

Do Your Sales Managers Know How to Coach?

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In an informal survey of over 100 sales managers, we found that most sales managers viewed coaching their salespeople as their first or second most important responsibility. Ironically, when we follow up that question with “How many of you spend as much time coaching as you would like?”, very few hands go up. Many companies are not satisfied with the ability of their sales managers to effectively coach their salespeople to success. Here are five things you can start doing right away to become a more effective coach:

1) Build Trust With Your Team

Coaching today’s sales professional begins with this element – do they trust you? We all understand the importance of trust as it pertains to our personal relationships and even how it pertains to selling and account managing. But have we created an environment of trust with our sales teams? A large part of building trust is how you treat the different levels of your salespeople. Do your top performers feel empowered? Do your under achievers understand their development areas? Some additional questions to ask yourself may include:

- ◆ “Do you effectively communicate with your team and do you listen to what they have to tell you?”
- ◆ “Do your sales people get excited when they learn that you’ll be conducting a call with them?”
- ◆ “Do they resist in sharing their goals and long term visions with you?”

A key element of building trust is creating a non-threatening environment.

There are a number of questions to ask yourself when contemplating whether you’ve created that non-threatening environment. They include:

- ◆ “Do I consider listening a strength of my character?”
- ◆ “Do I have an open door policy?”
- ◆ “Do I use my one-on-one meetings to better understand my rep’s territories, their progress, and to offer strategy?”

2) Accurately Assess Performance

Assessing performance may seem like a simple task; but if done correctly, there may be more than meets the eye. For example, do you understand what each member of your team member’s strengths and weaknesses are and have they been communicated to each individual? Do you understand “why” each person enjoys selling and what truly motivates them? Do you have a system for continually checking what motivates your sales people, knowing that the reasons can continually change?

An additional aspect of assessing performance has to do with development plans – does your team utilize them to achieve incremental success? Do they view development plans as “probation?” And lastly, are all of these aspects included in their reviews?

3) Provide Positive Encouragement

All you need to do is mention the word “feedback” and people begin to get nervous. Over the years, we have learned to associate feedback as negative – mainly because that is typically what happens in a feedback session. Too often, coaching is directly related to telling someone what they’ve done wrong. In order to truly coach today’s salesperson effectively, we need to understand that positive encouragement is as important as any other type of feedback. When was the last time you went out of your way to identify something positive about the members of your sales team?

There are some key areas to focus on when working with salespeople. For example, “Do you dominate the customer meetings – sending the message that you have to be in charge?” “Do you fully support your sales rep through both verbal and non-verbal communication?” And, “Do you recognize development effort and not just the results?”

4) Be a Role Model

We may not all agree that the role of a leader is to be a role model, but one thing we can all agree upon is the importance of being a positive role model for our teams. If you had to self-assess your performance in this area, how would you do? Do you practice what you preach?

A key area that we have much influence over is our attitudes. As a leader, the team’s attitude often starts with us. Do we understand what controls our attitude? Have we identified ways to maintain a positive attitude even through tough times?

Maybe a better way of looking at this is, “Are you role model in your industry or in your profession?” Do your team members view you as that “Industry Expert” and leader? And if we’re asking our people to self-assess their own performance, are we doing the same?

Tied closely to being a role model is being able to model the behaviors you expect in your people. The ability to model behavior is one of the strongest teaching methods for skill training.

But have you considered how you coach the behaviors you desire in your sales people? Being an effective role model can range from the ability to model a change initiative down to modeling a sales technique or process. It can also be used to establish a new practice such as goal setting. The old phrase, “The speed of the pack is determined by the lead dog” has relevance – what we do as leaders and the attributes we model is what we’ll see from our teams.

5) Bring Value to Customer Meetings

As a coach, when we get invited to be a part of a sales call or customer meeting, we are given the greatest opportunity to evaluate our salespeople. It’s also a great opportunity to build trust with our team members. How frequently do you get invited to go on sales calls? Is there a definitive strategy in place to always be on the same page? Are roles defined beforehand as to who will be doing what? Or do we take the motto, “We’ll just wing it when we get in there...”?

We all know the importance of planning for meetings – especially with our salespeople. Yet few of us actually go through the process due to time constraints or lack of skill. As coaches, this can be a development area for most of us – especially as schedules get squeezed with more distance coaching and larger teams.

For More Information:

Diamond Performance Group is a sales execution firm specializing in behavior change. By taking a holistic approach to sales and sales management development, we are able to achieve higher levels of behavior change and truly make a sustainable difference in output. The Diamond Coaching Process utilizes self-assessments to identify coaching blind spots and also to identify strengths and development areas of skill sets and attributes. If you’re interested in assessing yourself and your teams, please contact us at 952-233-5200 or at info@diamonddpg.com.