



# 3 Reasons Why Enabling Sales Managers Falls Short

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Written by Jason Davis, Senior Director, Sales & Marketing Practice, BTS



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An all too common story – a hard-working sales manager whose team does not consistently perform. During one quota period things go okay, but in the next, the team fails to meet the objectives. The sales manager was a successful salesperson themselves, so they clearly know how to sell. They are well-liked and respected by their team, by their peers, and by leadership. They are a diligent interviewer. So why can't they get their team to perform consistently?

## Why some succeed and others do not

Most sales managers started out as sellers. As sellers, they learned how to uncover customer needs, position their companies' offerings, and close deals. And while they developed expertise and performed well as an individual seller, these skills do not transfer directly to being a great sales manager. Coaching is not an innate skill for most people. Some sales managers "figure it out," but many more fall into traps like these common sales manager personas:

- **The "Super rep"** – someone who eagerly jumps in to lead/close opportunities on for their sellers.
- **The "This is what worked for me manager"** – the person who assumes everyone can just "follow in their footsteps" to figure out the path to sales success.
- **The "Performance manager"** – someone who focuses on holding people accountable for achieving their numbers but sees little value in skill coaching as their team should be able to "just get it already."
- **The "Administrator"** – the leader who focuses on handling all internal data, reporting, and tasks to "free-up their reps' time," believing that with more time, sellers will succeed.
- **The "Friend manager"** – someone who emphasizes building personal relationships, believing that if they are seen as likeable their sellers will feel compelled to deliver.
- **The "Ready-aim-fire manager"** – a leader who stresses the importance of speed to action and agility, believing that moving faster keeps sellers in front of their competitors and the market.

Following these approaches inevitably leads to some success. However, managers soon realize that the progress they once saw is not sustainable – they are standing in quicksand. Saddled with the burden to perform and reach their quota, they work harder, but sink even deeper into the pit. The more they struggle, the more elusive progress becomes.

So, what's the solution? These sales managers require a mindset shift. They are no longer selling as individual contributors, but instead leading a sales team. How can organizations help enable this mindset shift?

## Why training is not enough

For many organizations, the solution to helping sales managers make this shift is putting them through some form of training or coaching. If managers learn the proper coaching behaviors, the time spent coaching will drive sales results, won't it? But training is like throwing a fraying rope to these managers who are already drowning in quicksand. The manager will make some progress getting out, but eventually the rope will break and they will sink back down.

While valuable, on its own training lacks the individualization to truly address the unique needs of each sales manager. Managers need a combination of general skills training, in addition to tailored skill building that addresses the managers' specific situation and gaps. Managers need to understand how to think through and act upon what is happening with their team – and the best training will enable this learning. While each sales manager will get some benefit from traditional one-size-fits-all training, without additional individualization, results will vary and some sales managers will continue sinking into the quicksand.

## Why professional coaching is not enough

For a rare few, the answer is providing professional coaching for the manager. Professional coaching helps individuals develop a powerful awareness of how they approach on-the-job situations and how they show up in them. Coaching emphasizes honing personalized leadership skills and enables the manager to internalize learning quickly and apply it back on the job. This provides significant value to the manager. However, while experts in their field, professional coaches are rarely experienced in coaching for sales performance. As a result, sales managers are often limited to their own sales IQ (sales acumen) to think through how to translate their mindset learnings to coaching their sellers.



## Coaching the sales coach

Breaking this cycle requires a more comprehensive approach rooted in shifting mindsets and building capabilities. Enabling managers means equipping them to understand and embrace the three pillars of great sales coaching: 1) defining great sales coaching, 2) experiencing great sales coaching, and 3) executing great sales coaching.

### ***Step One: Define Great Sales Coaching***

Foundationally, sales managers need to develop an awareness of their limiting beliefs and mindsets. These are beliefs that they hold from their time as sellers that undermine their ability to drive sales performance as managers. From there, managers can begin embracing the mindsets that drive great sales managers: strategic thinking, calculated risk-taking, and leadership to drive sales results.

### ***Step Two: Experience Great Sales Coaching***

Sales managers need to experience what great coaching truly is. By going through a series of coaching conversations, Sales Managers can experience what it's like to be coached by an expert who understands how to tailor their approach to the unique needs of each sales manager. From this firsthand experience, Sales Managers can then apply the same techniques in their own conversations with their sellers.

### ***Step Three: Execute Great Sales Coaching***

Equipped with the right mindsets, managers can focus next on the behaviors they need to lead and inspire their team. A combination of training targeted at the individual's gaps with the support of a coach provides managers with the tools necessary for success. This experience enables managers to tailor their approach to coaching sellers on their team, recognizing the critical moments in time where sellers benefit most from coaching and how to engage in those moments. Such as preparation for customer meetings, execution of customer meetings, and reflection and follow-up after customer meetings.

Successfully enabling sales managers to become great sales coaches requires a comprehensive approach. This includes defining what great sales coaching looks like, allows managers to experience great coaching, and enables them to execute it on the job. Shifting sales managers' mindsets is only the starting point. While training on coaching capabilities alone can be costly in terms of time, performance, and ultimately revenue, combining individualized coaching and training delivers maximum ROI for both your managers and your bottom line.

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