

CHAPTER

The Death of Management

BECOMING AN EXECUTIVE SALES COACH

“What is that guy doing?” It was just an odd maneuver. Something out of the ordinary from what would have been a typical everyday experience at the drive-through of a Burger King. I was heading home from a day at the beach, unaware that I’d be having a breakthrough that would lead to the development of the concepts and strategies in this book.

I watched as the customer in front of me drove from the ordering to the pickup window of the drive-through, but it was closed. “How odd,” I thought. Instead of the usual routine, the cashier came outside to deliver the food, headset intact and bags of food in hand. The customer then drove off.

As I pulled up, I wondered if I too would have the same experience. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a digital timer mounted on the wall above the cashier’s head. At that moment, the manager at the drive-through window waved me forward, without

my food. “We will bring it out to you. Just pull up, please,” he requested.

The manager sent a young man out to my car who handed me my food. I had to ask: “I’m curious, why did we have to pull up, especially when there was no one behind me?”

“The timer,” he replied. “That’s how the manager is rated in performance. We’re supposed to serve each customer within a certain period of time. By moving everyone ahead like this, he can manipulate the results of the timer.”

It is a scientific fact that human beings have not tapped into their fullest potential. People drive growth and innovation. This applies to our business, our company, our managers, and, subsequently, our salespeople. Taking on the burden of management and the responsibility for increasing the value of each person on your team is a noble undertaking. This unique class of people is referred to as our manager, our brave and fearless leader, our CEO, our president, or our senior executive VP. It is unfortunate, in many cases, this role has been taken on by people who are untrained for it.

This book evens the playing field by giving managers the practical hands-on tools that sales coaches can use every day when they’re in the trenches.

Management, coaching, empowerment, accountability, motivation, leadership. These noble words have become so diluted in meaning and so irrelevant in business that many managers mistakenly believe that they actually know how to manage and coach their salespeople. They even think they do a good job.

In this first chapter, I will introduce you to the missing discipline of sales coaching in leadership. A new breed of managers is taking the helm, the executive sales coach, that is changing traditional management strategies. I will dispel the myths and misconceptions of traditional management and explain why it simply does not work. I will also introduce you to a new, more powerful approach to developing your salespeople into sales champions. Finally, I will describe the characteristics of the world’s greatest sales coaches and the obstacles that must be conquered in order to become one.

BUT I'M ALREADY COACHING . . .

At least once or twice a week, I talk with managers about their leadership styles. At some point during the conversation, a manager will mention that he coaches his team. I ask, “Really, that’s great to hear that you’re using the coaching model. Where were you trained as a coach?”

The response I hear most often is “Oh, I’ve never been formally trained.”

I then ask, “Well, have you worked with a coach yourself? Have you ever been coached?”

To my surprise, the answer is usually “No.”

Most managers don’t understand that they can’t just change their title from manager to sales coach without changing their skill set. They don’t understand the difference between being a manager and being a coach.

Let me explain. Calling yourself a coach without the proper training is the same as me waking up tomorrow morning and saying, “Today, I’m going to be a doctor (or a lawyer or a CPA or a professional athlete).” I can say it, but I can’t be it.

A sales coach must be proficient at coaching and that requires ongoing study and training. This book will guide you through the process of developing and mastering your coaching skills.

MAKING THE SHIFT FROM SALES MANAGER TO EXECUTIVE SALES COACH

Management is dead. This is a pretty bold statement to make, I know. Yet, the thousands of managers I’ve worked with throughout my career are testaments to the truth of this statement.

I ask managers, “What exactly is it you manage?” Although they say they manage people, the truth is that managers today spend most of their time managing processes, projects, data, problems, and information. If you do not have a defined process that moves your people forward so they can achieve greater results, then what is it you are managing? You’re managing the status quo. You’re managing a ledger entry in your company’s P&L statement. You’re managing sales reports and activity. Ultimately, under this

antiquated model, when it comes down to your people, you are managing the mediocre and the underachievers.

The ultimate problem with management inefficiency and failure is that the leadership principles taught today are just that, principles, devoid of specific measurable actions. Most leadership training programs concentrate on ideology rather than on developing a core competency or skill. Nothing more gets accomplished other than identifying another great concept in leadership or an attribute the greatest leaders possess. Status quo is managed, and life goes on.

The Executive Sales Coaching model discussed in this book fills the void between management philosophies and execution. Coaching translates theory into tactical, measurable actions.

I remember a story about a young boy who found a butterfly cocoon. Each day, the boy went to visit the cocoon, until one day a small opening appeared. The boy watched the butterfly for several hours as it struggled to force its body through the little hole.

Suddenly the butterfly stopped trying to make its way out of the cocoon. It didn't seem to be making any progress. The butterfly was no longer moving. With good intentions, the boy felt that he needed to help the butterfly. He took a pair of scissors and very slowly with surgical precision, snipped the remaining bit of cocoon being careful not to hurt the butterfly. The butterfly then easily emerged.

Except something was strange. The butterfly's body was swollen, and its wings were all shriveled and deformed. Nevertheless, the boy continued to watch the butterfly, expecting that, at any moment, the wings would expand to support the body, which would contract in time. Unfortunately, neither happened. In fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and deformed wings. It was never able to fly.

What the boy in his kindness and impatience did not understand was the natural evolution of life. The restrictive cocoon and the struggle through the small opening of the cocoon is nature's way of forcing fluid from the butterfly's body into its wings, so that it would be ready for flight after it emerged from the cocoon.

Sometimes struggles are exactly what we need in our lives. If we went through life without any obstacles, both our minds and bodies would atrophy. There would be no opportunities for us to

learn and grow from each experience. We would never be able to spread our wings and fly on our own. The premise of coaching is to develop a safe place to co-create new possibilities with people so they can reinvent themselves and who they are at their very core. Coaching provides the opportunity for people to generate solutions and solve problems on their own, while bringing out their very best.

I'm reminded of a conversation between two people who met at a networking event. When talking about what each did for a living, one person said, "I love my job. I'm the director of a camp for young children." The other person replied by saying, "That sounds like fun! I work with children, too." When asked what type of work he did, the person responded, "I manage a team of salespeople."

The point is, let your employees solve their own problems or you will wind up managing a team of salespeople that is fully dependent on you.

THE MISSING DISCIPLINE OF SALES COACHING

WHAT IS COACHING?

The coaching model is based on the belief that the question is the answer. The coach is responsible for people finding the answers themselves and developing their own problem-solving skills.

Coaching uses a process of inquiry so that people can access their own energy or inner strength to reach their own level of awareness. Tapping into a person's previously unused strengths and talents advances personal growth and learning, which challenges people to discover their personal best.

Coaching builds accountability by providing a safe forum for people to honor the commitments they have made. These commitments advance personal and organizational growth.

Coaching is collaborative as well as interactive. Coaching is like a dance rather than a premeditated or prescribed process. The shared experiences, insights, and solutions generated during meetings move the person forward, which also allows the coach to grow even more.

Coaching is about having clients grow on their own. Coaching helps people become more observant so they can better respond to the events, problems, or situations that arise.

Coaching isn't about giving information. It is about responding to the needs of other people. People will resist if information is forced on them.

Coaching consists of motivating people to reach their highest levels by offering them opportunities and possibilities, not obligations. Coaching is the art of creating new possibilities that didn't exist before.

DEFINING THE ROLE OF A SALES COACH

The following is an overview of a coach's role and core responsibilities.

Overview of a Coach's Role

1. Focuses on strengths, not weaknesses.
2. Facilitates, which is defined as "Making things easier."
3. Brings out the best in people by supporting, assisting and maximizing people's strengths.
4. Requests change and growth, as well as informs and guides.
5. Has the *right* questions, not necessarily *all* the answers.
6. Empowers people to be accountable for their success and failures.

A Coach's Responsibilities during a Coaching Session

- Helps people uncover their true passions and orient their lives around them.
- Assists in discovering and leveraging people's natural strengths, skills, and gifts to bring out their best.
- Works with people to create what they really want out of life, personally and professionally.
- Co-creates new possibilities that didn't exist before as well as an action plan and a path to help people achieve their goals.

- Provides guidance, support, insight, structure, accountability, encouragement, and tools people can use today.
- Provides a constructive, safe environment and becomes an unconditional partner during people's personal evolutions.
- Challenges people's thinking, attitudes, and assumptions about things in order to increase their awareness of the truth, enrich the quality of their lives, and boost their effectiveness as salespeople.
- Builds the momentum people need to reach their goals or generate the results they want in half the time it would take for them to do it on their own.

A COACH VERSUS A MENTOR

Many people use the words *coach* and *mentor* synonymously. The fact is there's a clear distinction between the two.

Coach An expert on people and personal development. Typically a skilled specialist regarding a certain topic, competency, or industry. A coach's role is to provide structure, foundation, and support so people can begin to self-generate the results they want on their own. Learning and growth are achieved by both parties involved. In coaching, the relationship is objective, and the focus is not only on *what* the person needs to do to become more successful but also *who* the person is and how he thinks. A coach works on the whole person and is multidimensional, rather than focusing only on what the person is already doing. The coaching relationship is built on choice rather than necessity.

Mentor An expert in a field, industry, or at a company who typically acts as an internal advisor. Usually this is done on a professional level to advance the mentored person's career. Often mentors have their own approach already in mind and use the system that has worked for them in the past, without taking into consideration the style, values, integrity, or strengths of the people they mentor. Mentors may also have something to gain professionally and, as such, have their own personal agenda. Often, mentors are not trained, and their guidance is based more on their experience rather than the skills or proficiencies needed to mentor.

Often, the mentoring relationship is need-driven rather than driven by choice.

NINE BARRIERS TO COACHING A SALES TEAM

For any executive sales coaching initiative to be effective and long-lasting, there are important obstacles that a manager or internal sales coach needs to address.

BARRIER ONE: NO COACH THE COACH PROGRAM

One of my clients recently called me with questions about building an internal coaching program. It seems the person who was spearheading the initiative was having a difficult time putting the processes and procedures together as well as getting the managers to embrace the new philosophy and approach. Since the company felt they could build the internal coaching program on their own, they didn't hire an outside expert or consultant. The person in charge of the initiative wasn't even a coach but someone in HR. Without a coach training program to develop coaching skills and competencies, you can change your managers' titles, but not their essence, their thinking, or their skills.

BARRIER TWO: COACHING IS A CHOICE—NOT AN OBLIGATION

The coaching relationship is a choice, not an obligation. The relationship between the coach and the people who are coached is a designed alliance, a collaborative partnership, and more. As such, remedial or sanctioned coaching is often met with resistance rather than with open arms. How is coaching being offered to your team or to your employees? A perk, an incentive, an option, an obligation, or a remedial response to underperformance? Are you offering it to your entire team, to a select few, or to just one person?

BARRIER THREE: SURRENDER YOUR AGENDA WHEN COACHING

What if your boss walked up to you today and said, "Your career, your bonus, your position in this company, and your salary will

depend on how well your team performs. That said, I want you to start coaching all the people on your team, one on one. Hold them accountable and be unconditionally supportive, while surrendering your agenda and maintaining objectivity.” Could you do it?

My clients consist of a myriad of companies and professions, all shapes and sizes, selling products and services in practically every industry and profession. Yet, the one truth I share with them is this: “When you work with me as your coach, this will be the only relationship you have where it will always be 100 percent about you.”

If you’re an internal coach, this may be a stretch to fully surrender any agenda or attachment to your sales team’s performance, especially since their performance directly reflects on you. In such cases, there’s an inherent challenge for you, as the business owner or manager, to separate your agenda from theirs and have no personal expectation from the relationship other than your unconditional commitment to their continued growth and success. It’s going to take some adjustment on your part to develop an unconditional and authentic relationship with your salespeople. We tackle this in much greater detail in Chapter 2.

BARRIER FOUR: YOU’RE COACHING PEOPLE, NOT CHANGING PEOPLE

There’s a big difference between coaching people and changing people. However, for executives or front line managers who are commissioned to hit some aggressive sales numbers, coaching is the last thing they want to talk about. The real distinction is that coaching is a process of discovery. A coach cannot push for results or attempt to change people overnight. The traditional scenario to facilitate change is typically a stressed-out manager who lays the same stress on his salespeople that his boss dumped on him. “Work harder; get focused; our jobs can be on the line; just bring in some more business.” This hollow approach seldom drives change.

BARRIER FIVE: CONNECTION—IT HAS TO BE THE REAL THING

In coaching it’s critical for unrestricted, honest communication in the coaching relationship. It’s extremely challenging to connect

with your salespeople at a deeper level, the type of connection necessary between the coach and the person being coached. Many employees are afraid that if they disclose too much, it will be held against them in the future. So they limit their vulnerability level to what is absolutely needed to perform their job function. This restricts safe and open communication, limiting the chance to connect with your people in a way that allows coaches to get to the real issues and barriers;—barriers that are preventing improved performance.

BARRIER SIX: CONFIDENTIALITY AND NO JUDGMENT? SURE, BOSS!

Lets get right to what you're thinking. Your role as supervisor or boss presents some inherent problems with coaching that need to be addressed head on.

Given the parameters, guidelines, and principles necessary to be a masterful coach, trust is critical to make the connection. After all, if your employees can't trust you as their manager, forget even trying to coach them. Coaching requires an elevated level of trust that transcends the superficial trust between employees and management.

And what if some of your salespeople already have a problem with you as their boss and now you're going to try and coach them? How does that get handled? Do you think any of your employees are going to just come out and say that? Think again.

As a result, this relationship could quickly turn into more of a mentoring rather than a coaching relationship. This is a major reason why companies bring in an expert coach from the outside who doesn't have any direct ties to the company as a manager would.

BARRIER SEVEN: ANYONE CAN MANAGE, NOT EVERYONE CAN COACH

"I'm really not cut out to be a coach." The hard fact is there are managers who want to be coaches, managers who need to be coaches, and managers who shouldn't be coaches, and probably shouldn't be managers, either.

Companies that force all managers into a coaching role make a costly assumption that all of their managers would actually make great coaches, just like every college athlete should automatically make the pros. The rules work the same. Desire, attitude, ability, and skill will always be the formula for becoming a successful coach, or athlete. Then there is the mistake of pushing managers to do something they don't want to do. Managers can easily sabotage their own coaching efforts, and in the end, corporate may learn the wrong lesson: "I guess our internal coaching program didn't work."

BARRIER EIGHT: FULL ACCOUNTABILITY

If you want to become powerful, hire a powerful coach. It's a simple, yet highly effective strategy. If you want your salespeople to be powerful, you need to be a good role model for them. As you evolve, so does your team. Consider this truth: Your team is a reflection of you. If you're not prepared to be 100 percent accountable for the success and failure of your team, if you skirt accountability in any way, if you lack professionalism or proficiencies in certain areas, your team will reflect these weaknesses. If you choose to evolve, so will your salespeople. If you want a world-class sales team, you have to become a world-class executive sales coach.

BARRIER NINE: COMPETITIVE MANAGERS

The most effective leaders develop other leaders. They encourage their people to perform as well as they do—even better. That is the sign of a true master and the real testament of a great manager. But what if the manager perceives his coworkers and subordinates as a threat? What if the manager is driven strictly by ego, the need to prove himself and his worth? What if this manager thinks he has survived only by keeping a competitive distance from his peers and salespeople? I've known managers who don't share their tools and best practices with their salespeople for fear their salespeople will outdo them. These are likely to be inferior managers who will seek to selfishly leverage the coaching relationship in a way to better themselves and their position rather than for the betterment of their sales team.

Now that we've listed the barriers that can get in the way of implementing an effective internal coaching program, do not be disheartened. With greater awareness comes choice. The good news is you possess the power to make a difference. The majority of these internal obstacles can be overcome using the strategies outlined in this book. The remainder of this chapter outlines some very specific steps you can take as you begin your journey as a coach.

CONSULTANT, TRAINER, OR COACH?

When potential clients call my office, I begin the process by conducting a preliminary needs assessment to ensure there is a strong fit between us as well as a clear understanding of their objectives. I assess what they are expecting from a coach, have them share their background and goals with me, uncover the additional areas we would be working on together, and qualify them to ensure they are a client that I would like to work with. Inevitably, I would hear myself saying, "It sounds like you need more than just a coach to reach your goals. I'm also hearing that you are looking for someone who can give you the best solutions and answers to certain issues with the intention of minimizing the steep and often costly learning curve. That's why you really need a coach who is also a trainer and a consultant."

It is at this point in our conversation when I would share with them the distinction between these three types of professionals and the role each would play in achieving the client's goals. Here is a scenario that will help distinguish between the three, determine the value proposition or deliverable each brings into the relationship, and the approach that can be expected from each.

Let's say you're looking to expand your selling and prospecting efforts and want your sales team to call on some different types of companies in your market. Since you are not sure which ones make most sense nor do you have a strategy to execute, you call on a consultant, a trainer, and a coach for help. Based on this scenario, here's what each would be able to offer. Keep in mind, I'm only drawing a distinction between these three professionals based on their core deliverables and not what each person may be able to offer based on their specific level of experience and expertise.

THE CONSULTANT

The consultant may provide you with some market research and aggregate certain data based on your target market. The consultant may report either verbally or in a written report about market conditions, market trends, samples of research they've conducted, a concise solution, and possibly an overview of an action plan needed to execute the solution. The consultant may also suggest hiring other experts by outsourcing, hiring full-time, or employing the services of other professionals such as legal, tax, accounting, human resources, IT, recruiting, trainers, coaches, and so on.

THE TRAINER

Once the consultant finishes, enter the trainer. Now, based on the overall solution the consultant laid out, there may be a component that calls for some professional training and further development of your employees' skill set. As such, the trainer's role may be to develop and deliver the actual training needed to achieve the overall objectives. The trainer may perform some further due diligence by interviewing participants, salespeople, and managers, possibly even some clients, to get a better assessment of the issues and what areas require further training and further skill development. The trainer would then develop the training module and deliver the training. Depending on the trainer's style and approach, the trainer may incorporate a variety of additional approaches such as:

- Action steps, assessments, or exercises to be completed prior to the training event
- Role playing
- Skill practice scenarios
- One-to-one training
- Roundtable discussions.
- Interactive forums: question and answer, panel discussion
- Development of collateral materials, scripts, templates, and so on
- Co-creation and collaboration on certain exercises and objectives to be completed by the end of the training event

THE COACH

When the training event is over, what safeguards do you have in place to ensure that the concepts and ideology learned during the training are understood, effective, and long lasting? How are the participants held accountable for applying what was learned? What process is in place for discovering the areas participants are still struggling with in order to develop a better solution? And, finally, what discipline will be used to ensure your people have developed and can maintain the mindset of a champion? I have found that continued accountability and support is essential to ensure the success of any type of long-term coaching and training initiative within an organization.

Since learning does not stop when delivery of the training is over, the sales coaching program is intended to be one component of a comprehensive set of methods for continuous improvement of the performance of the sales team. The trainer's responsibility is to teach you the fundamentals and how to play the game; it is the coach who then further sharpens your game and makes you a champion. Trainers teach you how to play the game; coaches teach you how to perfect your game, while building in the added accountability to ensure you actually play and achieve your high score in every game.

Through ongoing individual and team sales coaching sessions delivered via the telephone or in person, the coach will work with the sales team on the essential techniques, skills, and competencies that will result in accelerated levels of individual and team performance, productivity, and profitability. Scheduled weekly phone meetings will accelerate progress.

By understanding the differences between the consultant, trainer, and coach, you can accurately identify which professional is needed to develop the missing competencies and skills of your sales team. Sometimes it's going to be a training issue, other times a consulting issue, and in many cases it will be more of a coaching issue. Moreover, there will be times when the solution requires a combination of these approaches. A better understanding of these three distinct disciplines will help you accurately determine which approach would be most effective for your situation.

MANAGERS DON'T HAVE TIME TO MANAGE

The Arizona sun just started to shine over the mountains and come through my hotel window as I finished organizing my notes for the seminar I was delivering in a couple of hours. I was keenly aware that this new day would bring a new experience. I was going to test out a new methodology in front of an audience for the first time. I was certain my ideas would trigger a reaction and infuse new life into this program while championing longer-lasting results.

The title of the program was “Coach Your Sales Team to the Top.” Essentially, I was going to leave it up to the audience of approximately 60 front line managers to design the content of the program on the spot. The concept? Facilitating what I call Participant Driven Seminars not only fuels greater audience participation and collaboration but also helps identify the stronger, natural leaders of the group.

This format enables participants to tap into and experience firsthand the significance of empowerment, the power of coaching, and the real value of investigating and identifying problems. They would be developing their own solutions and creating an executable action plan everyone could follow.

When we came to the topic of execution and follow-through, I started to hear most of the grumbling, complaining, and resistance.

I typically get this reaction during a seminar when I discuss time management and strategic execution. However, the decibel level of this grumbling was much higher than average. You see, this particular company was Vetter Staffing, Inc., an executive recruiting firm, one of the largest in the country. And like many companies today, this company's management team was responsible for their own level of personal production.

I opened up the seminar with some questions. I posed the first question to the management team. “Can someone share with me how you wound up in the position you're currently in?”

As I listened to their responses, I realized that most managers in the audience were top producers themselves before becoming managers and, subsequently, were promoted into management.

I then asked, “When you were promoted into this new management position, were there any changes in your workload and in your responsibility? How did your job description change in this new position?”

“Nothing’s changed, other than the 10 salespeople who started reporting directly to me about a month ago,” one manager shared.

Wanting to confirm consensus, I asked one more question. “So, every manager in this room is still responsible for a certain level of personal production and your own monthly sales quota.”

I took the head nodding and silence as agreement. I found out that even though their own individual monthly sales quotas had been reduced by 10 to 20 percent, they were still responsible for everyone else’s sales and daily sales activity. Therefore, the reduction in their sales goals and that time that was typically used to drive sales would now be replaced with the added responsibility of hiring, training, developing, retaining, and managing an entire team,—a full-time job in itself. Talk about unrealistic expectations.

This common situation is the first major clue as to why a sales team may not be meeting its goals. Something has got to give. Unless managers are putting in 20-hour workdays, they will not have the time to carry out their role to the best of their ability. Tasks, good intentions, and core managerial responsibilities fall through cracks that get wider and wider. Additional demands are placed on these managers, who have fewer resources available to them which are necessary to perform their role successfully.

Here’s an interesting fact to consider. This particular company has experienced 85 percent attrition among their sales team over the last two years. Before they hired me as their coach, the company’s strategy to staunch this bleeding wound sanctioned by the senior leadership team was “Work harder and smarter.”

You are not reading this book to become a traditional manager but to become a powerful, influential manager and executive sales coach. Managing is a lot like parenting in the sense that practically anyone can be a manager but not everyone will be good at it. And becoming a great manager means becoming a great coach. This requires not only your commitment to your own development but also to your investment in the continued development of your team. For Vetter Staffing, bringing in someone like me to work

with their managers was certainly one positive step toward giving them the additional tools they need to not only survive but to flourish. The deeper issue that I uncovered during my one-day program was more of a cultural phenomenon that would ultimately have to be addressed with the senior leadership team, where the source of the problem originated.

Although these managers at Vetter Staffing did not have the power to change their role or job description, each had the power to change how they currently managed their teams. They learned at the seminar that a little honesty, introspection, and self-analysis goes a long way, especially as it relates to evaluating the integrity of their commitment as well as the process they are currently using to get their salespeople to perform at their very best.

UNDERSTANDING THE COMMITMENT TO COACH YOUR SALES TEAM

In the forward-thinking, pioneering companies that have embraced some form of a coaching model, coaching is offered as a perk to employees. These companies offer coaching to those employees that they want to invest in, support, and assist in their growth or succession plan. Not a bad way to position coaching, but there's more to the story:

- For a salesperson in your company, how many hours does it take to achieve success?
- How much time does it take to become a sales champion?
- How long will it take you to foster a healthy relationship with a salesperson?
- What is an acceptable period of time for a salesperson to foster a healthy relationship with a prospect or customer?

You might be surprised to find out that these questions are not meant to be rhetorical but to drive a lesson home. If you're not coaching on a daily or weekly basis, you're lying to yourself and your employees. You cannot define your internal coaching program by the monthly or quarterly meetings you hold or the performance evaluations you do each year.

Many self-proclaimed coaches or managers share the following illusion they believe to be true: “Sure, we have an internal coaching program. I mean, I’m not meeting with each person on my team every week on an individual basis, but we do hold sales meetings every Monday to go over their numbers and their progress. And we do two formal performance evaluations each year for every salesperson. With the demands I already have pulling on me, there’s no way I’d be able to meet with them one to one consistently on a weekly basis.”

Oh, the lies we tell ourselves. Let me shatter this costly illusion right now. This does not, in any way, resemble a sales coaching program. The bottom line is this: If you or an outside sales coach you have hired are not meeting with your salespeople individually on a consistent basis, either weekly or biweekly, then you are not coaching them.

If you want to grow your team and your business, ongoing sales coaching is an essential nonnegotiable activity every manager needs to be involved in. The most valuable investment any manager can make would be in the weekly coaching of each member on her team, especially a new hire. If you are unable to do so due to your workload or the size of your team, then biweekly sales coaching would be an alternative solution. And if this still isn’t an option for you, consider outsourcing the sales coaching to a professionally trained, certified executive sales coach.

A client of mine shared her concern about Ike, a salesperson who recently decided to quit. During Ike’s year-end review, management uncovered some key issues that had compromised Ike’s performance throughout the year, issues that could have easily been addressed and eliminated with additional training and coaching. Unfortunately, because this problem wasn’t addressed until Ike’s year-end review, what was initially a small concern quickly escalated into a large-scale catastrophe that turned into a lose-lose situation. My client lost a good employee, and Ike lost a good job.

Unless you are continually checking in and meeting with your staff throughout the year, the year-end review or performance evaluation is often the first time that both the employee and employer get to share their successes as well as their challenges.

Weekly coaching sessions enable you to identify and eliminate problems that can compound over the year and cost the

company money, new business, and countless hours in attempting to salvage an employee. And if you're losing salespeople as a result of coaching negligence, it will cost your company even more time and money to hire and train new salespeople.

✿ FROM THE SIDELINES ✿

There is nothing more important managers can do that will have a direct and measurable impact on the bottom line than investing time each day coaching their salespeople.

GET A COACH FOR THE COACH

Top executives and managers should be disciplined enough to hold themselves accountable to execute the strategy and take the actions needed to build a thriving team. That said, challenges exist that impede the efforts of even the world's most well-intentioned managers.

First, let me point out that the word *should* is a dirty word. I try my best never to use it, as a *should* is typically somebody else's agenda rather than what is in the best interest of that person. *Shoulding* on yourself or someone else would sound like, "I *should* be farther along in my career." "If they've been in the business as long as they say they have, then they *should* already know how to perform that task." "At this point, I *should* be able to manage my workload better." "Results *should* be showing up faster than they are."

If you're on top, there's often no one up there with you to support you and ensure that you're being accountable to your business, your employees, and yourself. Being accountable doesn't always mean that you're getting everything done. It also means taking ownership of the situations around you, which also includes all the *shoulding* you're doing on yourself and on others.

Top executives face problems and issues on a daily basis, so there is always a great reason why they cannot do something they need to do. Just as your salespeople have certain blind spots when

it comes to looking at themselves or identifying the source of a problem, managers also have blind spots. Blind spots are well named because they are hard to see; many have been around for a long time. When something goes on for a while, whether it's a limiting belief, a faulty approach or tactic, or a behavior we're tolerating from others, we become numb or blind to them. Sometimes, we all need someone to point out the truth to us. Only with the help of a coach can you identify your blind spots.

Here's why. You cannot grow with what you already know. Breakthroughs require tapping into new wisdom, additional information, and getting out of your own head. Otherwise, you'll find yourself recycling the same level of knowledge and insight you already possess.

For example, it's easy for a manager to get fired up in a seminar and decide that on Monday he's going to start a training program for his people or take on some other initiative. The problem is that Monday morning the phone starts ringing, and the manager gets involved in his daily routine.

Top executives need more than just a solid strategy, systems, and procedures to accomplish their goals. The number one reason for business failure has less to do with the people, strategy, product, process, service, or profitability and everything to do with consistent execution on every level. Yes, execution is a manager's responsibility, but who will ensure that the manager is executing on a consistent basis?

An increasing number of managers are turning to coaches because they offer expertise, third-party perspective, targeted advice, and a safe sounding board. Managers can talk to a coach about their challenges without worrying about being judged or criticized.

One benefit of having your own executive sales coach is knowing there is someone who will be frank with you should you attempt to use avoidance behavior, diversionary tactics, or excuses. Your coach will work with you to develop a strategy and timetable to accomplish your core objectives and then create the structure to hold you accountable. Since you are the one setting the goals, creating the timetable, and paying for the coach's expertise and time, there is plenty of incentive to follow through on your commitments.

FIVE CORE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST SALES COACHES

Regardless of your position or your profession, I've noticed commonalities among the greatest coaches I know and have trained.

1. *You can't take someone where you haven't been yourself.* Sure, you may be in sales but has your coach ever held a sales position before, let alone been a top producer in her industry and company? If you're a business owner, manager, or executive, has your coach experienced the same challenges and successes and learned the valuable time-saving lessons that will help you build a high-performance team or grow your business? Having an experienced coach in your corner who also happens to be a successful business owner and salesperson gives you the additional edge that's sure to cut down the time-consuming and often costly learning curve it takes for you to learn and achieve what's most important to you.
2. *A top coach is a model of what is possible to achieve.* The most effective way to teach others—our employees, clients, even family members—is to exemplify that which we want to teach. From the time you walk into the office, your appearance and disposition, as well as how you handle problems, talk to clients, complete tasks and projects, your work ethic, and how you demonstrate your commitment to your people as their manager, sends a message to your staff that says, "This is how it is done." The "Do as I say not as I do" approach to managing is no longer effective. Managers need to think beyond their spoken word and evaluate their behavior to fully identify the overall message they are really sending to their staff.

A hard truth to embrace but one that rewards every manager who does is this: Businesses take on the complexion of their owners and management, both their strengths and weaknesses. You can't expect your team to go the extra mile, feel great about their work, be highly organized, and be fully accountable for their performance if their leader is not.

The greatest leaders know that in order to have an impact on others, they need to change themselves first. If you want to accelerate team performance in ways other than through training and coaching, upgrade the message you send in your communication, which also encompasses your actions as well as your behavior. You owe it to yourself as well as to your team. You are their manager and have a responsibility that transcends monthly numbers or year-end sales targets. You create the atmosphere and culture among your team. You develop the parameters that determine exactly how effective your sales team can be each day. Are you setting them up to thrive or simply survive? When you have the power to make a difference in just one person's life, you are a leader.

3. *Sometimes they really need the answer!* So, give it to them rather than throwing another question at them, which does nothing more than frustrate the person you are coaching. The sad truth is, most coaches can't give the answer. Why? Go back to the first quality. You can't get the answers from a coach who hasn't been where you want to be.

Interestingly, most people need more than just a coach to reach their goals. They also need someone who can give them the best solutions, sometimes the answers, and reduce their learning curve (via training, advising, and consulting). Only an experienced coach who possesses great business acumen and experience in the real world can do this.

4. *Coach from your heart, not from your head.* When I first started coaching I had a master list of questions I used to ensure I was in fact asking the right questions. (I'll share these questions with you in the Appendix.) After coaching dozens of people over the course of my first several months as a new coach, I realized that the greatest coaches coach from their hearts, not their heads. That is, rather than focus on the "Five Steps to Coach Anyone" or some cookie cutter model that can be bought off the shelf, the truly masterful coaches go many layers deeper in themselves to become the most effective coaches they can be.

There is certainly a place for templates and a step-by-step model when coaching as I've outlined throughout this book. However, once you have evolved into a coach, it defines who you are, not just what you do. It becomes part of you. Rather than simply "doing" coaching, you are now coaching from your heart as a natural expression of yourself.

The most effective way to uncover and connect with someone else's heart, spirit, drive, and passion is to first tap into your own. The more you, as a coach, trust and use your gut feelings, your intuition, your instincts, the more of an impact you will have on the people you coach.

5. *Develop your personal style of coaching.* When people ask me what my style of coaching is, I say, "Direct yet light, exploratory, action-oriented, comprehensive, easily adaptable, conversational, enjoyable, tactical, and results-oriented. I'm your safe sounding board, your advisor, accountability partner, cheerleader, personal trainer, and consultant."

Building off the attribute we discussed under number 4, developing your own coaching style is something that doesn't happen immediately but as an organic process as you coach more and more people. The most effective coaches have learned to trust their heart and, in turn, trust their personality. Their style of coaching complements who they are naturally. These are the coaches who reign supreme, for they know that the very thing that their salespeople or clients find attractive in them is *who* they are, not simply *what* they do. Give yourself permission to be the authentic you and let your gifts radiate throughout the coaching you deliver.

It is perfectly normal and natural to have resistance to making the transformational shift from sales manager to sales coach. Considering what is required of you, it is a tall order. Much more is expected from the sales coach than the sales manager. However, imagine what would be possible for you and for your sales team once you make this transformation. For those managers who are willing to do so, the rewards are abundant.

