

Figuring out my role as coach

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"In running a business, one of my most important functions is growing a team that can grow sales. I have to learn more about my role as sales coach. How do I tap into the passions of my people? I've had success as a sports coach, now I have to figure it out in business."

Most business owners wake up one day to find themselves doing a whole bunch of activities for which they feel unprepared. Managing and motivating a sales team is often one of those. Without a well-coordinated sales effort, the business cannot continue to grow.

One top challenge for any business owner is mastering sales management. Unfortunately, there are lots of obstacles standing in the way of a company succeeding at sales. Here are some worth considering:

- not controlling enough or trying to control too much;
- focusing on the wrong goals;
- inconsistent leadership;
- unclear if you have the right people on the team; and
- pushing and pulling people to do more.

Finding the balance between enough and too much control is crucial for today's manager or coach. You cannot do the job for your people. You cannot beat anyone into submission. You have to lead.

Set goals, review roles

Set out goals for the company overall. Add up what you honestly believe each person can produce. If there's a match between what your people can realistically produce and what the company wants to achieve overall, keep going.

If there's a gap you have some figuring out to do. Pull the team in and brainstorm. Identify what's missing. Consider adding tools as well as team members. Create a budget, timeline and measurables to know if you're on track.

Look at your role as coach. Do you regularly work on skill development with every team member? Or do you just show up for game day and hope for wins? Is there emphasis on helping people to master skills in practice sessions?

Ask each person on the team what he wants in life. Relate that to succeeding on the job. Help each person to make the connection between actions he takes at work, results he is likely to achieve and how he perceives himself in the world.

Listen when people say that they're trying hard. They probably are. But if results don't match efforts, something's wrong. It's your job as coach to help each player figure out what's wrong and how to fix it.

Watch what people do, not what they say. Are they willing and able to put in time and effort in order to improve so that they can succeed? Keep in mind that an individual player may perceive major risks by admitting he can't or won't be on the team, from loss of status, to loss of job. Your job as coach is to bring the subject out in the open and put it to bed, one way or another.

Players and teamwork

Know that change is not easy, but may be necessary. Sometimes you have to cut a player to strengthen the team. Helping an underperforming player move on to something he can excel at may be your greatest achievement.

On sports teams there are a variety of positions, with room for lots of players and skills. Encourage participation and cooperation. Many teams do well with a roster of competent players and no superstars. Know who to go to for which skill.

Use the tremendous power of acknowledgement to get more out of every player. Recognize what each player contributes. Celebrate minor progress as well as major wins. Coordinate efforts through regular meetings, reports and open communication.

In sports, the quality with which each person plays an individual position combined with how the team performs as a whole are what lead to a winning season. The same is true for a sales team. Individual assignments matched to individual strengths, lots of practice time and a coordinated team can lead to more wins.

Looking for a good book? Try "Coaching Sales People into Sales Champions," by Keith Rosen.

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