

Poor Self-Assessment Leads to Poor Sales Coaching

Last Modified on 07/02/2020 3:11 pm EDT

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Most salespeople can accurately assess their strengths and weaknesses. But alas, unfortunately, this is not true.

Most people struggle to construct an accurate self-assessment of their abilities and have difficulty pinpointing the true nature of their strengths and weaknesses. They seek out evidence that confirms their positive opinions and ignore contrary evidence. Plus, they even fail to accurately assess from a performance perspective the underlying reasons for success.

When it comes to coaching, this is a problem. It isn't easy to travel the performance improvement road unless everyone agrees on where the journey begins.

Here are some ideas we have picked up over the years by watching sales managers that integrate a "let's get the self-assessment right before we begin" step into their sales coaching efforts.

- **Shift the reference frame.** First, the sales manager can change the standard against which salespeople self-judge. For example, shifting to a best practice standard versus "what everyone else is doing" will help neutralize explanations for performance weaknesses.
- **Define with greater clarity.** Second, sales managers can be more specific when describing behaviors such as "selling value" or "developing customer relationships." For example, pointing out a Feature has no inherent value; Value is about fit - the fit between a product characteristic and a customer need.
- **Paint a picture for moving forward.** Sales managers can help salespeople depersonalize negative information to make it easier to confront and handle. They can respond to unlikely explanations for certain behaviors or lack of performance by pointing out how others facing the same challenge were able to achieve the desired results.
- **Integrate the positive.** Too often, the coaching effort is all about correcting a performance deficiency. A more effective self-assessment also includes helping the salesperson to understand their strengths better. A great sales coach will help salespeople leverage their talents better, apply their strengths innovatively, and correct their deficiencies.

Most coaching efforts would be more effective, if more time is spent upfront, developing a shared vision of the salesperson's strengths and weaknesses. Most of us are not overly receptive to receiving feedback on improving something we think we are already pretty good at.

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