

The Growth Prescription, a podcast for healthcare sales professionals
Episode 2: Sales coaching with Becky Thomas

Rick Cheatham: Hi, this is Rick Cheatham. I am taking time off of hosting *Fearless Thinkers* for a special series that we're calling "The Growth Prescription: A Podcast for Healthcare Sales Professionals."

I'm leaving you in the very capable hands of René Groeneveld and Alan Gentry, two real experts in the world of sales and sales x healthcare.

René Groeneveld: Hello everyone, this is René Groeneveld. I'm heading the Sales and Marketing Center of Expertise at BTS, and I would like to welcome you to our next "Fearless Thinker" podcast here on coaching and coaching in a healthcare environment.

And it's great to have two very special people with me today. And our guest today is Becky Thomas. Hello, Becky.

Becky Thomas: Hello.

René: Becky, you are heading our one-on-one coaching for North America, is that right?

Becky: Absolutely. Yep. Happy to be here. Thanks for having me on.

René: Thanks for joining us today. And like always, I'm not alone on the healthcare expertise side here: I have the head of our global healthcare vertical, Alan Gentry, with us.

Alan, good to have you here. You are at home in Chicago, or where are you at the moment?

Alan: I am at home in Chicago today, and happy to be here as well.

René: Are you as excited as I am to have Becky with us today?

Becky: Yeah, I've worked very closely with Becky on a number of different projects, and she's awesome to work with so I appreciate her input today.

René: Absolutely. And, Becky, I should probably mention

you are not just a specialist in one-on-one coaching and developmental coaching, but you're also an expert in sales coaching and helped us to develop our global offering. So curious to hear from you about the current business problems – what's going on – but also how to answer them.

And maybe we wanna focus it a little bit today... There are a number of problems that the lack of developmental coaching creates, but the biggest one are probably around engaging skill development, maybe mindset shifts as well. And a lot of the times it comes down to knowing how to coach for development and finding the time for it.

So, our focus today is on developing and engaging people. Of course, there are many more perspectives, but let's keep this as the hot topic for today because we also heard from a lot of our healthcare clients that this is a very important topic.

Alan, I think based on your experience, what did you hear out there?

Alan:

Yeah, I've heard and observed these things like you've just mentioned with a lot of the companies that we work with, and one of the things we hear the most about is that managers tend to focus on *tactical coaching* versus *developmental coaching*, or they focus in on feedback instead of spending the time coaching the individual.

And so when we define tactical coaching, it can mean a lot of different things, but usually it consists of like account planning conversations, reviewing reports, problem solving – so, there's an issue that's come up, and we need to solve that problem. Other types of things that drive sales...

Which we don't really get into that people development or that engagement level or that skill development. And so, I think that's where we want to kind of shift the focus as you were just mentioned.

René:

Absolutely, and you triggered two things. You were speaking about feedback. You were speaking about, I would call it developmental coaching.

But, Becky, let's pull you in and your expertise. How would you differentiate between giving feedback and the more development-oriented coaching conversations?

Becky:

Feedback is something that we do that's more ...

Managerial tasks. You can think of that in two ways: one would be everyday feedback, and what we use at BTS is a process called what went well and what could be even better if. So WWW.EBI. It's our way of having feedback conversations in the flow of work.

And then there's another type of feedback that requires a lot more preparation, which is more in the, and I would put in quotes, "Must be better"-type of conversations. They require a lot of thought and consideration. You may wanna practice with an expert to make sure that it's landing in the right way, 'cause there's a lot of nuances when it comes to delivering feedback and really setting the right intention.

A lot of people have feedback that say, "I just need you to be more strategic." And the person walks away going, "Okay, like how do I do that?" Right? And instead, you might wanna think of, when you're giving feedback in that way, the end goal. What's gonna happen if they're more strategic?

So, you might change that to an introduction of, "I'd love to talk to you about helping you grow and advance more quickly in the organization. How does that sound?" Right? And then the person is gonna actually be much more receptive to the feedback that you give.

Feedback is really much more of a preparation and requires facts and impacts and requests for them to make a change in their behavior.

René:

That sounds pretty good and pretty clear to me. But maybe question for both of you: What does a good development conversation involve? How does a good development conversation look like?

Alan:

In a prior role, I would go out and ride along with managers to observe the manager coaching a representative. And this would be a ride-along that would have multiple sales calls during the course of the day. And so, my observation was that managers tended to provide a lot of different feedback and/or coaching, but what they tended to do was coach a different topic after every call. They would set up the call in their pre-call planning, they would go in, but then when they come out, they would not actually stay with the consistent theme of what they were working on with pre-call. And usually, these conversations weren't connected to the development plan of the representative.

So, at the end of the day, the representative felt like they were evaluated all day long, but the coach or the manager felt like they did a great job at coaching because they coached so many different topics.

Becky:

And that's really when coaching goes wrong is when you try and coach too much at once. And a lot of times, in those ride-alongs, you're actually shifting back into feedback or into more of a mentoring type of conversation. "Here's what I would've done here." It ends up being like a lot of telling versus actually developmental conversations.

One of the ways that we support in those types of conversations is thinking of it as like an analogy of a GPS or like a navigation system. So, the first step is – you're mapping it out (you think about Google maps, right?). Where do you wanna go? Where are you at currently? And then how do you wanna get there, plane, train, bus, et cetera, right?

And the same is true in a coaching conversation. Stick to the one topic, really get clear on what the topic is when you're coaching, and then fuel that conversation with really active listening; asking coaching questions that start with the word "What." "What does success look like?" "What" is a really key word in coaching conversations that helps the other person think more deeply about what it is that they wanna do.

We stay away from "why," just for context, just because why can feel like a judgment and kinda shut others down. I'll just give you one example here. If just somebody says, "Why did you handle the client objection that way?" Has a certain kind of impact that the person is gonna start to have a lot of adrenaline and maybe some stress.

And a good coaching conversation, a good developmental conversation, is, "I'm curious, what did you notice happened after the client had an objection?" A sales rep might say, "Well, I got kind of defensive." "So what would it look like if you were successful at handling objections," right? Now, you're letting that person come to their own conclusion. You're letting the sales rep make the change in their own behavior versus you saying, "Well, when I handle objections, this is what I do."

René:

Let's take a different look at it... In a sales and a commercial environment, especially in healthcare –

so how could you go from good to great at coaching with your sales managers in this environment? Any ideas?

Becky:

You know, we have so many sales managers, Alan and I have worked with that thought they were coaching the whole time, and they were like, "Oh, shoot, I was mentoring. I actually was mentoring and telling them what to do..." Going from good to great looks like asking a lot of coaching questions.

You gotta take your hands off the wheel, so to speak, and just sit back and ask questions. And for sales leaders – I know, I come from a marketing background – I've worked with sales leaders my whole life, and I know that's not an easy thing to do. It's never easy to make that kinda shift when you have behavior where you're like, "I've been – but I've been so helpful!" It's like, you will also be helpful when you sit back, take your hands off the wheel and shift the gear from the mentoring and telling to a new behavior of peer coaching. **So, the acronym "WAIT" seems to help sometimes, which is, "Why am I talking?"**

Alan:

One of the things that comes to mind here is how we've been able to craft a solution to help several different companies that we've been working with solve this problem: there was a high level of frustration on the training part because they've run multiple workshops on coaching models and how to coach and what great coaching looks like, but their managers just weren't getting better when they were in the field. When we looked at the way that they were running the workshops, a lot of times these managers would get paired up with each other. They've just been through the workshop. They get paired up, and they do a role play, and this role play, they would give each other feedback, and they would have the conversation.

It was artificial, which is what role plays typically are. But the challenge became, when the manager would give the other manager feedback, neither one of them were an expert in the coaching model that they just went through the training on, and they really didn't know how to really break down the conversations, give suggestions or guidance, as well as some feedback on what could have been better and what they could have said in different situations.

So, this is where we've kind of stepped in, and we leverage our professional coaching network to really simulate these interactions with managers. And in this scenario, our coach will play the direct report for this manager, and the manager will have a coaching conversation with them... Our coach is able to really go in and break down the conversation for them and give them guidance around the model in how to ask better questions, how to engage the learner or the manager in the conversations.

One of the things that we've able also do is really incorporate recording tool. And this recording tool helps to analyze the conversation. It analyzes how much time they spend in each step of the model. It analyzes open-ended versus close-ended. It analyzes how much I talked versus direct report talked.

And all these different things create [not just] a really great report, but [also a] great analysis. And so the manager is able to get all this great feedback, and what we've started to see when they repeat the conversation is huge or a most remarkable improvement.

In addition, we've started doing some field coaching guide analysis as well. After I complete the conversation, I then complete a field coaching guide on my own time, based on the conversation that I just had with the BTS coach who played my direct report, and I send that to the coach. The coach then reads it and evaluates it to ensure that it really, one, summarizes what the conversation was about, [and] two, is accurate.

Becky:

Yeah, there's a couple of things that make our practice with an expert groundbreaking. One is that piece of data that they get immediately. For someone to see, "Wow, I talked 60% of the time as the coach? Ooh, I probably was doing a little, I should have done more active listening."

It's so eye-opening that, within moments, within the second round, they change their behavior because they see the data, right? It's almost like watching your golf swing, right? You can easily correct it once you see what your grips like or how your stance is or whatever. So that part is really helpful.

And then the other thing is, we know that learning journeys that have coaching attached to them have actually moved from a 22% effectiveness to an 88% effectiveness for that participant. And it's exactly for the reason you said, Alan - it's because they

have that accountability feedback loop with their coach to create behavioral change. And that's something that, you know, a workshop or a pod alone just doesn't have the capability to do.

René:

I'm just thinking about one life science client, and they were keen on coaching and developmental coaching for quite some time, and we, over the last years, built a lot of hybrid journeys really combining traditional training, self-paced, with coaching, and this was super impactful. But they are now experimenting with pure sales coaching journeys. And the first results we received, including some of the conversational analysis, AI tools you just mentioned, showed some really, really powerful results. And you mentioned some impact already, but I think there's much more to come.

For our listeners, what are the three tips from what we learned?

Becky:

First tip is map it out with them.

The second one would be fuel that conversation with those powerful what-based questions.

And then the third one, again, is just let them do the driving. Let them determine what success looks like and be the guide on the side.

René:

Becky, Alan, thanks so much for the great conversation today. I learned a lot. I hope our listeners did as well, but this is just the end of this podcast. But if you are interested in more details, white papers, thoughts or just wanna speak to Becky, Alan or me, please reach out to us; find us on bts.com or LinkedIn. We're looking forward to continue our conversations maybe off-podcast.

Have a beautiful rest of your day, and more to come soon in this wonderful series here.

Masami Cookson:

If you'd like to stay up to date on the latest from the "Fearless Thinkers" podcast, please subscribe. Links to all of the relevant content discussed in today's podcast are in the show notes, or you can always reach us at bts.com. Thanks again.
