

THE BIG PICTURE: INFORMATIONAL SERIES

SALES COACHING: ROI IN REAL TIME

A sales coach is a great idea to build the skills and insights necessary for selling in a highly competitive environment. But we often are asked to assess if candidates are ready and willing to make the most of it. A successful sales coaching relationship is just as dependent on readiness as it is finding a great coach. Sales executives and their managers who are considering an executive coach need more than a desire to improve selling skills. Here are some key points to think about before extending sales coaching to an individual:

1. **Attitude:** The perception of or attitude toward coaching greatly affects one's readiness to benefit from engaging a coach. Questions to ask candidates include:
 - Do they believe coaching is a sign of weakness or a worthwhile developmental strategy?
 - Are they motivated to make changes for themselves or for other people?
 - Would they feel sales coaching is more valuable than the free advice they can get from books, colleagues, and seminars?
 - Are they confident that they have the ability to change their behavior?
 - How open and receptive are they to new ideas and new behaviors?

Ultimately, the most important attribute one can bring to a sales coaching engagement is receptivity

to new ideas and openness to different ways of addressing customer issues. Without that willingness, candidates are likely to be frustrated with their coach and could feel that the coaching isn't worth their time and effort. But some resistance to personal change is to be expected. If they have some negative feelings but generally look forward to improving their selling abilities, candidates can likely move forward with confidence.

2. **Time:** The organization and the individual needs to decide if they are willing and able to devote the time necessary to work with a coach. The candidate needs to assess whether they can make the time for any homework, such as attending networking events, detailed account planning, or journal writing. We also look at their travel and events calendar to determine if they will be free of unusual demands, such as the birth of a child or a family relocation.

3. **Trust:** A lot of information is shared in coaching sessions and not everyone comes to the sales coaching process with an open mind. Candidates for sales coaching need and deserve to know why they were selected, what the intended benefits are, and what they can expect from the process. Communication is key. Mix the message, and sales coaching is doomed for failure.

4. **Senior Level Support:** Support from the executive suite is critical for any organizational development initiative to gain traction, let alone set the tone for sales coaching. The organization that fails at distributing sales coaching throughout an organization is often one that has kept salespeople at a distance when communicating objectives and setting strategy. Sales coaching works well in organizations in which senior leaders act as enablers, as a trusted resource to their sales team, and facilitate healthy dialogues around the direction of the business. These are all key ingredients of a sales culture that coaches everyday.

5. **Process:** For sales coaching programs to take hold, a certain modicum of process is necessary for coaching engagements to reach their full potential. Successful sales coaching programs start with a thorough needs clarification process, and build momentum through the following steps:
 - Joint Planning - with candidate, sales manager, HR and the coach
 - Assessment - self, manager, peers, structured sales interview or 360 degree tool
 - Action Planning - sales objectives and personal objectives
 - Coaching - sales coaching tied to a personally prescribed action plan
 - Evaluation - of the coach, the candidate and the support organization