



# Coaching Library

# **The Sales Call Evaluation: Delivering Effective Feedback**

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Would you like to improve your team's sales? Of course you do. Everybody sales leader wants to hit a bigger number. But the question of how to do this is the more challenging. Do you invest in a rep training program? Do you put together a strategy for penetrating key accounts? Do you focus on driving accountability for selling activities? All of these strategies are all likely to yield benefits. But according to EcSell Institute research, there is at least one strategy you can undertake that will lead to proven results – improving your coaching of your reps sales skills.

Indeed, our research shows that helping a sales rep improve their skills is highly related to increased levels of a rep's motivation to sell. Moreover, the more highly a rep rates their manager's coaching of their sales skills, the more likely that rep is to exceed their sales goal. Overall, our research shows a clear trend – effective sales skills coaching shows a significant relationship to increased sales. So knowing the importance of sales skills coaching, how can you make sure you are doing it in the best possible way? Follow these specific strategies to deliver the most effective feedback to your reps on their selling skills.

## **Make Feedback a Consistent Practice**

Think back to when you were a sales rep. When did your manager typically spend the most time reviewing a sales call with you? If you were like most sales reps, feedback was more likely to come your way when something went wrong rather than when something went right. A sales call goes well and reps will get an “atta boy” and then everybody moves on to the next call. A sales call goes poorly (especially an important call) and reps get an earful on what they could've done better and need to do differently next time. Think of the connotation that this creates for feedback. Unfortunately, reps start to associate feedback with making mistakes. No wonder many reps are defensive when their manager coaches them.

By changing the consistency with which you deliver feedback, you can also change the perception of that feedback in the eyes of your rep. Debrief every sales call and feedback will start to become a normal part of the coaching process and will no longer have a negative connotation for them. It will simply be something that always happens, regardless of the outcome of the sales call. This will help feedback be received more positively, which in turn, means reps will spend more time listening to your ideas and suggestions, rather than being defensive. Winning play or losing play – if you review all of them, you will see that feedback starts to be perceived simply as a way to help them grow and improve their skills.

## **Use a Consistent Format for Feedback**

In addition to consistency in how often feedback is delivered, it is also important to have consistency in how it's delivered. According to our rep surveys, one of reps' biggest complaints about the feedback they receive from their managers is that it's

not in-depth or specific enough for them to take action on it. Indeed, most post-call feedback tends to be informal – often just done verbally in the car on the way back from a sales call. This type of informality can often lead to feedback that doesn't address all key selling skills, that's not very detailed and that doesn't create buy-in with the reps around the techniques they need to improve. Using a consistent sales call evaluation form can alleviate many of these issues.

An effective sales call evaluation form has three primary roles. First, it covers the key selling skills that a rep needs to exhibit to be successful. This includes such things as creating an effective call strategy, asking good needs analysis questions, overcoming objections and closing skills. While you want your evaluation form to be comprehensive, don't make it overly detailed. Evaluating 10-15 key skills is sufficient. Second, an effective call evaluation form should include a place for the sales manager to give numeric ratings of the reps' the different selling skills. Assigning a number not only helps to ensure clarity between you and the rep on the strength or weakness of their different skills, but it also allows them to track their improvement over time. Third, an effective call evaluation should include a place for the manager to write down specific suggestions for further leveraging a strength or improving a weakness. Clear ideas and examples are necessary for a rep to be able to take action on the feedback you give them.

Finally, even though you should rate all key selling skills on your form, be selective in how many skills you review in-depth. Choose no more than three key selling skills upon which to give more detailed comments and recommendations. If you overload your sales reps with too many improvement ideas, they will be less effective at implementing the key changes you need them to make.

### **Ask Questions to Facilitate Better Learning**

The final best practice for improving your feedback is to use questions to facilitate a more effective learning process. Asking powerful questions is likely one of the key techniques you teach your new sales reps and for good reason. Because questions help your reps learn customers' needs and business, as well as help customers self-diagnose their issues and how you can help solve them. A great questioning process can even create customer buy-in for a solution before the reps even suggest it. And in the same way that questions help your reps consult with customers more effectively, they also help you coach your team more effectively.

Now, obviously you have a different relationship with your reps than they do with their customers. But at the end of the day, they are people too. They want their opinion to matter. They don't like people to make assumptions about why they did what they did. They bristle at being criticized without context. And they want to learn rather than just being told what to do. This is why asking questions is just as important when coaching reps as it is when selling to customers.

One of the best opportunities to coach with questions is during your sales call evaluation. Many of us start a post-call coaching session with the most basic

question of “how do you think the call went?” But after the rep gives their initial response, we quickly transition into giving our assessment of the call and what we think they could’ve done better. Next time you are doing post-call feedback, consider asking your rep a lot more questions, such as the following:

- Why did you choose your strategy for the sales call?
- How were you hoping the customer would respond to your strategy?
- How well did you accomplish your goal?
- What could you have done differently to achieve your goal?
- Which aspects of the call do you want to replicate on your next call?

Asking open-ended questions like these encourages the rep to really consider the reasons behind their actions during the sales call. When you are able to get them talking about their ideas and beliefs underlying their actions, then you are better able to coach them. Because you will be dealing with the root cause of their behavior, whether it is positive or negative. Then you can reinforce the thinking and subsequent behavior that is on the right track or coach the thinking and subsequent behavior that is on the wrong track. You will also be helping them self-diagnose any issues, which is helpful in getting them to buy into the need to make a change. Above all, you will be showing how much you value their thinking and view them as a true partner in their success. This will create a much more positive and collaborative relationship between the two of you, and ultimately, help them in their development and performance.

### **Summary**

If you want a proven strategy for increasing your team’s sales, our research indicates that you should learn how to deliver more effective feedback on reps’ selling skills. Through making feedback a consistent practice, employing a thorough evaluation form and using questions to promote learning, you will be on your way to becoming a better sales coach, and ultimately, exceeding your sales target. And really, isn’t that what being a sales leader is all about?

### **About The Author**



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With over 12 years of experience in employee assessment, leadership coaching, and customer service, Sarah has helped hundreds of executives develop professionally and assist them with implementing programs directed toward increasing sales results and profitability.



EcSell Institute provides strategies for continuous improvement by showing our members how to apply the latest research, technology, and best practices in leadership and sales coaching, and by involving them in a network of the top sales management minds. Why? Because we know that improving a sales manager's ability to coach and lead has the biggest impact on sales team results.

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