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Coaching Best Practices

For Modern Sales Leaders

Table of Contents

You Need Better Sales Coaching 2

SECTION 1: COACHING SESSIONS 3

 Daily Exercises 3

 Weekly 1-on-1s 4

 Monthly Drill-Down 4

SECTION 2: COLD CALLING 5

SECTION 3: PIPELINE MANAGEMENT 7

SECTION 4: ANALYZING CLOSED DEALS 9

SECTION 5: ONGOING COACHING 12



Select to go straight to that section

ABOUT LEVELLEVEN

LevelEleven is a sales management system that reinforces the fundamental behaviors that lead to closing business. LevelEleven’s suite of software and services allow sales executives to take high-level initiatives and break them down into controllable day-to-day activities for their salespeople. The system creates world class frontline sales managers who coach with consistency and use actionable data to drive results. With this guided selling approach, modern sales organizations maximize their ROI through increased sales productivity and CRM adoption.

You Need Better Sales Coaching

What would you do to have 161% more wins?

What about 26% more pipeline and 19% fewer loses?

These are just a few of the of the positive benefits associated with coaching according to Salesforce.

Now consider this research from the Sales Executive Council: In the age of ubiquitous technology, no other productivity investment improves rep performance better than sales coaching.

It makes sense. Vantage Point Performance partner Jason Jordan explains in "Selling Power" that anything learned by salespeople during a day of off-site training sits in their head until needed. Coaching from well-trained sales leaders happens every day in real time.

"No one has greater influence on a salesperson's skills and behaviors than their direct managers," Jason writes.

The challenge is that 73.6% of sales managers spend less than 1 hour per week coaching per rep according to the "2017 Sales Manager Enablement Report" by CSO Insights.

Given that limited amount of time, all sales leaders need to make sure that these coaching sessions are productive, effective, and consistent.

That's why we put together this step-by-step guide of best practices that we've learned from top sales leaders, so you can drive real results from sales coaching.

SECTION ONE

Coaching Sessions

Some coaching sessions should happen more frequently than others. Here are three approaches for different timeframes.

COACHING OPPORTUNITY #1

Daily Exercises

Daily exercises are very effective, especially for younger reps. Make the first half hour of every day a partner exercise, broken up into three 10-minute blocks:

- **First 10 Minutes:** Reps quiz each other on messaging. If a prospect is focused on hiring, what kind of questions should you ask? What case studies can you show someone whose organization just launched a new product? Which customer quotes would you share with a prospect who just had a poor Q1?
- **Second 10 Minutes:** Reps role-play as buyer and seller, addressing common objections and value propositions.
- **Final 10 Minutes:** Reps switch roles and role-play again.

Alternative Solution: For companies that don't have time to for daily exercises, recording sales calls can enhance training. Have reps record a few of their calls each week and share them with their manager and/or each other.



Did you know?

Sales teams who use sales coaching have 161% more wins than those who don't. ([Source](#))

COACHING OPPORTUNITY #2

Weekly 1-on-1s

On a regular basis (ideally weekly), sales managers should meet with their reps individually and talk about holistic performance. This may include some feedback on deals, pipeline, and meetings, but the overall purpose of the meeting is to discuss the overall performance of that salesperson.

We recommend reviewing activity metrics during these 1-on-1 meetings to see how individuals respond to coaching. A [Sales Management System](#) can streamline this process and provide recommendations when your team is falling off pace.

COACHING OPPORTUNITY #3

Monthly Drill-Down

Is there a particular activity where you would like your team to improve? Once a month or so, your team can drill down on specific skill training by using the [Pomodoro Technique](#), where reps focus on one specific activity for 25 minutes, and then break to talk about it for five minutes. Here's one way to structure it for your team:

- 25 Minutes: Reps independently perform specific activity (writing emails, making calls, etc.)
- 5 Minutes: Reps record number of activities completed on collective whiteboard. Team gathers to discuss what worked, what didn't work, etc.
- Repeat for desired amount of time (a few hours is a good benchmark)



Did you know?

74% of leading companies say sales coaching is the most important role of a front-line sales manager. But less than 20% of the average sales manager's time is spent on proactive sales coaching. ([Source](#))

SECTION TWO

Cold Calling

COACHING OPPORTUNITY #4

Cold Calling

Your sales reps should be precision shooters. Snipers of prospects. Marksmen in finding and reaching your buyers.

This means they are experts at identifying, contacting and communicating value to your ideal customer profile.

A great way for sales leaders to coach around this is with team targeted call-out sessions, where you gather your entire team in a conference room for an hour or so and practice making phone calls. Each rep should have the chance to make a phone call to one of their contacts. If you have more than ten people on your team, consider breaking the team into smaller groups.

These sessions are valuable because they allow you to coach reps on their calling techniques, and the entire team gets the chance to learn from their peers. This also inspires peer collaboration and mentorship.

Here are five easy steps to hold your own sales development targeted call-out sessions:

STEP 1: PREP REPS

Send your reps an email invite to the targeted call session. Ask them to each bring 15 contacts that they'd like to reach out to during the session, as well as a computer, pen, notepad and energy. (You should come prepared with these things, as well).

If they aren't familiar with the exercise, explain that this is not to throw anybody under the bus or highlight what they aren't doing well. Emphasize that this is purely a coaching session to help reps hear and learn from their peers, as well as receive feedback from you.

STEP 2: PARTICIPATE

Kick off the call session by doing the first dial yourself. Whether you have your own batch of leads to pursue or you're just reaching out to make connections with key players, the best way to get reps fired up for this coaching session is to set the tone by making the first call.

Start by introducing the contact you're reaching out to. Quickly review with your team:

- Who the contact is
- What the contact does
- Why you're reaching out to this contact
- What the goal of your conversation is
- What messaging you're going to use (and why)

Then make the call. You can either mute yourself to make comments to your team during the call or do a quick recap afterward to explain your decisions and strategy.

STEP 3: TAKE TURNS

After your call, go around the room and let your reps take turns going through the same process. For each rep, ask them to explain those same five points you went through:

- Who is your contact?
- What does he or she do?
- Why are you reaching out to this contact?
- What is the goal of your conversation?
- What messaging will you use, and why?

Then let them make the call. If the contact doesn't answer, you can all still provide feedback on the voicemail.

STEP 4: PROVIDE FEEDBACK

This is the critical step to your call session. Listen carefully to every aspect of their call, including the introduction, the messaging, the language, the pitch and the tone. Then provide feedback based on your organization's selling techniques.

Did the rep start by listing off features and functionality of your product? Show them how to focus more on the problems your product solves. Did they leave a three-minute voicemail? Coach them around making a quick pitch in 30 seconds or less.

STEP 5: REPEAT

Last, but certainly not least, go through this exercise with each of your reps in the session. You can run through the entire group two to three times, but try to not let the session drag on for so long that the initial energy and excitement is lost.

Use these five steps to hold effective team coaching sessions, and feel free to adjust or add anything that might fit better with your sales process.

SECTION THREE

Pipeline Management

COACHING OPPORTUNITY #5

Pipeline Management

Any message from a sales rep that includes “touching base,” “circling back” or “checking in” will be ignored [according to Jill Konrath](#).

“When you leave messages like this, your prospect deletes them in a nanosecond. Worse yet, they see you as just another pesky salesperson. Clearly, that's not good!”

She's right. That's why, as a sales leader, you need to educate your reps on how to manage their pipeline and prevent prospects from going dark by constantly bringing something to the table (instead of forcing a sale upon prospects).

Here are seven takeaways from Jill on how you can coach your sales reps around road blocks in the sales process.

LESSON 1: HOW TO DETERMINE WHERE OPPORTUNITIES GET STUCK

The first thing is to teach your reps how to figure out where they're losing prospects because different problem areas require different actions. Is there a certain stage of the sales process that they're struggling to get past?

LESSON 2: HOW TO SEE IT FROM THE BUYER'S PERSPECTIVE

Help your reps find patterns between what stages of the sales process opportunities get stuck at and what might have been going on in the buyer's head at the time. Then develop coaching strategies around what they could do to reignite conversations with those prospects or do better in the future.

LESSON 3: HOW TO DEMONSTRATE CLEAR BUSINESS VALUE

Another lesson for reps is making sure they've communicated the value of your product or service. Teach reps how to understand and communicate the value that prospects will get from your company. Share your case studies with them and give examples of how to use those in the sales process. Even let them sit in on a few customer calls where you talk about the success that customer has had with your platform, so that your reps can learn to communicate your value prop clearly to prospects.

LESSON 4: HOW TO BE A CHAMPION FOR YOUR INTERNAL CHAMPION

Teach reps how to navigate those various relationships in an account — specifically, how to prevent the sales process from being stopped by a lack of decisions by the buying team.

You can then train your reps to be champions for your internal champions — this means helping the prospects in the account who are ready to purchase but might be held up by others in the organization.

LESSON 5: HOW TO FOLLOW THE CHANGING (PRIORITY) TIDES

When priorities change, sales reps need to stop and think about what's now happening in the company, what might happen and how they can reconfigure their business value to align with the new objectives.

LESSON 6: ASK TOUGH QUESTIONS

Another reason to have your reps get more engaged with multiple people within an account is to prevent them from getting boxed in with the wrong person. Make sure they ask prospects critical questions to ensure they're talking to the right people. In addition to locating the decision-makers in the buying process, show reps how to use tough questions to determine real interest. Have reps ask serious questions about their intentions.

LESSON 7: BRING MORE TO THE TABLE

While it can be helpful to give prospects all of the information, Jill suggested holding back information that isn't crucial to know at the given moment — information that's nice-to-know, not need-to-know. Demonstrate for reps how those interesting pieces of information you saved can be used to reach out to prospects. Encourage your reps to get creative in order to engage the prospect again.

Use these seven lessons — in no particular order — to help your sales reps become masters at managing their own pipeline.

SECTION FOUR

Analyzing Closed Deals

COACHING OPPORTUNITY #6

Analyzing Closed Deals

Time kills deals.

That's why it's imperative for your sales team to focus their time on the activities that matter to closing deals. But every organization is different, and that means the set of activities that lead to sales will be unique to each team.

What's a sales leader to do? Don't worry – we've got your back.

To figure out what activities impact your number of sales wins, bring your team together to conduct an analysis of what worked and what didn't in your most recent deals won and lost.

TO GET THINGS STARTED....

Arrange a meeting with your reps to hold a sales win/loss analysis session. Tell them to come with information on the last few deals they won and the last few deals they've lost (ideally, three of each).

For the lost deals, focus on the companies that made it to the later stages of the sales process, such as contracting or negotiating. Especially for younger companies still figuring out their lead flow, it's more important to focus on where things went wrong further down the line.

With both analyses, try to consider your sales process from the customer's point of view (i.e. think about how your customer buys).

THE WIN ANALYSIS

Once you have your sales team together, go around the room and have each rep pick one of their closed won deals and walk everyone through the process in detail. Ask specific questions, like:

- Where did this lead come from?
- How did you reach out?
- Who did you talk to?
- How did your first conversation go?
- What happened next?

In addition, ask questions to get the nuanced details of how and why the customer bought:

- What problems were they trying to solve?
- What were their goals?
- What were they thinking about?
- What did they talk to you about?
- Were they looking at competitors?

Finally, ask the higher level questions to understand what turned this deal into a success.

- What did the prospect say early on that told you this deal was good to pursue?
- How did you present your value proposition and use case?
- Who was involved in the decision making process?

When you go around the room and have each rep answer these questions, you might get overwhelmed with the immense amount of information. So take notes. And highlight trends in behaviors (both on the part of buyer and seller) that lead to success for your team. (Bonus: Your reps are listening to, and learning from, what's worked for their peers.)

THE LOSS ANALYSIS

This is as, if not more, important as your win analysis. Keep in mind that it can be unnerving for reps to talk about deals they lost, and they probably won't be comfortable doing it the first few times.

Set the stage for your loss analysis by explaining that this isn't to highlight what reps did wrong; it's merely a learning process. Yes, the deal was lost — but that's yesterday's news. The best way to move forward is to discover what went wrong and how to fix it in the future.

Just like your win analysis, go around the room and have each rep walk through a recent deal they lost. It might be difficult to pull information from reps (as they are likely nervous), but you can probe them for some of the finer points, with questions like:

- At what stage did this deal start to go south?
- Looking back now, what would you have done differently?
- What signal did you get that you wish you would have listened to?
- How could you have anticipated the deal was going south sooner?

Reiterate that this is a safe environment, and no one is criticizing reps for losing the deal. After identifying how and when the rep could have avoided wasted time on a bad opportunity, go deeper into what might have made it a good opportunity with questions like:

- What could you have done differently to win this deal?
- If you could change one thing about how you managed the process, what would it be?
- What can you and your peers learn from this?

Answers could be across the board – from reps admitting they didn’t qualify leads well enough in the beginning to not validating a prospect’s interest level in actually purchasing soon.

Once you’ve heard these answers from each sales rep, you’ll notice more trends in terms of what’s preventing deals from being won. Again, take notes. Identify where reps are seeing similar issues (i.e., Are reps targeting companies that don't have a real need for your product? Are they not communicating the value of your service effectively?).

Finally, take everything you’ve learned about what works in your win analysis and what doesn’t work from your loss analysis and apply it to your sales process. Did you learn that reps didn't connect with the right, VP-level people in the organization to make the purchasing decisions? You could add “VP-Level Conversations” as a step that reps need to complete within the sales process (and then track it as a KPI, of course).

Do this with each of your takeaways, and then continue to coach your reps around the behaviors that you’ve learned lead to closed deals for your team. We would also recommend looking into investing in a [Sales Management System](#) to standardize the coaching best practices you have learned during this exercise.



Did you know?

No other productivity investment improves rep performance better than coaching. ([Source](#))

SECTION FIVE

Ongoing Coaching

COACHING OPPORTUNITY #7

Ongoing Coaching

Coaching sales reps is one of your most important jobs as a sales leader, but it can be hard to find the time given our busy modern work schedules. Furthermore, how do you make sure that these coaching sessions are as productive as possible?

REGULAR CADENCE

- Make sure that your 1-on-1s take place regularly (ideally weekly) with each rep on the team
- Make sure that they happen (it is OK to reschedule within the week)
- Don't fall into the trap of "we talk every day so we don't need it"

SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE

- Start with what is going well and where does the rep need help
- Review performance against key performance indicators that lead to sales (be sure to look at trends over time)
- Document action items for next meeting



Did you know?

A 5% increase in productivity across the core (middle 60%) of the sales team yields 70% more revenue than the same shift in productivity of top performers. ([Source](#))



Thanks for reading!

Want to see what modern sales management looks like?
[Click here to review the LevelEleven product suite!](#)

Looking for additional resources?
[Click here to check out our sales management library!](#)

