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SALES PERFORMANCE



The Five Capabilities Needed to Lead Salespeople

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As sales teams become more diverse it has never been more important to develop a leadership style that speaks to everyone.

The sales team of today represents a range of personalities. Sales leaders need a new set of skills if they are going to lead each salesperson to the same goal.

Developing this kind of leadership means knowing how to understand the motivations of each seller and how to address them. This is not easy. Sales leaders need a range of skills to accomplish this.

They need to be able to adapt their leadership to the individual. They need to be able to deliver iterative coaching that adjusts to change. They need to conduct the kind of conversations that instill confidence in the seller.

Here we offer the core skills that sales leaders need to do just that.

Each of these capabilities can be put to use immediately so the entire sales team feels equipped to face the challenges ahead.



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01 Coaching with a “Sprint”

MODERN COACHING SEEKS TO DEVELOP NOT DIRECT

The coming months will likely present sellers and sales managers with a lot of change in a short amount of time. Therefore, sales leaders need to be agile. They need to adopt a coaching style that is designed for a setting that demands flexibility.

Putting this idea into use means getting clear about the actions that define agility in coaching. In our work with dozens of Fortune 500 companies we have learned that the answer is to work at a “sprint” which consists of three parts.

First, coaches need to prepare. Sales leaders must know the purpose of their coaching conversation by identifying where the greatest opportunity for the seller’s improvement lies. They must understand what is working and what is not, the desired outcomes, the root issues, and the action needed from the seller. With this information they can develop a plan which includes a list of questions they will ask the seller.

Second, coaches must engage the seller. They must establish a collaborative setting that is free from interruption. Next, they need to coach by assessing what must change, then analysing the underlying issue causing a performance gap, and finally seeking the seller’s commitment to the next steps.

Third, the coach must advance their coaching process by seeking the seller’s feedback on the coaching experience, keeping a record of what was discussed, and ensuring regular follow-up.

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02 Conducting Vital Conversations

A VITAL CONVERSATION IS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE CONVERSATION GETS REAL

Sometimes a sales manager needs a new approach after making multiple attempts to address an issue with a seller. These conversations are not about overall performance. Instead, they place the focus on a particular area of the seller's work that must change.

Without a model, these conversations can become emotional, contentious, and disorganised. Conversations like these are crucial for maintaining the kind of communication that underpins strong relationships. Consider research from Gallup which shows that "when top producers leave companies, 70% of the time it is because of a breakdown in their relationship with their direct supervisor."

An effective model prepares the manager by focusing their efforts on five key questions:

Is a Vital Conversation Necessary?

A vital conversation is needed when a previously addressed issue remains unresolved.

Is the Issue Supported by Facts and Data?

The issue is supported by facts when there is at least one data point that illustrates the problem.

Is There a Clear Talk Track?

The talk track is clear when the sales manager has a clear list of points to make in the right order.

Is There Confirmation of the Plan?

Confirming the plan means reviewing the prepared remarks with a peer to ensure that the message is clear and unbiased.

Is Any Prework Needed?

Here, prework refers to any preparation the seller may need to do before the conversation.

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03 Leading Strategic One-on-Ones

THE MOST EFFECTIVE ONE-ON-ONES ANSWER SIX KEY QUESTIONS

The seller's and the sales manager's time is valuable. A one-on-one meeting means both professionals are stepping away from their selling activities. Therefore, the sales manager has a responsibility to make the time meaningful. Doing so means having a plan.

Building that plan means answering six questions. This format helps focus the sales manager's efforts on the areas that will be most impactful to the seller's development.

What is The Big Picture?

Sales leaders should give the seller an opportunity to discuss a strategic goal or an aspect of their selling that spans a long period.

What is Working?

Feedback only works when it is balanced. Before the sales manager discusses areas for improvement, they need to discuss what is working well.

What is Not Working?

While this part of the one-on-one might seem negative, it can be presented as an opportunity for the seller to alleviate the stress that comes from an unmet challenge.

What Has Been Achieved?

What progress has the seller made against the action plan discussed in the previous one-on-one? Sales managers can ask about new relationships formed and highlights from sales pursuits.

Where is Help Needed?

It is important for the sales manager to first ask if the seller can make these changes on their own because intervening can become taxing on the manager's time and diminish the seller's sense of control.

What is The Action Plan?

Here, both parties seek to identify what specific actions can be taken to address the issues, what the specific goals for the coming month are, and what expectations the manager has of the seller.

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04 Managing Different People Differently

DRIVING THE INDIVIDUAL'S PERFORMANCE IS ABOUT UNDERSTANDING WHAT DRIVES THEM

Sales managers need a framework for recognising and addressing the numerous parts of each seller. This idea not only makes intuitive sense, but it also underpins the most engaged sales teams. Research from Catalyst shows that 76% of employees who work with empathetic leaders report feeling engaged at work, as compared to only 36% who feel engaged when they experience less empathy.

Fostering this sense of engagement means taking the time to learn more about each seller. After all, the team's performance is simply the aggregate of several individuals all of whom are guided by a different set of principles. Learning about these individual principles and responding to them means doing four things.

First, sales managers need to broaden their thinking and consider the seller's individual traits. The key is to recognise that one person has many dimensions.

Second, it is critical to examine how these individual traits influence the way in which the seller responds to their work. Through conversations the manager can learn about the seller's personality, what they value in their job, their skill strengths, and weaknesses, and what motivates them.

Third, the coaching routine must be individualized. Managers must determine how often they must meet with each seller, the format that is best for coaching them, how much recognition is needed to motivate them, and the amount of feedback they need.

Fourth, an individualised coaching plan is an iterative endeavor. Managers must observe where and why certain areas of the seller's performance falters. With these observations, the manager can adjust, as needed.

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05 Motivating Sales Professionals

To properly motivate a seller both their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation must align with the same goals. Many sales managers believe they can only influence the seller's extrinsic motivation. The truth is that intrinsic motivation can in fact be influenced when the sales manager understands the seller's individual drivers.

The individual's drivers commonly fall into one of three categories, which can be found in McClelland's Theory of Needs which identifies the need for power, the need for achievement, and the need for affiliation. Everyone has a combination of these three, but within each of us there is usually one or two that are more dominant.

Sales managers who understand the differing needs within a seller are equipped to properly motivate them with communication that resonates.

THE NEED FOR POWER

This need is motivated by the need for reputation and self-esteem. Those who are motivated by power enjoy being in charge and having a sense of agency. They like having professional respect from others. They often seek out more responsibilities and want to be able to marshal the resources needed to execute the selling approach they think is best.

THE NEED FOR ACHIEVEMENT

Those with a need for achievement have an urge to compete and are motivated by challenges. They also seek feedback on their work and see the achievement of a goal as the most valuable reward. They take personal responsibility for finding solutions.

THE NEED FOR AFFILIATION

Affiliation is about developing strong interpersonal relationships. Those with a need for affiliation get motivation from working in a collaborative environment. The team's success is seen as the reward, and they take special interest in work that provides companionship and social approval.

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For far too long, companies have had to deal with a big disconnect between their training and their actual sales strategy, culture, systems, and customers. To make real change happen, you need more adaptable content so you can build agility with a wider range of relevant capabilities. You also need more useful technology that integrates with your CRM and helps your reps get better deal by deal. And you need more visible progress with helpful metrics connected to your systems so you can see in real-time how your reps are impacting business outcomes. That's why industry leaders all rely on Richardson. And it's how our clients find more customers, win more opportunities, and grow their most strategic accounts.

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