

THE 9 KEYS
to
COACHING
SALES
SUCCESS

TONY COLE

from



ANTHONY COLE
TRAINING GROUP, LLC

The 9 Keys to Coaching Sales Success



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*An excerpt from the
Sales Managed Environment® Curriculum



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“The task of the leader is to get his people from where they are to where they have not been.”

~Henry Kissinger



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Introductio

n

The 9 Keys to Coaching Sales Success

If you are in charge of managing a sales team to reach sales goals, you must ask yourself this critical question: “How effective am I in this role?”

A sales coach helps his people mentally by arming them with the skills, knowledge and strategies to help them be successful. A good coach also motivates sales people by coaching to their individual hopes and dreams, by holding them accountable, by helping them recover from the no’s and by helping them reset after a lost sale. The following are the 9 Keys to Coaching Sales Success. These nine skills will help you bring out the best in your people.

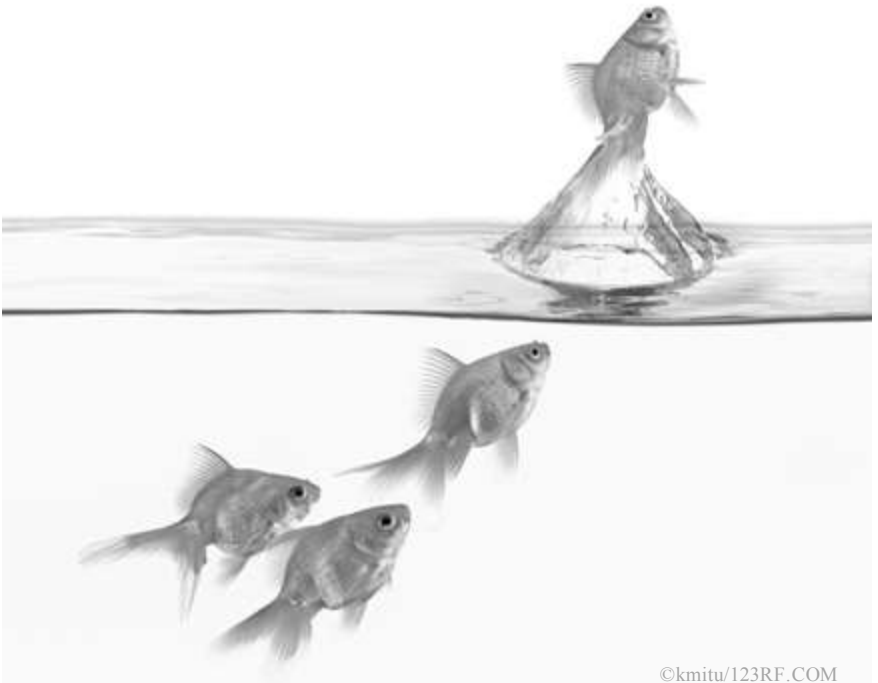
“Coaching isn’t an addition to a leader’s job, it’s an integral part of it.”

~ George S. Odiorne



“Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others.”

~Jack Welch



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Chapter 1

1st Key: Effectively Debrief Your Sales People

An effective and proactive coach is in a constant state of debriefing sales people. Whether they are engaged in a phone campaign, returning from an initial appointment with a new client, presenting a solution to a committee or renewing a current relationship, a coach must constantly have real-time knowledge about how the sales people are performing.

As an effective sale coach, you should schedule regular debriefing times into each week. You might have debriefing time slots every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 2 pm. From week to week, you may not know exactly what you will be debriefing, but you will have the time scheduled, in advance, to do this activity, thus making it routine and easy to accommodate your sales staff.

The essence of the debriefing process should not focus on the numbers. Instead, the debrief should focus on performance — *how* the sales calls and processes were executed. During these sessions, you must ask great questions so that you find out how the calls went— *what* happened, *how* things happened and *why* they happened. This process of asking questions creates dialogue between you and the sales person,



maintaining focus on the most critical aspects of selling. Questions about the prospect's compelling reasons to take action, their budget and willingness to invest, their ability to make a change from a current provider and their particular decision-making process are all subjects that you should ask about.

Based on the salesperson's responses and your notes taken during these regular debriefs, you will begin to develop insight as to where the individual's "choke points" are. For instance, if a sales person fails to get commitment for investment of time, money or resources, he or she may have a money weakness and this pattern will repeat itself. Look for insights about those items that interfere with the sales person's ability to move the sales process forward. Correct the identified choke points and develop him/her for future success.

During the debrief, listen and digest what you are hearing. Pause and reflect before providing feedback. Be nurturing and preface comments with something like: *"Now, maybe I didn't get the entire picture, but based on what I thought I heard, there seems to be a choke point here. Let me ask you a couple of questions so that we can figure out what happened and what we need to do to fix this."*

Stay clinically detached during these sessions. Be patient and "other" focused. Do not get frustrated or act in a disapproving parent mode.

If you are perceived as "attacking", the sales person will shut down and will not be open to future coaching discussions. Wrong way— *"Why do you continue to...?"* Right way— *"Help me understand what it is that seems to keep you from asking your prospect for this information."*



Chapter 2

2nd Key: Conduct Effective Joint Calls

Normally, when a manager attends a joint sales call, it is at the time of the capabilities presentation or closing presentation. Though attending these meetings can be helpful, they do little to help sales people close more business that late in the process. This is like coaching a baseball team by showing up in the final inning instead of watching the entire game. As sales manager, you may know the outcome based on the data, but you will not know *how* the game developed. Knowing *how* the sale developed is key to effective coaching. This is why observing sales people in action, in person or virtually, is so important.

There are critical components to effectively observing sales calls. First, schedule these calls with your sales people. Do not wait for them to schedule. Be proactive and select the calls to join.

Second, observe the sales person during the call. Be present during different stages of the process so you know how the sales person opens, nurtures and closes a sale. Do a pre-call

"Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power."

~ Abraham Lincoln



“Example is not the main thing in influencing others, it is the only thing.”

~Albert Schweitzer



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before the meeting so that the sales person is prepared and you can listen and absorb what is happening on the call. Make sure that the sales person is prepared to conduct the perfect sales meeting because you are there only to observe. During a joint call, the coach's role is defined as supportive, not as a main character. This means that, when you are on a joint call, you must let the sales professional run the meeting and even make mistakes so that he/she will learn. If you "rescue", this will not happen.

That being said, you probably wouldn't let a sales person blow the sale of a lifetime. However, you should not ask a critical question that the sales person has neglected to ask. If you think you must assist, address the sales person with a question. As an example, if the sales person has forgotten to get clarity on the decision-making process, you should ask him/her about it. This would sound something like – *"Mary, I must have missed this in the conversation – what is the decision-making process?"*

Conduct the post-call debrief as soon as possible after the call. First, ask the sales person how he/she thought the call went. Listen and take notes.

Compare their comments with your own observations. From there, share your insights about the sales person's performance. Then, schedule a one-on-one meeting to outline specific next steps and to develop an action plan that will address the "choke points" that were demonstrated.

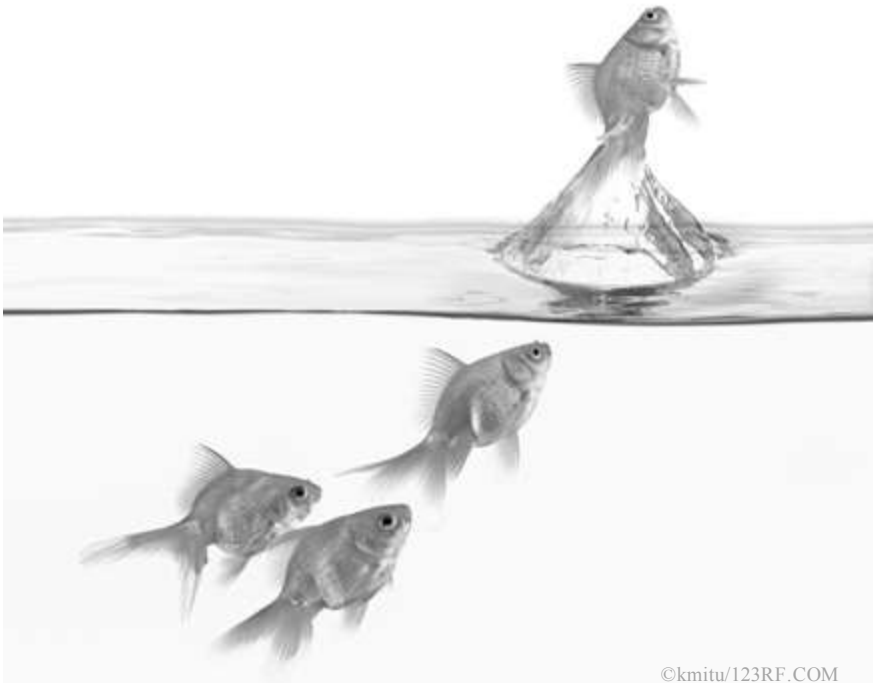
"People change when they hurt enough that they have to, learn enough that they want to, or receive enough that they are able to."

~ John Maxwell



***“The key to successful leadership today
is influence, not authority.”***

~Kenneth Blanchard



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Chapter 3

3rd Key: Ask Quality Questions

Conversation is much more pleasant than interrogation. This is important for an effective coach to remember because, after two or three questions, a sales person is going to feel like they are being attacked.

Great coaches ask great questions like, "Bill, *how did that linebacker get past you?*" If the coach tells him, "*You've got to keep that linebacker from getting past you*", does Bill learn anything? Chances are he already knows he shouldn't have let this happen. By asking the right question and reviewing via the post-call debrief (similar to viewing the game film together), Bill will better analyze his own actions and discover what he failed to do.

Note that the coaching question, "*Bill, how did that linebacker get past you?*" is open-ended. Do not ask "yes" and "no" questions. They are not effective during the sales process or when working with and coaching sales people. Phrase your questions as open-ended. This will help to engage the salesperson, make him/her think before answering and get him/her involved.

"Don't be afraid to give up the good to go for the great."

~ John D. Rockefeller



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, *"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 more engaging. Open-ended questions will help the sales person identify the gaps between what they are doing and what they should be doing. Open-ended questions provide information.

Once the gaps between expectation on the call and actual execution during the call are uncovered, you need to gain agreement from the sales person that there *is* a gap before moving to the next step. Sometimes the sales person will not see this immediately. Upon agreement, identify specific solutions and objectives to improve performance. The key here is to identify solutions that will help the sales person learn and grow. Do not just set data or results-based goals.

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. Be sure to document the identified, agreed-upon objectives and note the specific action items and corresponding necessary behaviors so that you enhance the sales person's probability of success.



Chapter 4

4th Key: Identify & Address Sales DNA

An individual's Sales DNA includes those hidden root causes that contribute to their failure to execute adequately. Understand the following: *A sales person can have tremendous passion and unquestionable commitment, but if they have issues in their Sales DNA, he/she will fail to execute consistently until the root cause is addressed.*

As an effective sales coach, you must recognize the symptoms of each of the issues (identified on following page) and the impact that they each have on sales success. You will need to ask great questions to help a sales person discover the root cause of a problem. You will also need to gain the sales person's agreement that the root cause is contributing to their inconsistent results and that he/she won't achieve their personal goals if the issues aren't addressed. At this point, you will need to get agreement that his/her not reaching personal goals is unacceptable—in other words, he/she must have the desire and commitment to address the offending DNA factor and to work on the solution. You can then begin to help the sales person improve.

“A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way.”

~ John C. Maxwell



***“Look over your shoulder now and then
to be sure someone’s following you.”***

~Henry Gilmer



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Here is a quick guide to understanding the symptoms and impact of Sales DNA:

(Source: Objective Management Group, Inc.)

Need for Approval – Sales person won't ask the "tough" questions, takes put-offs and stalls, wants prospects to *like* him/her.

Rejection Issues – Sales person won't ask for the appointment, an order or introductions. Afraid of being told "no".

Beliefs – Sales person's mental and emotional history conflict with sales objectives. For instance, sales person answers all questions asked by prospect (giving away valuable information) because parents trained him/her to "*Answer when I ask you a question!*" Everyone has a set of "mental records". Some enhance effectiveness; others hinder.

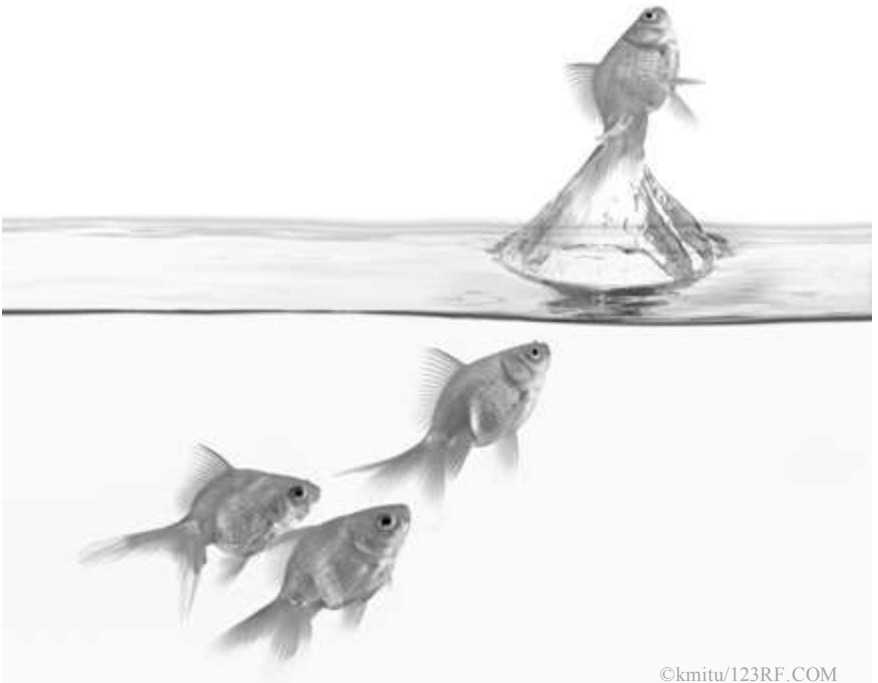
Money Issues – Sales person presents a solution without addressing budget and/or acts differently on larger sales, indicating discomfort talking about money. This behavior can also be a "record" because parents taught him/her that "*It is rude to talk about money.*"

Buy Cycle – Everyone has a buy cycle (how we buy personally) which can support or hinder selling. If a sales person takes put-offs, allows competitive shopping or sacrifices margin to make a sale, chances are he/she empathizes with the prospect due to his/her own shopping habits. On the other hand, if the sales person is quick to make decisions when buying large ticket items, he/she is more apt to move the prospect forward because this is a personally-owned behavior.



***“Leadership is the art of getting
someone else to do something you want
done because
he wants to do it.”***

~Dwight D. Eisenhower



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Chapter 5

5th Key: Train & Coach an Effective Selling System

In order to have a productive sales team, you must consistently teach and coach an Effective Sales System (ESS). If your team does not have an ESS, and you rely on sales people to operate within their *own* system, you will have a difficult, if not impossible, time affecting individual skills and behaviors.

An effective coach must demonstrate what is expected of a sales person. At a minimum, you must be able to portray how to employ concepts and tactics via stories, analogies and metaphors. Again, think of the athletic coach — while the coach may not *physically* demonstrate everything that is expected of an athlete, he/she must be able to communicate what is expected.

To be an effective sales coach, you must do the same. You must truly know the selling process and the Effective Selling System. You must *own* the content and the process and you must communicate the sales skills expected of your team.

“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.”

~ John Quincy Adams



Specifically, you must be able to demonstrate the 8-step phone process with an effective Unique Selling Approach (USA) opening. You must demonstrate an effective initial call starting with “*What would make this meeting a great use of your time?*” Your ability to demonstrate these skills will greatly enhance your sales team’s ability to execute an Effective Selling System. On the other hand, if you don’t know the system intimately, you won’t be able to effectively coach your sales people through demonstrations or identify sales-sabotaging behaviors.

Remember to ask open-ended questions. Help sales people *discover* their choke points through the questions you ask. Make sure that the sales person wants to fix the problems. Verify the salesperson’s willingness and enthusiasm to fix the problem. And finally, get commitment.

A good sales coach must also be able to teach the theories and psychology which support an Effective Selling System which include:

- A. The interpersonal dynamics of the buying and selling process, especially in our virtual world
- B. Why traditional phone approaches are ineffective
- C. Why a sales person should not look, act or sound like every other sales person
- D. Why effectively asking questions can make or break a sale
- E. Why it’s critical to get commitment for a decision prior to presentation



As well, you must understand and teach the psychology and theory supporting:

- A. When and why a sales person asks for referrals
- B. Why each sales person must have a robust pipeline
- C. The importance of executing a personal success formula
- D. Why participating regularly in sales huddles (weekly, 15-minute meetings in which sales people report critical numbers) is crucial for a sales person's success.

As sales coach, you must coach your sales people at each step. First, *tell* them the skill you will be teaching. Second, *show* them how to use the technique. Third, *review* what you taught and demonstrated. Next, *execute* with drill-for-skill and role play so that your sales people can see the skill in action. Finally, *have them practice* using the technique with one another so that they are able to employ the tactic while they are under pressure in the field, on a webcast or on the phone.

“Great leaders are almost always great simplifiers, who can cut through argument, debate and doubt to offer a solution everybody can understand.”

~ General Colin Powell



***“The price of greatness is
responsibility.”***

~Winston Churchill



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Chapter 6

6th Key: Get Commitment from Your Sales People

Gaining commitment is key to the on-going development and improvement of a sales team. Get commitment from sales people, even top producers, to execute at the high levels necessary. Get each individual's commitment to perform the activities required to reach his/her specific personal goals.

Sales people commit to what is important to them. While they may understand the benefit of shareholder value increasing, this is not what will drive them to do the activities. What motivates each sales person is his/her own set of personal objectives, goals and ambitions. Your job is to help each individual uncover these personal goals and help him/her understand that, if committed, he/she will reach these goals.

Next, you must help each discover his/her "current state", i.e. where he/she stands relative to these goals. When there is a gap, as when the personal income forecasted from current sales pipeline and closing ratio will not be sufficient to buy their dream house, you must help him/her discover the pain of not achieving this goal. Help each understand, through a series of "drill down" questions, what his/her future looks like based upon current production. This process is an important part of



getting a sales person to commit to personally desired outcomes.

Once you have gone through this initial discovery and drill-down process, you will arrive at the sales person's ultimate desired outcome. In the case of a sales person who is underperforming or failing to execute effort or skills, you must get him/her to agree that failure to achieve the desired outcome is not an acceptable option.

***Note:** *The sales person MUST be personally involved and verbalize this.* It is not effective for him/her to answer a leading question that you might pose such as "You don't want that to happen, do you?" Instead, you must ask "Is that a problem? Are you sure that's a problem? And is it compelling enough for you to make changes? What will you do differently?" Only after the sales person verbally acknowledges that he/she wants and needs to change can you move to the next step. Only then can you get the sales person to agree to some form of disciplined structure around changing their sales activity.

Once you have a sales person's commitment to fix a problem, you must get him/her to agree to do everything possible to succeed. At this point, you can implement a sales development program that can help them move toward their goals.

A disciplined sales development program will probably be harder on you than it is on the sales person because you will need to inspect every step. Example: if the disciplined program for filling the pipeline includes making phone calls



every Thursday morning at ten o'clock, you will need to be there to hold the sales person accountable. Or if you expect the individual to ask for introductions daily, you must be available at the end of each day so that you can take reports.

Do not ask for a sales person's commitment and then not do your part. If you are to be an effective sales coach, helping your people to achieve their goals, you must make your own commitment to do whatever is necessary. A lack of consistent performance in sales coaching and management on your part will translate into a lack of commitment in sales people.

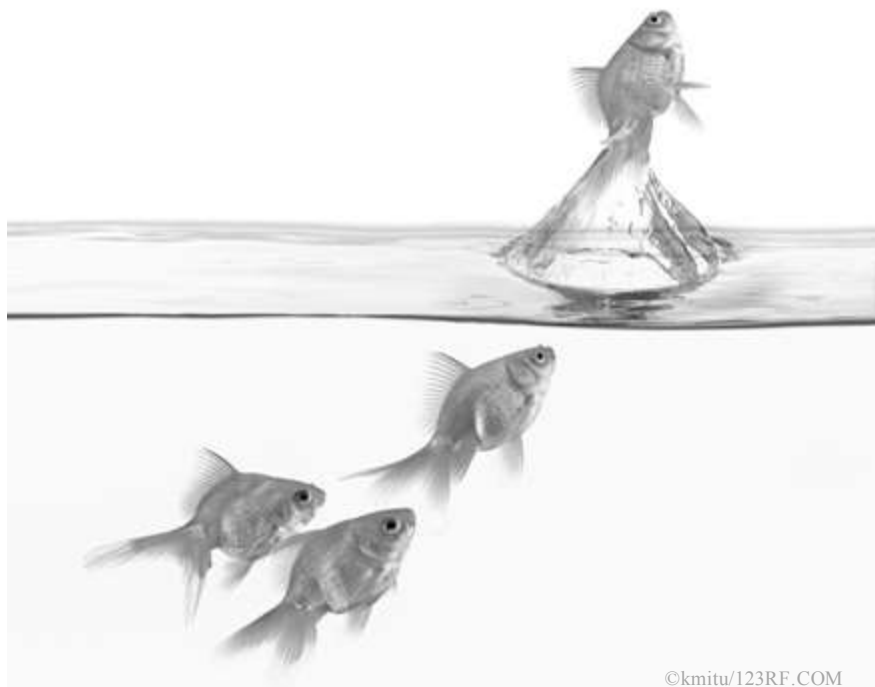
“Setting a goal is not the main thing. It is deciding how you will go about achieving it and staying with that plan.”

~ Tom Landry



“Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower.”

~ Steve Jobs



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Chapter 7

7th Key: Consistently Coach Sales Skills & Behaviors

There are several components to being a good sales coach. Often, sales coaches do not understand the difference between holding people accountable to the sales activities (i.e. the numbers like prospecting dials) versus technique mastery (or how the activities are being executed). Here, you will focus on technique, not on holding people accountable to their numbers.

Every sales leader's calendar should have regularly scheduled slots for coaching sales people. You should hold coaching sessions every week, say on Tuesday from 10 am to noon. Although you may not know who you will be coaching or what sales skill you will be working on, you will put on your coach's hat every Tuesday for those two hours. Your sales people will know that you are available and that they are invited to this session each week. This practice sends a message to your sales people – *"I am here to help you succeed during this time. I am not just here to collect data and remind you when you are failing to execute."* It says that their success is a priority to you. Whether held virtually or in-person, you must have coaching on your schedule weekly.



Effective coaching focuses on skills and behaviors— the *techniques*. Sales coaching should include the following:

- A. Asking questions
- B. Drilling down to get real answers
- C. Getting commitment
- D. Helping sales people overcome their own objections
- E. Correcting sales performance issues

This time is not for teaching product knowledge or structuring a deal. It is for delving into the art and science of the sale rather than the mechanics of the product/service design of the offering.

You can measure your coaching success by the improvement you see in the sales behavior ratios of your people. For example, if more first calls turn into opportunities or if closing ratios improve, they are getting better. You will also know your people are improving when they perform *consistently* better in the field and in the classroom.

“A leader has the vision and conviction that a dream can be achieved. He inspires the power and energy to get it done.”

~ Ralph Nader



Chapter 8

8th Key: Understand & Coach The Will to Sell

There are four elements that make up sales and sales management Will to Sell. These are: Desire, Commitment, Outlook and Responsibility. A sales person or sales manager who lacks the will to sell will not reach their potential. (Source: Objective Management Group, Inc.)

Desire starts with goals. Setting personal goals will help your sales people succeed in any economy. Having specifically outlined personal goals will help them fight through issues that could impact their outlook and will help to eliminate excuse-making. Their passion and potential for success will increase with desire.

Create an environment in which your team can dream. Help them achieve their personal goals and objectives. Hold personal goal setting sessions at least once a year. If you skip this crucial step, your sales people will lack the extraordinary desire necessary to sustain them as they perform the tough behaviors.

If you know what stirs the hearts of your people, you can effectively coach them and help them achieve their dreams. You will become a hero in their eyes and in the eyes of the company.



“As a leader, you’re probably not doing a good job unless your employees can do a good impression of you when you’re not around.”

~ Patrick Lencioni



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Commitment is not a gray concept. People who are committed to success in selling do everything possible within legal, moral and ethical limits to succeed. Truly committed sales people are willing to learn, to change and to risk. Evaluate each sales person. Does this description fit the individuals on your sales team?

Commitment follows Desire and isn't a trait you can require of a sales person. Only he/she can attain Desire and Commitment. However, if you hold regular personal goal setting/dream achieving sessions, instill an environment that encourages growth and work together to construct a great action plan, you will get commitment.

Outlook is an individual's perspective of the world, is very personal and is impacted by personality, genetics, history, environment, etc. Outlook may also be the toughest element with which you, as sales coach, must contend because it is complex, based largely on former experience and, if weak, can have a negative impact on the individual's ability to sell. Strong outlook helps people to effectively approach their daily personal and business lives. Sales people need strong outlooks.

You can help by creating a nurturing and supportive environment. As you know, a sales person's job is fraught with rejection, failure, financial insecurity, etc. (See my e-book, *Why is Selling So Darn Hard?!?*)



You must recognize that your sales people are going to have highs and lows. Your job is to understand this and to encourage them. Help each sales person recognize that a rejection or a “no” is only a role failure and is not fatal. Encourage each sales person to reset. Teach them our motto, otherwise known as SW³N- ***“Some Will. Some Won’t. So What? Next!”***

Taking ***Responsibility*** means not making excuses. When a sales person offers an excuse like *“The economy is...”* to explain a lack of performance, ask this question *“If I didn’t let you use that as an excuse, what would you have done differently?”* Challenge the sales person to click-through and go deeper. Even in tough economies, people are buying and selling.

Taking responsibility means being resourceful and creative. It means finding ways to be more effective at fixing problems.

Those sales people who make excuses are like a fungus—given a ripe environment, a fungus spreads, infecting others. A sales team that is allowed to make excuses will not grow. As sales coach, you must make sure your sales people take responsibility.

“Most of us spend too much time on what is urgent and not enough time on what is important.”

~ Stephen Covey



Chapter 9

9th Key: Effectively Onboard New Sales People

Upgrading your sales force is an ongoing process which starts with selection of the right candidates. Unfortunately, most sales leaders neglect the crucial onboarding process which determines the immediate and long-term success of a new hire. Sometimes a sales manager thinks, because he/she hired a superstar, onboarding is unnecessary.

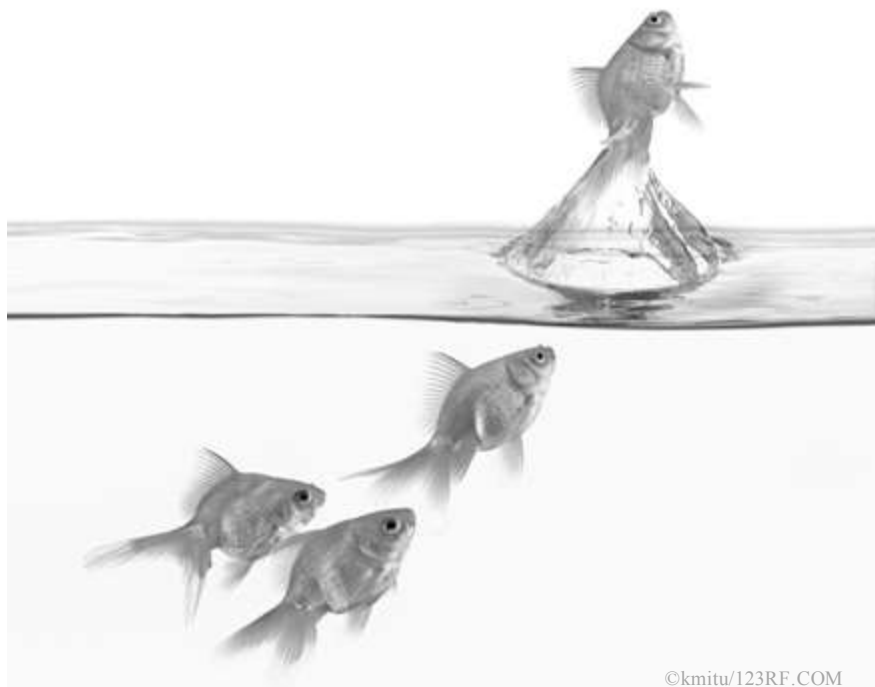
Here are the three critical onboarding steps:

1. Communicate the company's vision, objectives and expectations. Make sure the new hire understands and can verbalize these important concepts without hesitation.
2. Schedule weekly coaching sessions with new hires to help them create and execute their success formula. Help them learn, implement and inspect their Effective Selling System. Require attendance at weekly huddles. Make sure they understand the value of huddles, how they can have immediate impact on pipeline and why huddles will help them improve their sales approach and skills.



***“Never doubt that a small group
of thoughtful committed citizens
can change the world. Indeed, it is
the only thing that ever has.”***

~ Margaret Mead



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3. Use huddle data, pipeline growth and notes from pre-call and post-call debrief sessions to see if the new hire is exceeding activity and behavior expectations. This critical early data will help you identify choke points so that you are able to teach and coach to these specific weaknesses.

The importance of hiring good candidates and onboarding new hires can't be overstated. Your coaching will be more effective with a strong sales team. Finding, hiring and coaching good sales people are the primary challenges and the most important roles for every sales coach and sales organization.

**Need help coaching your team?
Check out our
[Sales Growth Coaching Program](#)**

Or Call us at (877) 635-5371



See the next page for a preview of Tony Cole's

***The 5 Dysfunctions
of Most Sales Organizations***

*which is packed with insights and useful real-time,
easy-to-implement advice for executives
and sales managers.*



Sneak Peek

The 5 Dysfunctions of Most Sales Organizations

Clearly, there are many factors involved in the business of selling. As anyone who has been a sales person can attest, the sales process can be a complex and daunting experience fraught with obstacles like aggressive competition, tight economic environments, shrinking budgets and incumbent vendors. While there are many obstacles like these that are outside a sales person's control, there are many others they can control. Our goal in this e-book is to provide some new framework for these controllable factors and, consequently, give hope and clarity to frustrated sales managers.

While there are numerous reasons that a specific group of sales people may not be selling, there are five predominant dysfunctions in most sales organizations that can dramatically affect sales success. Each of these dysfunctions points to a *sales management* issue that, if addressed, can significantly impact the success of a sales team. Here we will focus on the five most problematic dysfunctions and will offer solutions that will help you make the most dramatic difference in your business results.

In order to address these issues, we must first acknowledge that whatever sales management activities we are performing today create the results we are achieving today. These activities may be many or few, consistent or irregular, planned or impromptu,



but the behaviors and activities that we use to motivate, train and hold our sales team accountable are at least partly responsible for the success and/or failure of those we manage.

So, in the interest of bettering your sales people and sales results, I hope you will approach the following with an open mind. A characteristic of truly successful individuals is that they are open to exploring and implementing new ideas and practices. So, even if some of the dysfunctions that we will be exploring do not seem to apply directly to what is going on in your company, recognize that you cannot achieve different results until you acknowledge the possibility that perhaps they might apply in some form or fashion. Sometimes even minor changes are sufficient to elicit different results.

Dysfunction #1:

Lack of Effective Performance Management

There are two areas that must be addressed to achieve more effective performance. These include:

(1) Setting Standards and (2) Developing Strong, No-Excuses Accountability Processes

Setting Standards:

Most companies set annual standards for sales teams and individual sales people. Certainly goals are established and communicated and are probably tracked and inspected on a somewhat regular basis. Typically, the process for setting goals is part of the annual business planning process, usually an arduous ordeal in which the sales team has little say. Thus, it is neither enjoyed nor embraced.

Yet, if this process is approached in the right manner, with the right attitude and the right information gathering, annual



business and goal planning can be a positive experience, motivating individual sales people and bringing sales teams together. So, let's describe how this can happen for your company.

The following exercise will help you align your thinking and thus your expectations regarding acceptable sales performance. In this case, you will use the table below to analyze and set standards for your team's Annual Gross Sales Number. You can use this exercise with individual sales people or the entire sales team and you can change the Annual Gross Sales Number to any other metric you might wish to identify and set (ie, the number of prospecting calls, the number of first meetings, etc.).

Critical Success Factor: _____	Annual Gross Sales #
Extraordinary	
Excellent	
Good	
Poor	
Failing	

Step 1: Write your team's current Annual Gross Sales Number goal in the box next to Good. This is what is expected this year. Achieving any number less than this will be considered poor performance.

Step 2: Now, pick the Annual Gross Sales number of a decent year, but choose one when your team did not achieve its assigned goal. Choose a year when your team worked



hard and put forth great effort, but they didn't quite reach the assigned number. Write the actual number achieved in the box next to Poor. Understand that this number is poor because your team did not reach goal. If you frame the year as "pretty good" (we almost made it), you have communicated that you will accept less than goal. You will have accepted mediocrity, thus eroding the new standards you are trying to set.

Step 3: Select a number that would be completely unacceptable for your team and write this in the Failing box.

Step 4: Next select a number that would make an extremely good year, one in which your team would exceed goal. Write this number next to the Excellent box.

Step 5: Select a number that would make a truly amazing year, a year that would be beyond expectations, far surpassing the current sales goal. Write this number in the box beside Extraordinary.

As you can see, you have clearly identified and raised the standards. This newly defined level of standards will become your communication platform for setting extraordinary expectations with your team.

Taking an individual sales person through this process is quite impactful. Help the sales person establish the sales metrics for Poor through Extraordinary and then say the following, "Bill, I don't believe in micromanaging. You are a professional with *X* number of years experience in your sales role, so I am going to ask you to manage yourself. To what standard on this chart will you manage yourself?"



In most cases, Bill will tell you that he wants to manage himself to Extraordinary or Excellent, that he will put forth the effort to reach the identified goal. Hence, your job of holding him accountable to the metric should become easier.

Once you have had this discussion with each of your sales people, you will have created and communicated an extraordinary standard with which you can manage activity and results.

If, in the course of this process, you find a sales person who is only willing to manage himself to a level of Good, and your company is like most and is trying to compete and grow, then you may have the wrong person in this sales role. Worse, if you find that you have multiple sales people who are only motivated to be mediocre, you have a problem because chances are good that your team will not achieve Extraordinary or even Excellent until these people have been reassigned and new standards have been set and communicated.

Developing Strong Accountability Processes

The second area that sales managers must address to achieve more effective performance management with their sales teams involves developing a strong accountability process. We often describe the term “accountability” as the 14-letter dirty word because, in most organizations, the process of collecting, inputting, and inspecting sales activity is not a well-liked process by sales people or sales management.

Most companies want to have accountability in their sales organizations, but do not track the sales activities that are the most predictive of sales results. Too often, the metric of



“closed sales” is the identified and inspected metric and that is similar to looking in the rear view mirror in that this does not give you critical information (like number of prospecting calls) and does not allow you to calculate ratios (like the number of prospecting calls to first appointments).

As an effective sales manager, you must track, inspect and coach each step in the selling process. These steps include phone calls, contacts, opportunities, appointments, proposals, and closed sales.

This type of detailed information will give you the raw data needed to see patterns and to calculate critical ratios. It can help you recognize the correlation between each step. This information can tell you where a sales person may be failing to move a prospect forward from step to step — prospecting to qualifying, qualifying to first meeting, first meeting to presentation, presentation to sale.

Often, sales people and sales managers do not know how many prospecting calls will be needed to exact a sale (call-to-sale ratio). Yet, this detail is vital information to individual sales people and to the organization.

This process of accountability is hard work, but if you have taken your sales people through the Setting Standards discussion as described above and your sales person has agreed he is going to manage himself to Excellent or Extraordinary, then you have done the heaviest lifting by setting expectations.

Along with tracking activities, you need to help each individual understand the ramifications of failure to achieve



goal. Do this by holding the following one-on-one conversation with each sales person. *“Bill, what is going to happen if you don’t reach this goal? What happens if you don’t achieve Excellent or Extraordinary?”*

In this way, you are asking the sales person to determine what he will adjust, and what the consequences will be for not reaching goal. Leading each of the sales people through this discussion will help them to take responsibility for their success and failure. They will also be more receptive to your newly implemented accountability systems. After all, they agreed to this process and established their stretch goal.

The single biggest problem that recurs with holding people accountable is that managers often allow excuses for lack of success. If you and/or other managers allow excuses, chances are that all of the other sales systems and processes are going to fail.

Per the historical data collected from hundreds of sales assessments over the years, we have found that approximately 66% of sales people make excuses for lack of performance. This means that a majority of sales people blame the company, the competition or the market, *not themselves*, for their lack of success. If a sales person makes excuses, he is not taking responsibility for the job he has been hired to perform. If we, as sales managers, allow excuse making, we are eroding the standards of the organization.

The following is an example and a recommended solution to help you create a “no-excuses” environment. A sales person, Jane, has just told her sales manager that she did not reach



her activity goal of phone calls this month because she had an unusual amount of operational support issues upon which she had to spend time. (She is blaming the company.)

Your response to an excuse like this should be “*Jane, if I did not let you use that as an excuse, what would you have done differently?*” Note that this creates a transfer of responsibility because the excuse maker, Jane, now has to think through the problem and figure out what she must do differently to avoid this problem in the future. By asking the question in this manner, you are not allowing her to continue to make excuses or to lower her own or the company’s standards.

Be aware, excuses come in all forms, so learn to recognize and utilize the critical question; “*If I did not let you use that excuse, what would you have done differently?*” See how many times in one week you can use that question and note the results you achieve in a short time.

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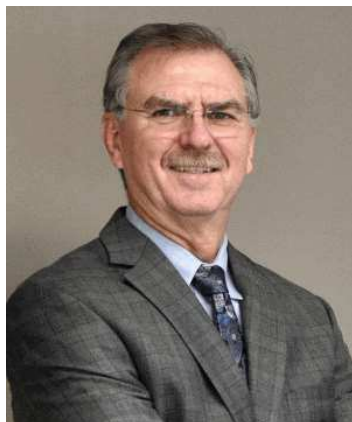
“The task of leadership is not to put greatness into people, but to elicit it, for the greatness is there already.”

~ John Buchan



Sales Management for Success

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Tony spent more than 15 years in sales and sales management positions. He launched Anthony Cole Training Group in 1991 to build sales cultures within organizations and drive consistent and predictable sales results. With deep backgrounds in sales and sales management, ACTG's Sales Development Experts deliver training and consulting services to individuals and companies across the nation.

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