



THE BENCHMARK

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How to coach a salesperson

PART I

get questions regarding sales staff motivation. I think this is because it's relatively new to most owners who sold for so long they can't understand why others can't do it the way they did it. They manage the salesperson like the batting coach instructing recent arrivals from the farm club. "Just step up to the plate, see the ball and hit it," they tell the less experienced batters.

Thank you, coach, for that invaluable advice. The truth is, though, most of the best batting coaches were .240 career hitters. They lack the gift, but know the science.

There *is* a science to selling — and like the baseball swing, it can be broken down and coached. The coach's job is to teach the mechanics and process through observation, demonstration and applied pressure.

The best place to start is by understanding the factors that produce poor performance. In sales, there are three big ones. Coaches and salespeople should focus on these, and master the process and mechanics of each.

1 Ineffective qualification of prospects. Salespeople can't meet goals if they don't grow and nurture a large pool of warm leads. To do this, the sales manager must focus the salesperson on allocating time to this task, counting and testing the quality of the leads weekly, and providing simple networking call scripts for turning cold/warm leads into hot leads. A good sales manager reviews and develops canned emails and voice-mails, and helps the salesperson strategize ways to get in the door. Poor writing and phone skills with lack of creative follow-up narrow the lead pool.

2 Insufficient lead pool management. Failure to qualify a hot lead as a high probability close opportunity will always produce lots of bidding activity, with relatively little result other than wasted time. Given the low close rates in the

industry, wasted time is a luxury they can't afford. A sales manager can test the quality of an opportunity by asking a few simple questions.

- › Do we know who really makes this decision?
- › Will we have the opportunity to close it face to face?
- › Have we established a clear need (point of pain), and connected that to our service proposition in a way that establishes a "fit"?
- › Do we understand the job specification and budget range, and can we shape it?

A good sales manager provides scripts, practices how to ask the right questions to elicit these responses, and shows the salesperson how to close on an advancing action. If the salesperson cannot confirm a clear fit or a face-to-face, then closing success will be low.

3 Ineffective negotiation under pressure. The art of deal-making — also known as negotiation — takes practice. But the skill set is rather straightforward. The poised and patient salesperson turns an objection into an opportunity by validating the objection, clarifying it, turning it back as a question to the prospect, then closing on the response with an offer, concession or assurance. This simple method gets salespeople past the "deer in the headlight" moment of truth that happens right after a brilliant presentation is followed by a question about matching the lowest price. A good sales manager prepares "objection cheat sheets" and a 4-minute canned "needs/solutions" presentation to arm the salesperson with proper tools. But this is not enough without grilling sessions to produce fluency. At the end of the day, a sale is not made in the presentation, but in the negotiation.

How do you motivate landscape and lawn care salespeople and get better performance? Teach them how to win. For salespeople, winning is the ultimate motivation.