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From Good, To Great To Extraordinary

It is perhaps more important now, than it has been at any time during the past 80 years, for front-line sales leaders to acquire the right coaching skills for teaching fundamentals and encouraging exceptional performance and loyalty from their teams. The ability to coach, as much as anything else, may be the largest single contributing factor to sales health in the next few years. In many cases, the success or failure of many companies may depend on it.

“Coaching” has become one of the buzzwords of the new millennium. Coaches have always been important in sports, but the idea of coaching has permeated everyday life, including business. For just about anything you can think of, you can find a coach. You can even find so-called *Life Coaches* who purportedly will coach you into better living habits!

Some of the better sales consulting firms advise sales managers to become effective coaches for their sales teams. While I absolutely agree with this advice, I think it's important to examine the practice of coaching and to understand what makes an effective coach in any discipline.

There are, in my opinion, three types of effective coaches. At the lowest level there is the *good coach*. The middle level is occupied by the *great coach*. *Extraordinary coaches* occupy the very top level of coaching.

All effective coaches share at least one admirable talent – the ability to teach. Teaching techniques for any discipline vary widely, but you cannot coach effectively unless you can teach. It's not so important how coaches teach as it is what they teach that distinguishes the three levels of coaching.

A good coach, for example, effectively teaches the fundamentals, whether it's the rudiments in drumming, the compulsory figures in figure skating, or the basics of the baseline and net game strokes in tennis. Good coaches don't have to be superstars in their fields. The ability to effectively teach fundamentals is the most important attribute of the good coach.

The great coach is not only adept at teaching the fundamentals, but also possesses the ability to extract superb performance from his or her students. The great coach sees in a student what others don't see and, many times, what the student doesn't see. Great

coaches know intuitively how to motivate those students who have exceptional talent to give exceptional performances. Great coaches have the ability to coax superior performances from their students that the students themselves may not believe they are capable of delivering.

Then there is the *extraordinary coach*. There aren't many of these. These coaches are master teachers of the fundamentals who routinely coax the very best performances from their students. What sets the extraordinary coaches apart from all other coaches is their ability and willingness to show their students how what they learn can be applied for their benefit to the rest of their lives.

Next month we will examine the role of the sales manager as coach, and we will explore how sales managers might go from good, to great, to extraordinary coaches of their sales teams.

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