

## ARTICLE REPRINT

### Step One To Extraordinary Coaching

I'll never forget the sales training and guidance I received from Al, my first sales manager. Fresh out of college, and eager to start my first job, I walked into Al's office on Monday morning and asked him when we would get started with my training.

Al looked at me with sympathy and understanding, handed me a thick, white binder stuffed with brochures and product information sheets, leaned back in his chair and said, "Steve, I'm going to tell you what my first sales manager told me - "If you want to learn how to swim, there is no quicker, better way to learn than to jump right into the middle of the lake. Here is your binder with all our product information. Now, go get 'em, tiger!"

I soon figured out that Al wasn't really a sales manager, and he certainly wasn't a coach. What I needed at that time, since I knew absolutely nothing about sales, was a good coach. So, what could Al, as my sales leader, have done to act like a good coach for me?

#### Teaching Fundamentals

First, besides providing some basic information about the company, and some product knowledge, Al could have assumed the role of a teacher. He could have taught me some of the fundamentals of selling. The ability to effectively teach the fundamentals of any discipline is a common, requisite skill of all good coaches.

In complex sales, selling fundamentals should include how to prospect for new business that fits the profile of a profitable relationship for the seller, how to qualify sales opportunities, how to efficiently perform the work that must be done to move opportunities through the sales funnel, how to close sales opportunities and how to effectively manage established relationships.

#### Teaching Is Reinforcing - Continuously

Sales leaders who want to become good coaches must do more than teach fundamentals to their sales teams. Once the leader teaches selling fundamentals, and the logical steps in the process used by the sales team to generate sales, the knowledge and skills must be absorbed by the sales professionals and used in their everyday selling activities. New skills and sales methodologies must be practiced by team members and reinforced by the leader.

One of the most important things all good coaches recognize is that practice doesn't make perfect – only *perfect practice* makes perfect! Good coaches know that even world class

athletes must practice the fundamentals of their sports throughout their careers. Superior performance in any discipline is the direct result of continuous, perfect practice.

Once the sales team understands and grasps the fundamentals, and appreciates the necessity for and value of perfect practice, the sales manager, as a good coach, must reinforce the practice of those fundamentals until successful execution becomes an integral part of the team's DNA. The goal is continuous, incremental improvement, much like the goal of “lean” strategies and Kaizen, as practiced by manufacturing companies worldwide.

Sales leaders who are good coaches know that teaching and reinforcing, the cornerstones of effective sales leadership, is a never-ending process. Sales leaders who are also good coaches are hard to find. It's even harder to find sales leaders who have grown in their profession to become *great* coaches.

Next month we will explore the prerequisites of great coaching and how front-line sales leaders can learn and employ the skills of great coaches.

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