

The B2B Sales Coaching Challenge: How Technology Can Help



— EXECUTIVE SUMMARY —

As sales teams encounter increased market challenges and heightened competition, industry surveys reveal one activity to have the greatest positive impact: sales coaching. But even some of the most passionate coaching advocates admit they're not devoting the proper resources to coaching the right way.

Effective sales coaching must include:

- Instilling a coaching culture from leadership down
- Hiring or promoting the right people to sales manager positions
- Giving sales managers the right time and tools to coach effectively
- Relying on technology to drive real, measurable results

In this paper, you'll see why coaching is an integral part of sales enablement, when it can falter, and how the right coaching technology can help sales managers turn 'B' reps into 'A' game superstars.

The Simple, Rapid Value of Coaching

When Tom Hayden was a brand-new sales rep, his manager took the lead on his first 10 sales calls, and had Tom watch. For the second 10 calls, Tom was in charge and the manager piped in when necessary.

For calls 21 through 30, Tom ran the show. His manager just sat by and listened. “It was sort of crawl, walk, run,” remembers Tom, who became a top seller routinely exceeding his targets, and now is director of enterprise growth accounts at marketing agency Harte Hanks.

“I would take each call as far as I could, and he would say, ‘Go this direction.’ Seeing what works and what doesn’t, and having the hands-on guidance just an arm’s length away, gives you the confidence you need and accelerates the learning process.”

A number of recent surveys and studies reinforce that Tom is right. This kind of coaching between sales reps and their managers vastly improves reps’ sales effectiveness; conversely, a lack of it has a negative effect on performance.

With a business climate that’s increasingly competitive and complex, and teams of sales reps fanning out across the globe, coaching is more necessary than ever.

Yet many of the same corporate leaders who rank coaching at the top of their wish lists also confess they do too little of it.

Not Your Father’s Sales Teams

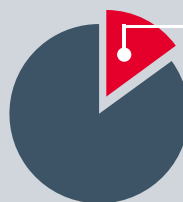
Mostly gone are the days when rookie reps and grizzled managers sweated together in high-pressure, *Glengarry Glen Ross*-style bullpens. These days, when reps and managers *are* in the same place at the same time, they’re often too overscheduled to

Sales coaching ranks as the

#1

activity to impact sales effectiveness.

but



ONLY
15%

of managers say they have the right amount of coaching at their organization.

-The Sales Management Association ¹

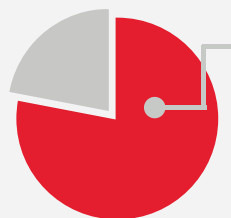
coach or be coached. The opportunities they do have may be squandered on ineffective techniques.

A fresh emphasis on coaching is beginning to trickle into sales departments. By using the kinds of data analytics already harnessed in other fields, sales leaders are pinpointing areas that need improvement. And sales managers are using technology to deliver coaching in new ways—including at a distance.

“There’s such focus on coaching now that if you’re not a good coach, you’re going to be found out,” says Michael Crain, vice president for global sales and product development for CloudCoaching International, a consultancy whose 1,000 corporate clients include half of the Fortune 500.

The Positive Impact of Great Coaching

According to three separate surveys,² the kind of accountability Crain describes is warranted. All showed that, of all the activities on which supervisors spend their time, coaching has the biggest impact on employee performance.



74%

of leading companies rank coaching as sales managers' most important role

-Forbes Insights - Brainshark



94%

of sales reps who receive exceptional coaching hit their quotas

-CSO Insights

Seventy-four percent of leading companies rank coaching and mentoring as the most important roles played by sales managers, according to research by Forbes Insights and Brainshark.³ And CSO Insights reports that companies whose coaching programs exceed expectations see more than 94 percent of sales reps meet their targets —10 percentage points more than those whose coaching programs need improvement.⁴

“Despite the fact that coaching might have the best impact on results, we’re not doing enough of it,” says Robert Kelly, founder and chairman of the Sales Management Association and adjunct faculty member at Emory University’s Goizueta Business School.

Coaching has become so important, says Crain, that companies are likely losing

more than just sales if they don't coach well – they're also losing top people. "We now know that when we lose good talent, it's about connections between employees and their managers," Crain

explains. "The world has never been smaller and employees have more options than ever. They can find a new job by tomorrow morning. We need to honor that and understand that we have to up our game."

Coaching ≠ Training

Of course, one-time training doesn't get the job done. A majority of corporate leaders say three out of four sales reps tune out classroom learning and never use the techniques they're shown. Even well-planned training falls short if it's not implemented in a way that sticks with sales reps.

"We have to get out of the business of training people and then walking away and expecting they're going to do something differently," says Mike Kunkle, senior director of sales enablement at Brainshark.

What makes a real difference? Experts and sales reps say face-to-face coaching, in person or by video. Depending on the situation, either one-on-one interactions or team coaching can be equally valuable.

"The beauty of coaching, and what makes it so effective, is it's not the typical teaching style where there's lecture and teaching, and you try and repeat it," says Christa

Pusateri, a former sales rep and sales coach who's now vice president of marketing for cyber-security firm Lynx Technology Partners.

Pusateri recalls the learning process that took place when she was in sales:

"Before calls, there would be the pre-call planning portion: 'Do you understand what you're trying to get out of this meeting?' Afterward it was, 'What parts went well? What parts didn't go well?' If you don't have a coach asking you that, sometimes you skip over pieces or miss information that's really critical in making the calls successful."

Which sounds much easier than it proves to be.

"Despite the fact that coaching might have the best impact on results, we're not doing enough of it."

Robert Kelly,
The Sales Management
Association

87%

of training content
is forgotten within
30 days⁵

When Coaching Doesn't Work: 3 Mistakes and How to Correct Them

1. Having poor process from the top down

If a manager is going to coach sales reps toward improvement, he or she must be well-chosen and well-trained for the role. At some companies, this is almost completely overlooked.

“Managers often are promoted into the job because they were great sales reps. They may not be suited for the job, and they’re not trained for it, necessarily,” says Joe Gustafson, Brainshark’s founder and

chairman. “Just because you’re a great player doesn’t mean you’re a good teacher or coach. I’ve also seen people who weren’t great sales reps who were great coaches. People are wired for different things.”

2. Not giving sales managers time for coaching

Front offices often pile so much work on sales managers that they’re left little time for coaching – especially frustrating when a big chunk of that assigned work isn’t focused on improving sales productivity and performance.

“This is a common theme in corporate America, where sales managers are dumped on and pulled on,” Kunkle says. “Their job is to manage, lead, and develop their team to get the best sales results possible. When that expectation is clear throughout the organization and their time is protected so they can actually spend it in the field, observing and coaching, then the front-line sales managers become the real drivers of organizational growth.”

Kunkle remembers being brought in as a consultant by a company whose sales reps were complaining they didn’t get any coaching from their managers.

“There were so many demands being made by the corporate office on the managers,” says Kunkle, and not one of those things was coaching.” The company decided to free up the managers’ time for coaching by farming out many of those tasks.

“At some point the decision has to be made that we want our managers doing this, and that’s going to give us better business results,” Kunkle says.

“Sales managers are dumped on and pulled on... their job is to manage, lead, and develop their team.”

Mike Kunkle,
Brainshark

3. A lack of coaching focus

Once you've set time aside for coaching, it must be used to best enact positive results. That means focusing on the one part of the sales process that nearly everyone involved says is most pivotal: conversations with potential buyers.

"The behavior a salesperson demonstrates in front of a customer, whether it's through a phone call or a live meeting, that's the part you have to coach," says Crain. "For example, tone of voice. What do you sound like? What's your body language? Do you 'um'? Do you 'uh'? You have to get close enough to your rep to see those behaviors."

Sales reps agree that the most important coaching they've received has been about the art of conversation with their customers.

"One of the first things I remember a manager telling me was: 'Who talks, buys,'" says Pierre-Jean Bissonnette, an accounts manager at 3-D software company Autodesk. "Meaning that, in a meeting, if the client is sharing and talking with you, he's buying what you're selling. He exposes himself and then you're in a better position to pinpoint what he wants and what he needs. A successful meeting is a meeting where I don't talk at all."

The New Era of Coaching Analytics

When coaching is a part of the sales enablement process, it should yield insights into which sales tactics are working, and which aren't. Technology is changing the way insights are obtained and shared.

For one thing, data is increasingly becoming the gold standard for tracking and understanding sales teams' strengths and weaknesses, bringing science to a process that was previously imprecise. Gustafson recalls how reviews happened in the pre-data world—and why they didn't work: "A rep met with their manager once a week and the manager said, 'Tell me about your deals.' Of course, he or she only told them the ones that turned out the best. What a waste of time that is. But, if you looked at analytics dashboards that say,

okay, Joe's got 10 deals he's working on, and you can see where they are and add a score and make comparisons with other sales reps, now the manager can really dig in."

Gustafson credits today's data-centric tools with being able to solve a problem he believes was best summed up by 19th-century merchant John Wanamaker, who said, "Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don't know which half."

If Wanamaker had access to data analytics in the 1890s, he'd probably have known which half was wasted. The right data analytics technology can reveal which parts of the sales process are most or least effective. It can also track engagement with specific components of the process, such as whether customers have clicked on any of the digital material presented, indicating whether or not they're interested.

Understanding the Role Data Plays

Problems occur when companies put too much faith in analytics for its own sake, and know too little about what actually happens during a sales call. At that point, says Gustafson, "we're back in the old John Wanamaker days."

Such companies may be "awash in data, but they're absent wisdom," says Kunkle. Understanding how to sift through it and know what it all means can be a challenge.

"There's so much information that sometimes you almost don't know what the heck to do with it," he says. "If you can pull a report that says reps are making a certain number of contacts on a daily basis but not creating new leads, then they're probably not using an effective contact strategy."

That information becomes valuable only when you can do something actionable with it, says Kunkle. When you can "make the link to human behaviors – how can I make the human behaviors change to get better results?"

Crain says data can reveal a problem, but it doesn't help solve it. "It just tells you there's a problem here. I want to get as close as I can to the behavior," Crain says, "and that means I want to know what you're saying and how you're saying it."

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-Michael Crain,
CloudCoaching International

Technology Delivers the Coaching Connection

The best way to understand sales reps' behaviors is through observation. But with increasingly dispersed sales forces, there are too few opportunities for that. Technology can help.

If I have a global team, I can't meet with you one-on-one – but I can Skype with you," Crain says. "Or, if we're in different time zones, I can record something for you, or have you practice a pitch, record it and send it to me."

To delve further into reps' interactions, sales managers are using high-tech tools far more advanced than Skype. At information management company Iron Mountain, the coaching process includes recording sales reps having mock, two-way conversations.

“It’s a great way to have the rep spend a lot of time preparing their best effort,” says Kevin Starnner, vice president of sales enablement.

Those kinds of role-playing videos can be utilized beyond one-on-one coaching. Sales managers can use them in intra-team challenges to drive performance, with competitions for best elevator pitch, for instance.

“The reps fire up their laptops and webcams, and give their pitches,” says Kunkle. “When they don’t like the results, they do it again, and when they don’t like those, they do it again. Now they’ve practiced three times,” says Kunkle.

Meanwhile, the sales manager gets a useful framework to decide who needs which kinds of coaching.

Beyond video chats and recorded pitches, technology can enable coaching in another potentially unexpected way: by automating administrative tasks like preparing expense reports, so sales managers have more time to coach. “That puts hours back into the day,” Gustafson says.

Once technology is used to its full potential, analytics can reflect the sales organization’s total effectiveness – tracking not just how well each stage of the sales process is going, but getting a complete comparison of the team’s pre-coaching and post-coaching world, from number of closed deals to employee satisfaction and staff turnover. That’s when the case for coaching has real, proven ROI. And the progress can continue.

“Maybe the next phase,” Gustafson says, “is tracking the managers with data.”

Brainshark for Coaching

Intuitive Interface
Instant Communication
Detailed Feedback
Effective Selling



See how Brainshark
helps businesses
deliver effective
sales coaching

About Brainshark

Brainshark sales enablement solutions help organizations harness the power of content to achieve faster training, better coaching and more successful sales conversations.

Using Brainshark to simplify content creation and delivery, companies can ensure salespeople are always up-to-date with the information and resources they need – anytime, anywhere and from any device. Tight integration with Salesforce empowers reps with fast, easy access to the right content and training for every selling situation. Brainshark's detailed analytics also help companies tie content directly to revenue and identify the best sales opportunities, while enabling managers to pinpoint best practices to improve coaching effectiveness.

Thousands of companies – including half of the Fortune 100 – rely on Brainshark to improve sales productivity and increase the impact of their sales, marketing and training communications. Learn more at www.brainshark.com.

Contact

Brainshark Inc.

(866)-276-7427

info@brainshark.com



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2. Harvard Business Review, [The Dirty Secret of Effective Sales Coaching](#), 2011; CEB Global, [Customer Content Council Supervisor Effectiveness Survey](#), 2012
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4. CSO Insights, [2015 Sales Management Optimization Study](#), 2015
5. CEB Blogs, [Why Your Sales Training is Falling Short](#), 2014

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Building 1
130 TURNER STREET
BRAINSHARK

STONY BROOK