**The 9 Keys to Successful Sales Coaching**

*Coaching Skill #3: Asks Quality Questions*

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“Everyone lives by selling something.”

Robert Louis (Balfour) Stevenson, Scottish Author & Poet, 1850-1894

Are you an effective sales manager and sales coach? Do you feel you know what will help your people go out and find new business? Can you motivate and encourage them?

Managing sales people can be similar to raising teenagers—both sales people and teenagers think they know what they are doing and how to do it and neither are looking for guidance. Both want to do things on their own terms and neither wants to do homework/paperwork. Both are convinced they will succeed on their own terms. And they probably will, eventually. However, the reality is that we can all benefit from some effective coaching.

My wife was a good coach when our daughter was a teenager in the throes of high school. She was proficient at asking questions that encouraged Alex to talk through the multitude of issues she dealt with regularly. Although they did have occasional conflicts, my wife’s non-judgmental approach encouraged our daughter to think and talk things through so that she would make good decisions in the future.

Sales people can benefit from a similar approach. You can help them be more successful at selling by asking good quality questions that will encourage them to think through each step of their selling process.

The following article, *Asking Quality Questions*, will focus on the third of nine skills that will make you a better sales manager.

**#3 Sales Coaching Skill: Asks Quality Questions**

We all prefer conversation over interrogation. An effective coach will want to keep this in mind because after two or three questions, a sales person may well feel he/she is being attacked.

Great coaches ask great questions like “Bill, let’s talk about that play where... How did the linebacker get past you?” By asking the question this way, the coach allows the linebacker to analyze what happened. By softening the approach with "Let’s talk about that play where...” Bill is less likely to feel sabotaged.

On the other hand, if the coach tells him, “You’ve got to keep that linebacker from getting past you”, Bill doesn’t have the opportunity to think through this on his own terms. Chances are he already knows he shouldn’t have let this happen. But by
asking quality questions and reviewing in a non-judgmental manner in post-call debriefs, Bill will better analyze his own actions and discover what he failed to do/could do better.

Note that the coaching question, "Bill, how did that linebacker get past you?" is open-ended. It is preferable not to ask “yes” and “no” questions. They are not effective during the sales process or when coaching sales people because they don’t encourage interaction. Phrasing your questions as open-ended will help to engage the salesperson, encouraging him/her to think before answering.

Let’s say that you have a sales person who frequently fails to uncover the competition during the sales process. You could ask him/her, "What did you find out about the competition?" or “When you asked the prospect about those firms being considered, what did he say?"

Can you tell which question is going to get a better answer and provide more insight? Open-ended questions make coaching sessions more conversational and engaging. Open-ended questions will help a sales person identify the gaps between what they are doing and what they should be doing. Answers to open-ended questions provide more and better information.

During the debrief, your goal is to uncover any gaps between the expected outcome and actual execution during a sales call. Once you understand where these gaps exist, the sales person must agree that there is a gap before moving to the next step. Sometimes the sales person will not see this immediately and so you may have to spend more time asking good questions. But when you do get agreement, you will then work to identify specific solutions and objectives that will improve performance. Next you want to identify solutions that will help the sales person learn and grow.

An example of a learning objective would be to improve the percentage of contacts to appointments. An increase in this percentage would indicate improvement in an initial-call skill. Improving the quality of initial calls would be a measurable objective because there would be a corresponding increase in opportunities created. You will want to document the identified, agreed-upon objective and note the specific action items and corresponding necessary behaviors to enhance the sales person’s probability of success.

You can access Tony’s entire eBook **The 9 Keys to Successful Sales Coaching** on this link below. Make 2013 your year to become an even more effective sales coach!

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