

Your practical guide:

4 steps to developing high performing sales teams

Accelerate sales growth through effective learning opportunities

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Introduction

Sales directors, sales managers and salespeople all have one objective in common: hitting their targets. But how can sales leaders support their teams to continually learn and develop? Not only to drive sales, but to be the best salespeople they can be.

In sales, we're on a continual quest to meet and exceed our targets. We're always looking for new strategies and tactics to get our teams closing faster and increasing sales values. What can be easy to overlook is how we support our teams to adopt these new approaches and refine their performance. The learning and development of our sales teams is often the biggest lever we can pull on in terms of sales performance.

This guide will explore the 4 stages of developing high performing salespeople and provides practical guidance for how to make improvements to your training and development quickly:

- ***Accelerate the onboarding of new salespeople***
- ***Enhance shadowing***
- ***Encourage a self-reflective salesforce***
- ***Deliver coaching and feedback more effectively***

Steven Denman,
Head of Sales at iConnect



1 Onboarding new salespeople

Get new sales staff contributing to your bottom line sooner

The key to attracting and retaining your top talent, is the learning and development you offer new starters. Getting new salespeople up to speed quickly can mean a considerable increase in revenue and efficiency for your organisation.

How to get your salespeople off the start line quickly

Establish your organisation's best-practice blueprint and sales methodology. This is a great way of exposing those new starters to what their critical learning is in the first few months. It also allows them to apply their strengths and weaknesses to their learning.

Explore the buyer journey and sales process

Ensuring new starters understand your sales process is a given, but what about the buyer journey?

This will influence how the sales process is applied. Think about how you can immerse your new starter in the thought processes that potential buyers can have and actions they may take. Do you have a map of both and are they aligned?



“When salespeople go through structured onboarding, 69% are more likely to remain with the organisation after three years.”

A Magazine, “How to inspire great teams”

1 Onboarding new salespeople

(continued...)

Create experts within your team

Sales professionals should be seen by clients as trusted advisors. To achieve this, they need to know as much-or-more about the field in which their buyers operate. Of course, becoming an expert at anything takes time and we learn through experiences, so think about how your onboarding programme can speed up this process.

At HubSpot for example, new sales starters are tasked with creating their own websites, blogs and social media presence, engaging with SEO methods along the way. This means that when it comes to selling HubSpot's inbound marketing software, they have a genuine understanding of how their technology works for the end user and the pains and stresses felt in their daily jobs.

Test for sales readiness

How do you know when your new starters are ready to get on the phone or meet potential clients? You can test for sales readiness in two ways: product knowledge and selling behaviours.

Product knowledge: This can be tested for with an exam at the end of training to ensure new starters have a suitable level of knowledge around your product or service.

Behaviours: This can be achieved through simulated learning. Get trainees to demonstrate and role play their presentations, calls and selling skills (like questioning techniques) against a framework.

This process can really be accelerated by enabling new starters to record themselves in action with audio or video. This allows for enhanced self-reflection and objective feedback; speeding up their development.



“The best trained salespeople have experienced the day-to-day job of their potential customers.”

*Mark Roberge,
“The Sales Acceleration Formula”*

Top tip:

Start with a training session on your buyer journey. Dig deep into examples of the questions your buyers have had. Don't move on to 'sales process' until they have cracked the first stage.



2 Shadowing top performers

Shadowing has been criticised in recent times as it can lead to new starters only witnessing one person's selling style. No matter how effective that top performer is, if their approach is the opposite to that of the new starter, it can be demotivating and stunt their development.

The trick with shadowing these days is to give the employee access to a number of top performers, so they can interpret and apply the different selling styles to their own approach.

As a sales manager, it's also important that you get to see your salespeople in action. However, we know that time constraints and conflicting priorities mean that this doesn't happen as often as it should.

2 ways video can enhance the shadowing process:

If you have great salespeople who are regularly smashing their targets, or someone who is particularly awesome at questioning for example, ask them to capture and share their meetings or calls with the rest of the team. Not only will this boost their ego, but it will display what **'good practice'** looks like in your organisation:

1. Sales managers are busy and can't be everywhere all of the time. Video means you can observe your team without having to be there at particular times and locations.
2. Create a library of good practice, with videos and recorded calls, to give your team access to a wealth of content whether they're on the road or at their desk.



“Do the best you can, until you can do better. Then when you know better, do better.”

Maya Angelou

2 Shadowing top performers

(continued...)

3 ways to encourage your team to share videos:

1. **Bring out their competitive nature** - Salespeople are highly competitive, so running a competition for the 'best elevator pitch' within the team is a surefire way of getting them engaged.
2. **Think of the career advances** - This is an opportunity to highlight room for professional growth. Recognising and supporting good practice are the hallmarks of future managers.
3. **Working together** - Putting your team into groups with a shared focus, like a peer training project, is a good way of making the sharing of practice a priority for everyone.



Top tip:

Create 'groups' in iConnect to share great sales performance that your team can dip into when they want/need.



Bonus tip:

Using video is also a great tool when working in regulated industries. Keeping a record of meetings can help to ensure your sales staff are compliant and will also put your customers at ease!

3 Self-reflection leading by example

How many times have you come out of a meeting and thought “I could have done better” or “I wish I had used that example”? Reflecting on those moments is useful, but to really refine your sales skills and performance you need to go beyond simple recall to analyse specifics like body language or who you were really directing those questions to.

Video is the ultimate reflection tool. Here's why:

- It's objective - the camera doesn't lie.
- You don't need to rely on memory and your perception of what happened.
- You can focus on and analyse specifics.
- You can stop, start, rewind and review the same clip with different questions in mind.

4 ways to encourage your salespeople to be more reflective:

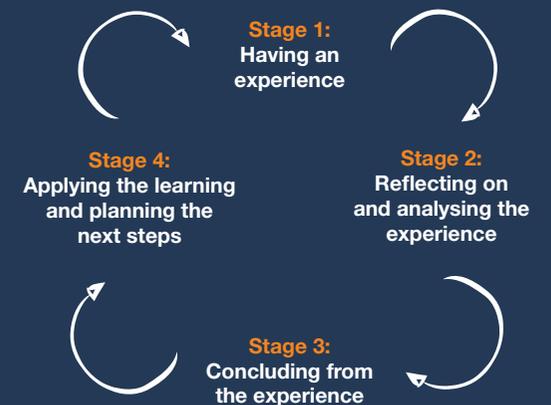
1. **Lead by example.** For your team to be more reflective, they need to see how reflective you are. Record yourself in a presentation (good or bad!) and take the time to watch it back and share some insights that you gained.
2. **Create a judgement-free culture built on trust.** Your team will feel much happier about using video to reflect if they know it's a controlled and judgement-free environment.
3. **Ask each team member to pinpoint an area that they would like to focus their reflection on.** This self-assessment can be used as a basis for discussion in 1-2-1s where you can encourage them to share what they're learning.
4. **Create a sales team focus** that concentrates on one particular priority, for example, closing or questioning. This is likely to encourage collaborative reflection and discussion.



Top tip:

If you're using iConnect, you could create a form for your team to reflect on the key area and highlight the aspects of their development.

Action Learning uses reflection and the cycle of learning (Kolb 1984)



“Learning is a continuous cycle of action and reflection.”

4 Coaching and feedback

Effective coaching is one of the most powerful ways to increase salespeople's revenue. It's essential to shift any perception that coaching is only for underperformers and make it clear that coaching is key to fine tuning top performance too.

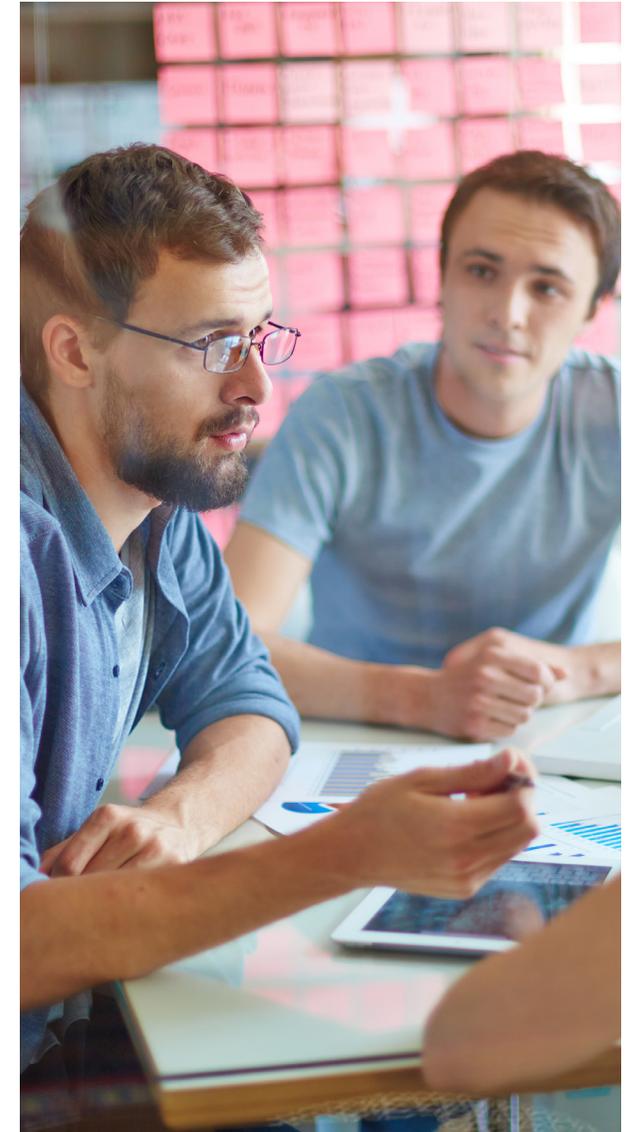
Identifying the needs of the business and exploring where in the team you could focus your coaching efforts, will keep you on track to achieve your team's goals. Bridging the skills gap in your team is a great place to start.

Not all sales managers have the skills and experience for coaching. High performance sales coaching is about asking great questions and listening.

5 things great sales coaches do:

1. **Define** - help salespeople define their goals and strategies.
2. **Execute** - help develop habits that allow them to reach their goals.
3. **Advise** - ask exploratory questions that allow their salespeople to find their own answers.
4. **Develop** - assess the skills gap, knowledge transfer and ownership of the salesperson.
5. **Motivate** - understand the motivators of each salesperson and take action to maximise it.

Check out this [infographic](#) for more insight into becoming an effective sales coach.



4 Coaching and feedback

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Feedback

Giving feedback to your sales team is the most important part of being a sales leader. You're responsible for their performance and ensuring they hit their targets. They should look to you to help them improve and offer them resources, guidance and knowledge.

6 tips to help you improve the way you give feedback:

1. **Ask them to self-assess first** - by asking the receiver to go first, it allows them to be self-reflective. It also means they may raise any areas for development themselves.
2. **Give feedback on a regular basis** - feedback should be a weekly, even daily, occurrence. Don't keep it confined to 1-2-1s or formal settings, make it a normal part of your day-to-day communication with team members.
3. **Make sure you give positive feedback too** - research suggests that you should give 5 bits of positive feedback for every 1 piece of constructive feedback so that you help keep them motivated.
4. **Reference a specific situation when giving feedback** - this will help them to understand the context of your feedback e.g. "In yesterday's meeting I noticed that...".
5. **Feedback on specific behaviours and try to be objective about these** e.g. "I noticed that you regularly get your monthly figures to me on time". This helps to avoid conflict and disagreement about feedback you're giving.
6. **When giving feedback** - make sure you explain the impact of their actions on you / the rest of the team / their performance. This reinforces good behaviours and explains why bad ones need changing.

[The "Situation - Behaviour - Impact" tool is really useful >>](#)

"Jack, I noticed you always get your monthly figures to me on time which means I don't have to waste time chasing you and I really appreciate that. Keep it up!"

Or... "Jack, for the last two months you've been late sending me your figures. This means I have to chase you and can make me late reporting to the board."

4 Coaching and feedback

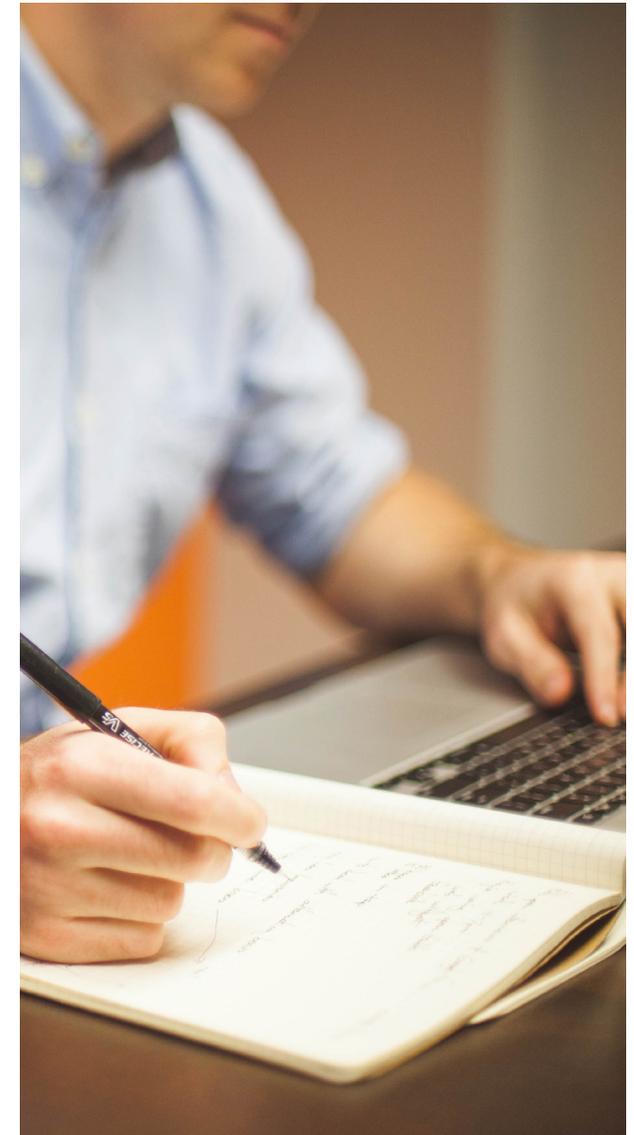
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Encourage your team to coach each other

Effective peer-to-peer coaching can accelerate your sales team's performance by establishing a shared focus for learning and development. It can also take the pressure off sales managers who can often be solely responsible for coaching.

5 tips for getting your team off to the right start:

1. **Set your team up in trios:** A coaches B, B coaches C and C coaches A. Make sure everyone fully understands the process, timings and responsibilities.
2. **Encourage your team to discuss their goals first:** The more open they are about these, the more they can increase their commitment to achieving them.
3. **Establish a culture of trust and respect:** This will help salespeople feel confident that this is a supportive process
4. **Set out a code of conduct that everyone has to adhere to:** This will help to ensure that clear parameters are set out from the start and everyone agrees on certain principles, such as not making quick judgements, or ensuring feedback is developmental.



Summary

In summary, if you want to develop high performing sales teams who increase revenue and efficiency within your organisation, it's important to support and develop them from the very beginning.

The effective onboarding of new salespeople is paramount. Equip them with knowledge and insight, delivered in the correct way, and help them to learn the critical things they need to know to be able to get off to the right start.

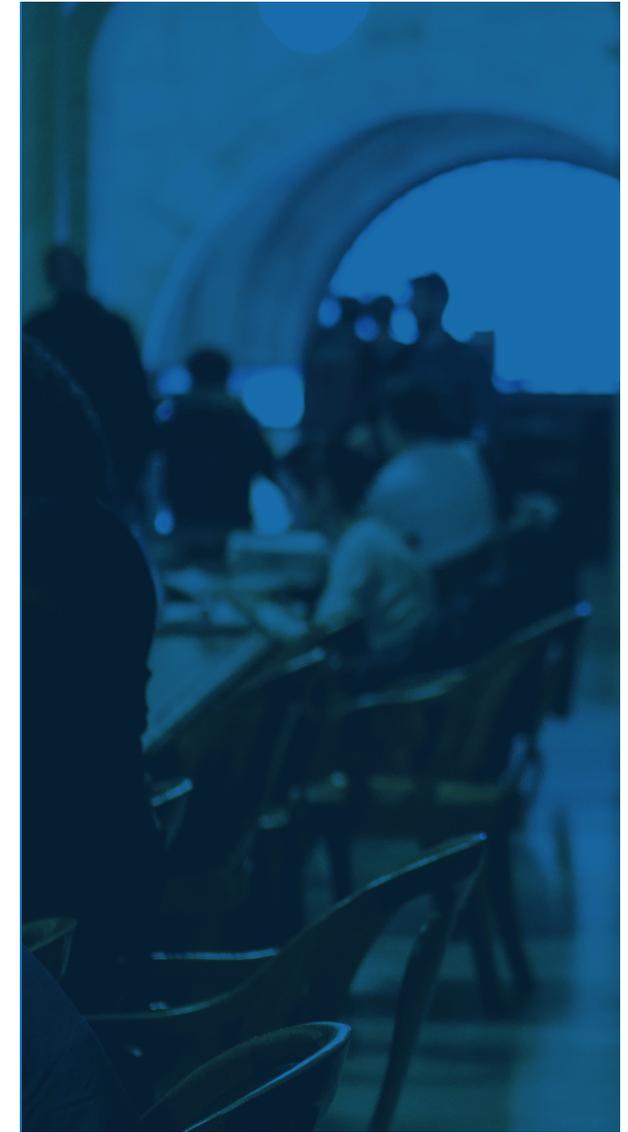
Create a culture of trust that's judgement-free and open to continuous learning. Leading by example is a surefire way to show your team that you are all in it together.

Offer the correct tools to support their learning and development and allow them time to reflect on their practice and see improvements through coaching and feedback.

Finally, investing in your people will empower them to strive for something greater than good.

**Everything you have read in this guide is currently being achieved by our customers.
Check out the [Accordance VAT case study](#) to see how:**

connect-online.com/2017/01/02/accordance-vat



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