



An EcSell Institute White Paper

Sales Coaching Research Series:

Practical Ideas to Develop Your Sales Coaching Skills

Part 3: Motivating Sales Reps

Best Practices for Motivating Sales Reps

This third installment in our research series on sales manager best practices centers on the sales coaching ingredients to best motivate sales reps to greater sales performance. We look at the responses of sales reps who strongly view their sales manager as a sales coach who is effective at motivating them to achieve increased sales. Understanding the behaviors of sales managers who excel at motivating their sales reps is a critical area of research. These managers are skilled at finding the best approaches that prompt sales reps to perform in ways and at levels beyond the normal expectation. Additionally, sales manager who are effective motivators are also able to find ways to keep sales reps actively engaged in their performance during difficult sales cycles, for highly experienced sales reps, and across other situations where complacency in improving selling skills or hitting sales goals may arise. By better understanding this concept of sales manager motivating behaviors, we gain increased understanding of the universal behaviors that sales coaches across industry and organizational size can take to improve their sales coaching skills. Here, we discuss each best practice exhibited by motivating sales managers and the practical applications for each.

Through the Eyes of the Rep Survey Data

We use data gathered by the EcSell Institute as part of the Through the Eyes of the Sales Rep Survey (TTEOTR) to explore the sales manager behaviors that most impact sales rep motivation to improve sales performance. TTEOTR is a web-based survey administered to sales reps of EcSell member organizations. The purpose of this survey is to gather data about experiences and beliefs from the sales rep regarding coaching behaviors carried out by their sales manager. The survey is comprised of a total of 67 items with this analysis using the responses of almost 600 sales reps.

This current study focuses on the differences found between reps who report very strong agreement that their manager motivates them to higher sales performance against the reps responses for all other manager types. The mean item scores were then ranked from highest to lowest for those reps reporting the highest levels of sales manager driven motivation. By doing this, we can examine the strongest behaviors of managers who are seen as being most effective at positively motivating sales reps.

Findings

In this analysis, we examine the behaviors of managers who are highly effective at motivating sale reps based on survey data of sales reps. The following findings discuss the five behavioral variables (See Figure 1) with the largest mean differences between sales manager who excel as motivating coaches against all other coaches. This research allows us to examine the strongest behaviors sales managers can execute in order to improve their sales coaching skills, specifically regarding ways to motivate sales reps. A discussion of each behavior is also included.

1) Get To Know Your Reps

According to sales reps who view their sales manager as highly effective at motivating them to greater sales performance, the most impactful behavior a sales manager can undertake is getting to know their sales reps. Reps who feel their manager really understands who they are as a person have strong agreement that their manager knows how to motivate them. Taking the time to get to know your reps is a highly productive practice. By learning more about your sales reps, you also learn, both directly and indirectly, how to motivate them. Information you gain through more personal interactions allows you to tailor your approach to motivating, encouraging, and pushing your reps in ways that suit them individually.

What you should do:

Take the time to get to know your reps on a personal level. Gain insights into their individual preferences by asking them questions that help you understand who they are and how they think. Casual conversations can be meaningful relationship building opportunities. During these conversations, make sure the information flow is balanced. Never hesitate to invest time into getting to know your reps both in and outside the office setting.

2) Model How To Handle Stress

Challenging experiences are often where professional and personal growth are found. Sales reps perceive managers who successfully handle stress as managers who are also effective at motivating them. Experiences intended to help motivate can easily be seen as a source of stress by the reps they are intended to benefit. By modeling how to navigate stress and obstacles, sales managers serve as real-life examples of how reps can also excel during stressful and uncharted situations (such as those often created when looking for ways to motivate and challenge your team).

What you should do:

Be aware of the affect of your responses to new and challenging circumstances. Look for opportunities to demonstrate how even the most difficult situations can produce positive results. Be willing to fully participate in any strategy, program, or experience you are placing upon your sales reps. Display the behaviors you would like to see from your reps during difficult times such as positivity and intensity.

3) Give Feedback That Increases Sales

Feedback is a central component to almost every high-payoff sales coaching activity established in the sales profession. Whether it be one-to-one meetings, role-playing, or sales call evaluations, these interactions are pointless if the sharing of feedback between the sales manager and sales rep is not present. To bring even more emphasis to the importance of this interaction, sales reps tell us that receiving feedback that is clearly seen as resulting in increased sales as a key motivating factor. Feedback must be offered that is purposeful, practical, and applicable. When they reps experience success based on your coaching performance, a drive or motivation for continued and increased success is created.

What you should do:

Success often produces the drive for more success. Every interaction is an opportunity for you to provide meaningful information to your reps that can impact their performance. Do not take a laxidasical approach when providing feedback to your sales reps and insert as much quality into your offerings as possible. Be specific and detailed rather than speaking in general or vague ways. Never push coaching opportunities to the backburner when time crunches arise. Understand the individual needs and preferences of each member of your sales team in order to coach them effectively (see first best practice listed above). Network with other sales management professionals and seek your own educational opportunities to hone your coaching skills and learn best practices.

4) Utilize Your Rep's Best Skills And Abilities

Experienced sales managers can readily attest that sales reps often have components of the sales process or profession where they naturally excel or struggle. When you identify where your rep's best skills and abilities lie, you are able to help place them in positions where struggles become growth and natural achievements are magnified. Having a good command of what each of your reps does best and where they could use some improvement is like a roadmap to guide your coaching interactions not to mention increasing sales through strategic planning.

What you should do:

Referencing back to the first best practice identified in this paper, getting to know your reps on a personal level will help you identify their best skills and abilities. Participate in joint sales calls and provide role-playing

opportunities in order to witness your reps in action. When an effective skill or ability is identified, place your reps in additional opportunities for this component to be utilized. Additionally, find ways for these reps to share their success with other team members. Their sharing of experiences and approach may be powerful pointers to other reps and provide you with new tools for your coaching tool belt.

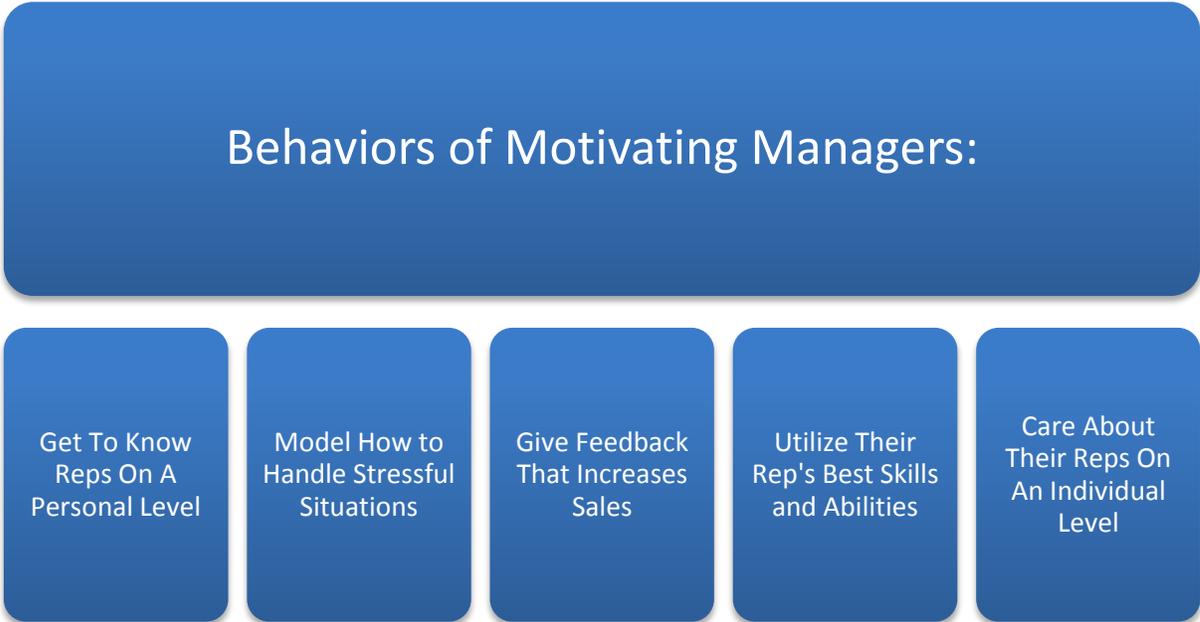
5) Care About Your Reps On An Individual Level

The importance of personal relationships appears over and over here in our results of best sales coaching practices that produce positive motivation for sales reps. Here, we again see how impactful individual bonds are between a sales manager and each member of their sales team with finding that managers are more motivating when their reps believe they care about them as a singular person. Reps want to perform at a higher level when a manager demonstrates interest, concern, and investment for them as a unique being. By making genuine and consistent efforts to build a personal relationship, you are encouraging your reps to trust your guidance, work through growth experience you provide them, and simply perform at a higher level because of your personal investment in them.

What you should do:

The fast-paced world that we live in makes the often causes the time needed to meaningfully build personal relationships to be pushed aside. Finding and prioritizing ways to get to know your reps on an individual level is a best practice behavior. Simple efforts, such as holding your monthly one-on-one meeting over lunch rather than in the office, illustrate to your reps that you are taking special interest in them. Taking time to discuss current or personal events that take place outside the office, listening more and talking less, remembering and recalling details about information shared, and opening yourself up for reps to get to know you on a more human basis are all small ways you can show your reps you see them as people beyond just sales producers.

Figure 1. Manager Behaviors That Promote Rep Motivation.



Summary

Here we have outlined the five most impactful sales manager behaviors that motivate reps to greater sales performance (increased sales). By examining the highest mean score variances for sales managers who are reported to be highly effective at motivating their reps against all other managers, five specific behaviors emerge as most impactful. The central theme to these behaviors is that they key on the importance of a strong personal relationship between the sales manager and the sales rep. Our findings demonstrate clear support for the critical need for managers to take deliberate yet sincere steps to spend time and energy to create connections with their sales reps that move beyond the nuts and bolts of acquiring sales. By engaging with team members as valuable individuals, sales managers are making an investment with their time that pays off in greater sales rep motivation to perform at higher levels.

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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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