

THE BIG PICTURE: INFORMATIONAL SERIES

“SALES” EXECUTIVE COACHING

Nine out of ten salespeople want job coaching, but less than four receive it. That's the latest research into the importance and impact of developing and retaining top salespeople. At ProDirect, we have been saying for years that coaching is the greatest accelerator for sales performance. When managers take positive steps to bring out the best in their salespeople, they are rewarded with loyalty and dedicated effort. So what's the problem? Typically sales managers don't coach for 1 of 4 major reasons:

1. Don't know how
2. Perceive that it takes too much time (and I don't have it)
3. Feel their people don't or shouldn't need it
4. Never had a mentor or coaching example in their own career

Here are a few tips to reinforce effective selling behaviors and to discourage poor ones:

COACHING TIP #1: BE PROACTIVE

Managers too often confuse coaching with confrontation, usually because they only start coaching salespeople when those reps have an issue. But

this most often yields short-term rewards. If you want a productive sales force, you've got to provide coaching on a regular basis, from the first day on the job. This means coaching not just during sales slumps but for offering praise or incremental support for work well done. Instead of judging, Sales Managers need to reflect on the behaviors that they've observed, and offer salespeople constructive feedback. We tell Sales Managers to be hard on the issues, softer on the person.

COACHING TIP #2: HEAR AND UNDERSTAND

Once you've shared your assessment with a salesperson, open the floor to hear their side of the story. Even better, ask for his or her assessment before you give your own. This puts reps at ease by letting them know you value their input. In fact, some of the best sessions happen when you let the salesperson talk first.

COACHING TIP #3: MAKE IMPROVEMENTS IN INCREMENTS

In assessing salespeople, hold them accountable only for those behaviors that in previous coaching sessions you both agreed they would perform. It's

unrealistic to expect a change of 15 behaviors in two weeks. Carefully plot out the desired changes and time lines for those changes with your salespeople. Most often managers will see behavior modification at 60 days and real behavior change at 90 to 180 days.

COACHING TIP #4: BE AUTHENTIC and POSITIVE

This doesn't mean merely maintaining a positive attitude. That's essential. But you also need to keep your phrasing = positive. The message should be "Remember to call Jones Industries," not "Don't forget to call Jones Industries." Avoiding negatives like "don't forget" isn't just a trivial syntactic trick-it's a communication strategy with real-world payoffs.

Sales Coaching really operates from a basic premise: People want to perform well, but don't always know how. Your goal as a sales coach is to point out the how, very precisely, and trust them to make the adjustments that will help them sell better.