



Good Coaching Means Good Consultative Selling

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Any manager charged with coaching his or her people knows that it can be a somewhat daunting experience. I'm not talking about evaluative coaching with someone who works for you (which has its own set of tensions). I'm talking about *developmental* coaching, which, as the word implies, is meant to help someone get better. Why can this be a daunting experience? Think about it. You are about to tell someone who is performing well enough to still be on the payroll that they can be doing some things better. Well, hello, if that person knew that the change you are suggesting was the right thing to do, they would already be doing it. So that means one of two things: either your ideas on how they can improve make sense but they were too close to the trees to see the forest (whew, they agree with me), or they are not in your particular boat (rough seas ahead).

In either case, your life as a living, breathing, coaching manager can be made a lot simpler if you follow the rules of good consultative selling when you launch into your next coaching session.

Rule #1: Always Position The Meeting. When you are selling, you position the meeting with the buyer so that you can put him or her at ease by managing expectations. This makes it easier to begin analyzing the situation and agreeing to the needs. Here's where good pre-call planning, stated objectives, agendas, time contracts and facilitated meeting management skills come into play.

It's the same skill set you will use for a good evaluative coaching session...and for the same reason. You want the 'coachee' to be as relaxed as possible in order to eventually work out a mutually agreeable plan for improvement. And if you don't think this involves selling, then you've never been there. Remember, 'selling' is having someone do something they wouldn't ordinarily do without your input.

In selling, the climate has to be right before a dialogue between the prospect and the seller can occur which will eventually help the seller determine the buyer's needs. Sound like coaching? You bet.

Rule #2: Agree on the needs. In sales, a prospect will not buy unless he or she sees the value *to him or herself* in acting (WIFM, What's In It For Me). This involves a complete understanding of that buyer's needs, which occurs through a dialogue involving good questioning and equally good listening. If it's successfully executed, a good needs analysis leads to a mutually agreed to set of needs that always precedes the recommendation. The more insightful the needs, the more the buyer appreciates the corresponding value you are delivering with your recommendation.

It's the same with coaching. I will not change my behavior unless I clearly see a benefit *to me* in doing so. Of course, unlike selling, you can always order me to change (job preservation is always compelling). But that's a short-term fix and an unhealthy one to boot. It is far better that, through a skillful needs analysis, we can together discuss the things I'm doing right and why it seems to be working for me and the things I can be doing better in the future to help me improve my performance. If I see the value, I am far more likely to implement the changes you would like me to make.

Rule #3: Creatively match the specific benefits of the recommendation you are making to my needs we have mutually agreed upon. In sales, never waste time. If, as the buyer, I agree my need is flexibility, then the first thing I should hear in your recommendation is the specific benefit of flexibility that you can offer me. Otherwise, you miss your chance to be most compelling. MasterCard knew from their research that buyers buy the *experience* they get from a product more than the actual item itself. That is why the first image you see in their advertising (and what makes it so compelling) is the experience of taking your kid to a ball game and the encapsulation of that experience with one word...priceless!

It's the same with coaching. Let's say you and I agree that it is important for me to ask more open-ended questions during my sales calls. You suggest that a way for me to implement this change in behavior is to write three open-ended questions on my pad and check them off during the course of my meeting as they are asked. The most compelling reason you can give me to do this might be that you have a way that guarantees I will ask more open-ended questions. Now you have my interest and now I am more interested in listening to your idea...maybe. That leads to Rule#4.

Rule #4: If I don't agree with your recommendation, HEAR ME OUT. You know as well as I do that people resist ideas, even if your recommendation seems right on the mark. Maybe it's natural skepticism, or the not-invented-here syndrome, or the need not to feel like a push over. Whatever the cause, the result is a literal or figurative NO (i.e., literally, I can vocalize the two letter word or figuratively I can say something like "I'll think about it" or "leave me the write-up" or any number of stalling or deadening responses. So if you are selling *or coaching*, a good consultative approach to conflict is to acknowledge the objection (which is akin to positioning by letting the person know you are willing to discuss the matter). Then let them talk, drawing them out if need be with open-ended questions. The more they talk, the more you will understand and, correspondingly, the better chance you will have to convert the objection to a need because that is the most effective way to deal with an objection.

It is easier to address a need than to challenge an objection. So if you are selling and I say your price is too high, you might paraphrase this objection as a need to understand what additional value I bring to the table to justify this price.

It's the same with coaching. If I don't agree with your suggestion to help me change my behavior (let's say that idea about writing three open-ended questions before I start a sales meeting seems too scripted to me), then hear me out – don't argue. We may agree on the need I have to change but not the solution you are offering to help me accomplish the change. It would be criminal at this point to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Acknowledge my right to push back and let me voice my concerns so that we can mutually agree on a way to accomplish the objective. That is by far the best way to ensure I will use whatever solution is mutually worked out between us to help me change my behavior.

So use the skills of good consultative selling to help you effectively coach good consultative salespeople. Always position the coaching session so I am more available to hear you out. Make sure we both agree on my needs and the value *to me* to change my behavior. Make sure you 'sell' me on your recommended course of action in the most compelling manner by showing me how the specific benefit of your idea addresses my need. And if I don't agree, hear me out.

No matter how you slice it, good coaching is good selling. Good luck.