, and the ugly on the phone or in the car prior to the selling event. In most cases...tell the Salesperson you 'want' them to develop confidence by refining skills so this 'safe' environment is the place to make mistakes.
- Get their buy-in to performance improvement. Adults need to be shown respect - a central tenet of adult learning. Getting buy-in is mixing the best of managing and persuasion. The secret to selling and buy-in is that people believe what 'they' say more than what others say – another reason for selling instead of telling. Whenever possible, help them to discover for themselves what they need by asking them questions rather than telling them. To motivate them to own the plan of action they must be fully enrolled in it so it's vital to allow them to voice their concerns, opinions and experience without interrupting or correcting them.
- Rather than saying, "you'd have gotten farther if you had asked better questions," ask, "What would you do differently if presented with this situation again?" When you allow the Salesperson the opportunity to pinpoint what can be improved you not only get their buy-in but you're able to train and coach them to evaluate their performance as though you were with them every day. Training and coaching them to assess their own performance will lead to lasting change.
- When soliciting self-evaluation, even if they are off base or a junior salesperson you can still help to steer them by asking modifying questions that help them discover for themselves what you would otherwise tell them. Once the plan of action is clear, check for understanding by *asking* them to tell you what success looks like and why it will help them get and grow their business. In saying it, they not only believe it, but will remember it, and most importantly, own it.
- Confirm the plan of action and define rewards (increased sales, recognition, etc.) that will result from success. Model selling skills to tie the behaviors to benefits and what the rep values. Tap in to what they need (money) and value. Adult learners have a need for practical information and will focus on the aspects that give them what they need and value. More on motivating and managing the 'white space' can be found in the Fire 'em Up™ Coaching program.

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- Whenever possible, schedule the next field contact and dates for follow up during the current session to ensure real transfer of skills. A key aspect is application and accountability for using and continuing to develop the knowledge and skills. Scheduled times and assignments for review help transfer knowledge and skills into success habits they'll use when you are not there. This is one of the fundamental aspects of the Distance Manager™ and Territory CEO™ programs.
- Remember to focus on progress over perfection because trying something new is always a risk for adults who fear looking incompetent, foolish, or clumsy. Remind the greater risk is in not trying at all. Reward willingness to experiment and reinforce any improvement.
- Performance improvement is a gradual process of small changes that can add up to revolutionary results in a progressive – not radical process. Because we set the bar high Managers and Salespeople can become discouraged if the results don't immediately follow new behaviors. Create realistic short-term benchmarks for success and reinforce the expectation for gradual development, not instant transformation. When Sales Representatives are willing to continuously learn and grow they will be successful, confident and happy you've ignited performance in training and in the field.



*For more ways to fuel their careers and yours, get the "Fire 'em Up™" Training and/or the Coaching™" programs. Both are in-demand/on-demand (24/7) programs consisting of content rich webinars and downloadable toolkits.*

***Fire 'em Up™ Training for Sales Performance*** This program teaches the Fire em' Up Model to overcome the biggest training challenges Managers face:

- What to train; including diagnosing a training need from a performance issue.
- Never enough time; including interactive lecture techniques.
- Getting buy-in; even from veteran reps.
- Creating sales performance; skills reinforcement & transfer to success habits.

***Fire 'em Up™ Coaching for Sales Performance*** Coaching is a critical aspect of the training model. In this program you will learn to:

- diagnose specific skill deficiencies and identify coaching remedies.
- Motivating the 'white space' of discretionary effort.
- avoid common pitfalls like creating backwards performance expectations.
- provide specific, behavioral based balanced feedback, identify one minute coaching opportunities.
- use words that motivate not alienate; write field contact reports that improve morale and performance.

To get your on-demand webinars and downloadable toolkits loaded with eye-opening tips, 'and how-to' training, coaching, and reinforcement tools go to:

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