



High Impact Sales Coaching: Combining Active and Emotive Behaviors to Increase Sales Coaching Performance

An EcSell Institute White Paper

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Identifying High Impact Coaching Constructs

On any given day, sales managers engage in a variety of events and interactions intended to positively impact sales rep performance. Many of these are of a nature where it is easy to see whether or not it has been accomplished because a definitive action is completed (such as holding team meeting). Other activities, as we discuss in this paper, are of a less concrete nature. Often with these behaviors, such as creating an atmosphere for open dialogue, the execution is less visible and more variable. The purpose of this research is to identify and discuss this variation in sales manager behaviors that most impact sales reps using two constructs identified in our research. Understanding the potential variations in high-impact sales coaching behaviors can help us better discern areas for sales leadership focus and understanding.

Through the Eyes of the Rep Survey Data

We use data gathered by EcSell Institute as part of the Through the Eyes of the Sales Rep Survey (TTEOTR) to explore realms of high performance coaching activities based on sales rep responses. TTEOTR is a web-based survey administered to sales reps of EcSell member organizations. The survey is comprised of a total of 67 items with this analysis using the responses of 158 sales reps. Using this data, we employ statistical procedures that allow us to take our total group of questions and reduce them down to a smaller subset. These subsets are grouped to capture constructs embedded within the total survey. Here, we discuss the two constructs that emerge from the data and the applications for them within the sales team environment.

Findings

A factor analysis was run to identify latent coaching constructs carried within the total group of TTEOTR survey questions. These constructs explain a large portion of the variance in sales rep responses and thereby indicate areas for meaningful discussion when examining high-impact coaching behaviors. Each of the constructs, which we classify as Active Coaching Behaviors and Emotive Coaching Behaviors, are discussed below.

Active Coaching Behaviors

The first construct identified in our analysis leans on survey items pertaining to action-oriented behaviors. See Figure 1 below for a listing of survey items included in the Active Coaching Behaviors construct. By in large, these items require a manager to engage in actions that either tangibly engage the sales rep or are intended to somehow elicit a response from the rep. The active nature of this construct can most easily be seen in behaviors such as providing valuable information in team meetings, providing feedback on selling skills, and incorporating role playing into the sales rep development process. Other action-based behaviors that are more abstract include taking steps to introduce challenges or uncomfortableness intended to create growth opportunities (complexity) and finding vehicles to motivate sales rep performance. Finally, this construct contains the sales rep's general overall perceived ability of their sales manager to coach and lead sales teams.

Figure 1: Active Coaching Behaviors

- THE MANAGER PROVIDES FEEDBACK THAT HELPS THE REP SELL MORE.
- THE REP FINDS GREAT VALUE IN THE INFORMATION PROVIDED IN TEAM MEETINGS.
- THE MANAGER USES ROLE-PLAYING TO IMPROVE SALES SKILLS.
- THE MANAGER PUSHES THE REP, EVEN IF SOMETIMES UNCOMFORTABLE, TO GREATER PERFORMANCE
- THE MANAGER IS EFFECTIVE AT MOTIVATING THE SALES REP TO GREATER SALES PERFORMANCE.
- THE SALES REP VIEWS THE MANAGER AS AN EXCELLENT SALES COACH.
- THE SALES REP VIEWS THE MANAGER AS AN EXCELLENT SALES LEADER.

Emotive Coaching Behaviors

The Emotive Coaching Behaviors construct is a collection of items pertaining to less tangible actions. Instead, these behaviors do not have a concrete formula for execution. Various paths can be taken to carry out these behaviors and are highly dependent upon the individual's personality and preferences. For example, there are many ways a manager can demonstrate care for a sales person or create a comfortable environment for sharing differing views. This construct contains behaviors that require a manager to understand their reps at a more personal level in order to adjust their approach to have the desired impact. The items included in this construct are listed in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Emotive Coaching Behaviors

- THE MANAGER CARES ABOUT THE REP AS A PERSON AND NOT JUST A SALES PRODUCER.
- THE REP FEELS COMFORTABLE VOICING DISAGREEMENT.
- THE MANAGER UNDERSTANDS THE REP AS AN INDIVIDUAL PERSON.
- THE MANAGER ALWAYS LISTENS.
- EXPERIMENTATION TO IMPROVE IS ENCOURAGED.
- THE MANAGER IS OPEN ABOUT BOTH SUCCESSES AND FAILURES.
- THE MANAGER TALKS THROUGH PROBLEMS RATHER THAN CORRECTING THEM PERSONALLY.
- THE MANAGER GIVES THE REP FREEDOM TO WORK AS THEY SEE BEST.
- THE MANAGER DOES NOT GET UPSET WHEN NEW THINGS ARE TRIED BUT FAIL.
- CHOICES ARE GIVEN TO REPS IN WHEN, WHERE, AND HOW THEY WORK.
- THE MANAGER WORKS JUST AS HARD AS THE REP.
- THE MANAGER DOES A GOOD JOB OF USING THE REPS BEST SKILLS AND ABILITIES.
- THE MANAGER WORKS BEST IN STRESSFUL SITUATIONS.
- MISTAKES ARE USED TO TEACH RATHER THAN PUSH.

Summary

Here we see the importance and need for two different types of coaching behaviors when leading a sales team. First the Active Coaching Behaviors construct shows that action-oriented behaviors are important. These action-based behaviors can be viewed as more traditional and understood needs to sales leadership coaching where tasks are completed and checked off a list. Completing these tasks, such as providing feedback, involve more discernable actions by the manager. Actions intended to create a response by the rep, such introducing a challenge or a goal, are also included in this construct.

Similarly, important are behaviors that share more perceptive, fluid and climate-based elements. With Emotive Coaching Behaviors, we see not actions that can be checked off a list, but implementation of less obvious actions. Successful execution of many of these elements is dependent upon the unique personalities of the sales managers and the sales team members. For example, the way in which a sales manager demonstrates trust, care, and understanding can take on a multitude of manifestations. Other items demonstrate the importance of interpersonal skills, such as the use of active listening or teaching approaches. In sum, these behaviors demonstrate the need for managers to carry out actions that require interpersonal skills and a personal understanding or knowledge of their reps to be successful.

In summary, high-impact sales managers must incorporate two coaching approaches: completion of tasks (Active Coaching Behaviors) and affect-inducing behaviors (Emotive Coaching Behaviors). When combined, the highest amount of impact can be exerted in the sales coaching arena. The ability to be a highly effective sales leader is not simply action-based. Instead, it involves a combination of both active behaviors (such as creating role playing opportunities) and engaging in emotive behaviors (demonstrating care, talking through problems, etc.). In order to develop our skills as sales managers and team leaders, we need to be aware that many of the behaviors that are less tangible may have the highest impact on the success of our sales reps.

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Stacia Jorgensen brings an array of experiences in data collection and analysis to EcSell Institute as the Director of Research. She has over 13 years of experience running a non-profit academic research organization and has expertise in both qualitative and quantitative data collection methodologies. She specializes in collaborating with clients to meet the data needs of their specific sales team while providing information that is easy to use and understand.



EcSell Institute provides strategies for continuous improvement by showing our members how to apply the latest research, technology, and best practices in leadership and sales coaching, and by involving them in a network of the top sales management minds. Why? Because we know that improving a sales manager's ability to coach and lead has the biggest impact on sales team results.

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