

Being a Great Sales Coach

[it's in the questions]

As a 'sales leader', at some point you will need to coach your sales team on their selling skills. Keep in mind that a great coach doesn't need to be the best player. Think about successful sports people. Their coaches usually have experience playing the game, but are not always championship players themselves. A great coach identifies areas for improvement, understands what drives the player, helps the player work on specific actions to improve results, and holds the player responsible for their ongoing improvement.

Moving from Babysitter to Coach



Poor performance by a sales team can often be caused by the team not being held accountable for producing results. Their manager may be acting more like a babysitter (i.e. hand-holding and responding to problems) rather than being a sales leader and supporting their team to be independent and productive.

In these situations you might see team members coming back to their manager asking too many questions (that the sales person should already know), to check what to do next, 'managing up' by getting the sales leader to do the work and therefore become responsible for what happens, or simply not being proactive. This creates frustration for the sales leader and limits the opportunity for professional development of the individual team member.

Help Them to Find Their Own Answers

Effective coaching requires you to resist telling your team 'what to do' and focus more on:

- Asking them "How could you improve?"
- Guiding them to discover and implement new options.
- Encouraging them to locate and use suitable resources.
- Helping them to help themselves.

Ideal coaching opportunities are:

- After a sales conversation on the phone.
- After a personal sales meeting with the client.
- When you accompany the sales person on sales calls.
- When reviewing results at weekly sales meetings.
- When planning for sales calls (maybe including practice/role play).

Provide Coaching While the Opportunity is Hot

Sales coaching should not be done at periodic performance review meetings. Usually these meetings are far too infrequent to be useful for coaching purposes. It is most effective to provide coaching while the event is still current and fresh in your team members mind.

In your coaching sessions, ask your team member to explain to you **what they did in a specific sales conversation**. Focus on specific actual things that happened. Explore with them what worked, what didn't work and what they plan to do differently next time.

Your questions will help your team members think more deeply and be more responsible for their actions and outcomes.



Questions to Ask

Effective sales coaching questions start with How, Why, What, When, including:

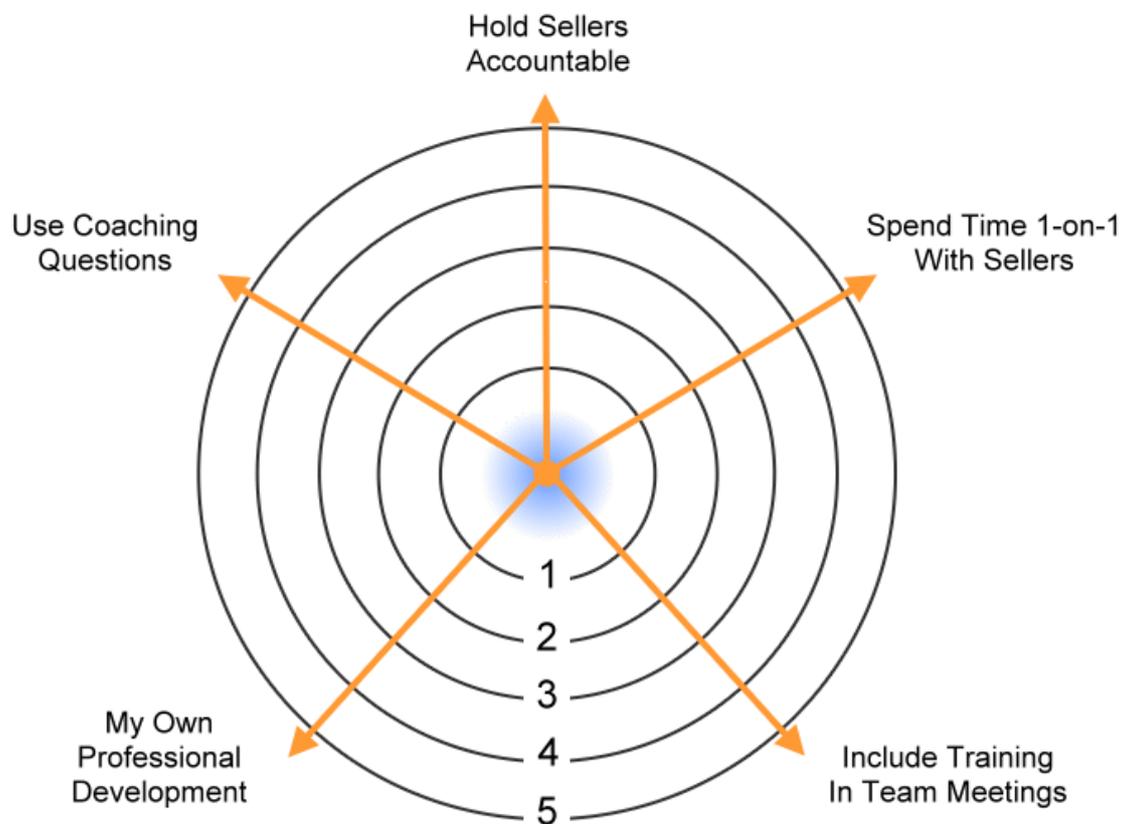
- How did the sales conversation go?
- What were you aiming to achieve from the conversation?
- How did your client/prospect respond?
- What did you do or say after that?
 - Why did you choose to do that?
- What do you think made the prospect react that way?
- When you met the prospect how did you start the conversation?
- Which questions did you ask?
- Was there any part that was challenging for you?
 - If yes, what made it challenging?
- What were the advantages of doing it that way?
- What were the disadvantages of doing it that way?
- When did you feel the conversation got out of your control?
- What did you do that may have prevented it from being even better?
- What could you do next time to handle it more effectively?

Planning for Success

Like any process, sales coaching can be improved by making adjustments over time. Listen to how you ask the questions. Do you get full and clear responses? Should you ask a different question? Could you approach your team member at a more suitable time?

Make time to review your own performance as a sales leader and coach. Plan for success.

Assessment & Action Plan for Being a Great Sales Coach



Note: 'Sellers' may include advisors, consultants, managers, professionals, technical staff, account managers and sales reps.

Step 1 – Assess Your Current Performance:

Rate yourself (place a cross) on each axis above for where your performance is now:

- 1 = Not happening at all
- 2 = Rarely happens
- 3 = Occasionally happens, but is usually reactive
- 4 = Frequently happens, but only when time allows
- 5 = Happens regularly, I make time to achieve it

Step 2 – Identify Areas for Improvement:

Performance Factor	Current Rating	Growth Potential (5 – current rating)
Hold Sellers Accountable		
Spend Time 1-on-1 With Sellers		
Include Training in Team Meetings		
Use Coaching Questions		
My Own Professional Development		

Step 3 – List Action Items:

Reflect on your assessment of your current performance and growth potential. List actions you will take to expand your skills and improve your performance as a sales leader.

Action Item	Success Criteria (Measurement)	Deadline or Priority

About the Author



Stuart Ayling is Chief Sales Strategist at Marketing Nous, a sales performance improvement firm based in Brisbane Australia. Clients are located in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, and further afield to the Middle East, including the Australian divisions of multi-national companies.

A typical client will have a team of business development staff possibly in roles such as consultants, managers, advisors, technical specialists, service technicians or sales reps. Often team members have a dual role of 'doing' (their area of expertise) as well as 'selling' (generating new business), and may struggle to be proactive with identifying and pursuing sales opportunities.

Stuart Ayling holds a Bachelors degree in marketing and a post graduate qualification in International Business, has lectured at the University of Queensland Business School, and has authored over 100 business development articles and sales improvement guides.

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