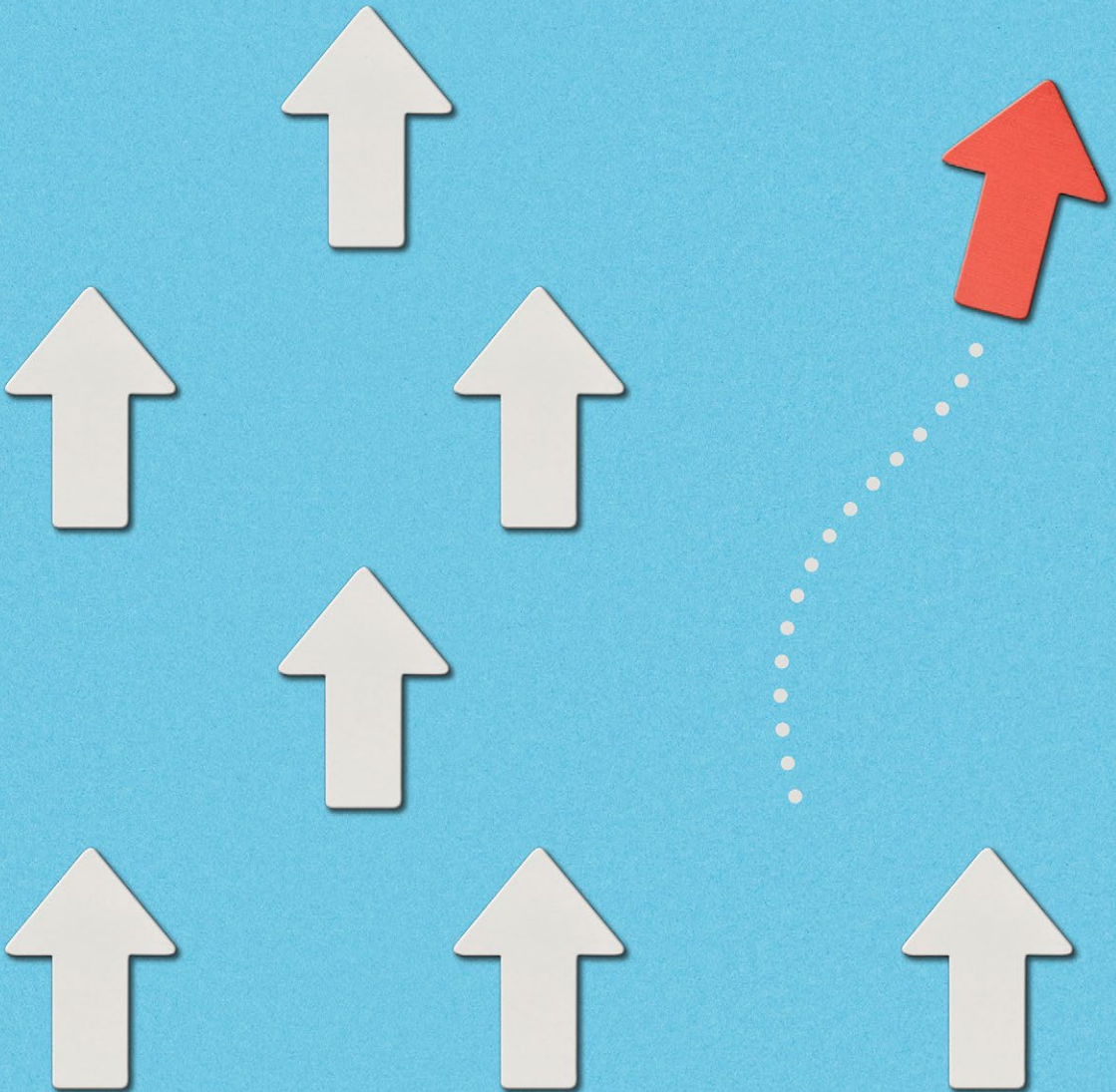


THE ULTIMATE
SALES
COACHING
GUIDE





INTRO

If you want to build a high-performing sales team that surpasses quota, then coaching is a critical piece of the puzzle.

Sales coaching is essential to help reps close deals with confidence. It focuses on the human aspect of sales, by treating each team member as an individual rather than a cog in the machine—and the results can be astounding.

According to *BrainShark*, companies with dynamic sales coaching programs have 28% higher win rates and 16.7% greater annual revenue growth. But even though most sales leaders recognize the importance of coaching, implementing it is another matter.

In this guide, we share everything you need to know about sales coaching, including the difference between coaching and management, what makes a great sales coach, how to choose the right coach for your team, and how you can improve your own sales coaching skills.

THE ULTIMATE SALES COACHING GUIDE

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THE ROLE OF A SALES COACH

It can be confusing to differentiate between the roles of sales trainer, manager, and coach.

The sales manager is an internal role, responsible for organizing the team's daily tasks and monitoring each rep's performance. Managers are also involved in onboarding new reps, tracking performance metrics, and implementing improvement plans. In both sales training and management, the focus is on the team or organization, with little input from the rep.

Sales coaching, on the other hand, is a collaborative process between the coach and their mentee. A coach listens to the rep, provides feedback when needed, and works with the rep to support them in their personal and professional development. Rather than striving to reach quota within a certain time frame, the goal of sales coaching is continuous improvement.

Sales coaching is a distinct function within the team, even if a manager occasionally steps into the role. As we will see, coaching requires an entirely different skill set than management, which is why sales leaders need to understand the nuances of each role.

SALES COACH VS. SALES TRAINER

A sales trainer educates sellers on specific skills or tools; for example, a new sales enablement software. Sales trainers are usually experts brought in from outside the organization. In most cases, the information is delivered in a presentation format without much participation from the trainees.

Sales coaching can help maximize the effectiveness of sales training by providing long-term accountability. Unlike training, coaching is a hands-on process and focuses on one individual at a time. Coaching also helps reinforce the skills learned during sales training, which *research shows* would otherwise be lost within a few months.

WHAT DOES A SALES COACH DO?

RESPONSIBILITIES

A sales coach is responsible for monitoring reps' performance, identifying areas for improvement, and then working with each rep on an ongoing basis. Because coaching is highly personalized, the same coach working with five different reps will likely work on different areas with each individual.

That might include tasks like:

- One-on-one meetings to discuss the rep's progress
- Providing tactical advice or sales tips
- Listening to recorded calls with a rep to help them identify their strengths and weaknesses
- Creating a plan for continued personal and professional growth
- Helping reps prioritize the skills they need to learn
- Weekly check-ins with each rep to keep them on track toward their goals
- Reviewing call recordings or emails to provide feedback
- Suggesting additional resources the rep might find helpful

Ultimately, a sales coach's job is to equip reps with the confidence and skills they need to succeed. A great coach adapts their approach based on each rep's individual needs.

THE COACHING PROCESS

Sales coaching looks different for every organization, but in general, the process looks like this:

- The coach collects data and observes the rep's performance
- The rep and coach work together to create a plan for improvement
- The rep implements the plan
- The coach continues to observe the rep's performance and provides more feedback at their next meeting

The key thing to remember is that coaching is an ongoing process and doesn't necessarily follow a linear pattern from A to B. Several of the phases above might overlap with time. That said, some level of structure in your coaching program will help ensure everyone stays on track.

Staying on top of metrics and having an established sales playbook will make it much easier for coaches to do their job. Decide how often check-ins need to occur, when sales data will be collected and reviewed, and how reps will communicate with their coach. Setting clear expectations is key to a successful sales coaching process.

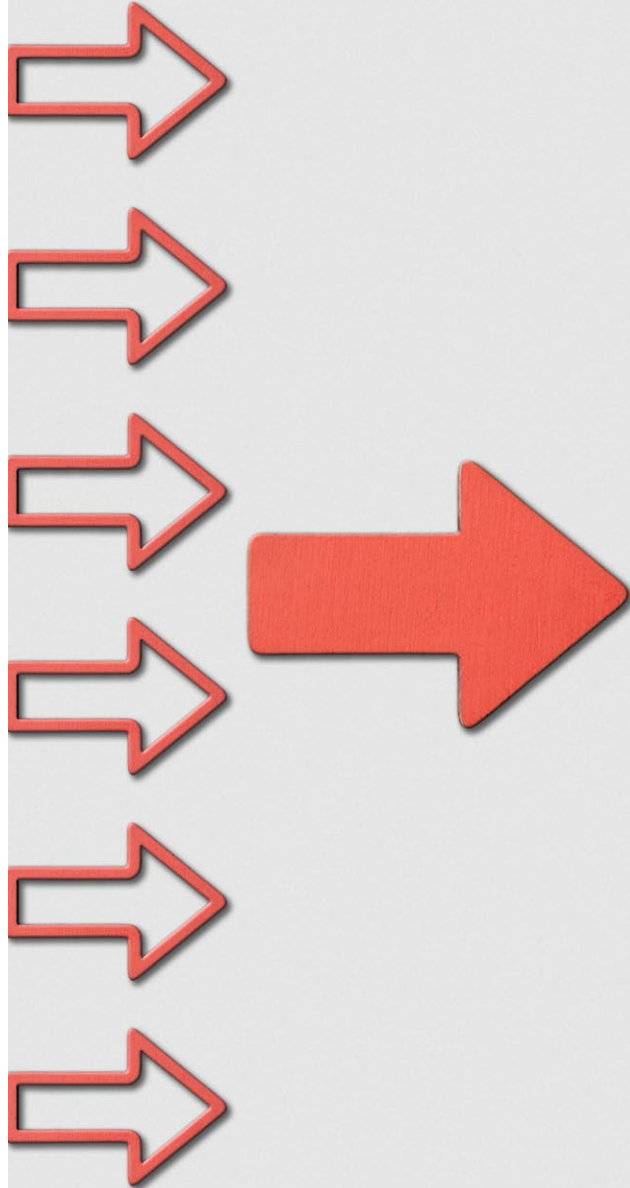
WHO SHOULD RECEIVE SALES COACHING?

Your entire team can benefit from sales coaching, including those in leadership roles. When leaders own their growth and receive coaching, it sets a strong example for the rest of the team.

In the past, one-on-one coaching was reserved for reps on performance improvement plans. But coaching should be a continuous process for all sales professionals, not just those who are underperforming. Any one who strives to improve in their role can benefit from coaching.

Sales coaching can also be particularly useful when transitioning to a new role. For example, sales managers often have experience selling but need help learning how to effectively manage a team. New sales leaders may need to learn best practices for coaching their team.

For best results, everyone on your sales should receive coaching, whether internal or external.



BENEFITS OF SALES COACHING

BETTER PERFORMANCE

Sales coaching has a great return on investment. According to the *International Coach Federation*, the average company can expect a return of seven times their initial investment. Improving the skills of each individual rep has a direct impact on your close rate, productivity, and revenue.

REDUCE CHURN

Retention is a huge problem across the sales industry, with an *average turnover rate of 35%*. A great sales coach can be the difference between a rep choosing to stay at your organization or moving on.

In a study from *BetterBuys*, employees with professional development opportunities were 15% more engaged and had a 34% higher retention rate. Working with a coach can improve employee satisfaction and encourage reps to stay at the company long term.

FREE UP YOUR MANAGERS

Without a designated sales coach, sales managers often end up taking on the role, offering advice and encouragement to their reps. This takes time away from their other duties, and the result is that managers spend their day putting out fires rather than making any strategic progress.

Bringing on a sales coach can help your team operate more independently. In return, managers will appreciate their newly freed up time and be able to focus on what they do best.



SHORTER RAMP TIMES

Reps often finish onboarding overwhelmed with the amount of information; placing new reps directly into a sales coaching program can help smooth the transition. Having access to a coach will reinforce the skills they learned during onboarding, and also ensure they get the support they need while adjusting to the role.

BUILD RESILIENCE

It's the job of a sales coach to stay on top of best practices, keep up with an ever-changing industry, and implement new ideas when needed. This kind of flexibility is critical when the organization experiences a setback. Regular coaching keeps salespeople open to innovation and encourages them to seek creative solutions.

EMPOWERED EMPLOYEES

One of the key differences between sales management and coaching is that coaches empower salespeople to find their own solutions, rather than relying on a manager. The result is that reps develop stronger critical thinking skills and are able to operate more independently. Over time, reps gain the experience and confidence they need to become top-performers.

TRAITS OF A GREAT SALES COACH

Most sales coaches started as a rep themselves, and therefore have experience on the other side of things. They've learned the ins and outs of the sales process and were likely top-performers. They know exactly what it takes to meet quota.

However, not all top-performing reps make great coaches. There are other factors to consider as well. These “soft skills” are more difficult to teach, but just as important.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

The best sales coaches are masters of communication and great listeners. As a rule of thumb, coaches should let reps do most of the talking during one-on-one sessions, and only interject when the rep asks for feedback or advice.

LEADERSHIP

There's a difference between being a good manager and being a good leader. *Managers are focused on controlling others*, while leaders seek to motivate and enable. Coaches focus on the latter; they help reps establish a strong sense of purpose, give them the tools they need to succeed, and keep them motivated to reach their goals.

ADAPTABILITY

Coaches need to be flexible in order to work with different reps and team members. Every individual has different strengths and weaknesses, and a great coach will adapt their approach accordingly. They will track of every salesperson's unique goals, motivation, and learning style.

CURIOSITY

The sales world is constantly changing. Sales coaches need to keep an open mind and stay on top of industry trends, changes and best practices. Coaches also need to be curious about the individuals and organizations they work with—to ask a lot of questions before diagnosing a problem.

EMPATHY

Successful coaches are great relationship-builders. They truly care about the people they work with, and they take the time to understand each rep on an individual level. They genuinely enjoy being helpful and are willing to go above and beyond for their team, providing personalized recommendations, checking in often, and offering extra support when needed.

SALES COACHING BEST PRACTICES

Like any other skill, the ability to coach can be learned and improved over time. If you're a sales leader or manager looking to improve your coaching skills, here are a few tips to keep in mind:

LISTEN MORE THAN YOU SPEAK

In one-on-one sessions, let the rep speak first. You can provide feedback where needed, but for the most part, the rep should do the majority of the talking.

Practice active listening rather than waiting for an opportunity to speak. If the rep says they don't have anything to share, encourage them with open-ended questions.

FOCUS ON THE MIDDLE GROUP

Sales managers often become preoccupied with their top performers and their worst performers, while reps in the middle are neglected. In fact, those in the middle can benefit the most from coaching.

Reps who consistently underperform may not be the right fit for the role, while top performers are already doing well on their own. Moreover, those "average" reps make up the majority of your team—improving their performance could have a dramatic impact on revenue.

TREAT EVERY REP AS AN INDIVIDUAL

It's common for sales leaders to wish they could clone their top performers. This is why successful reps are often paired up with their less successful counterparts, in the hopes that some of that success will rub off on their partner.

But in reality, what works for one rep may not work for another. Every salesperson needs to find their unique way of doing things. As a coach, it's your job to help reps identify their strengths and develop a strategy that works for them.

BUILD TRUST

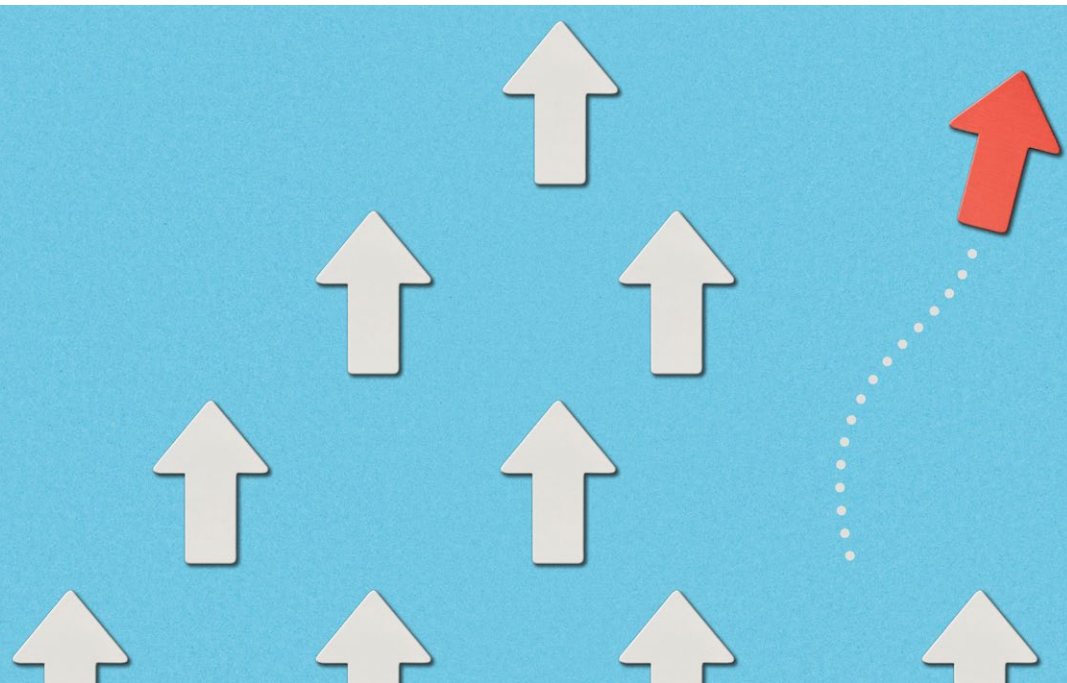
In order for coaching to be effective, the rep needs to feel comfortable. If a rep doesn't trust their coach, they're unlikely to be honest about performance issues or challenges they're facing outside of work.

The best way to build trust is to get to know the person you're coaching, and even more importantly, let them get to know you. Share a few personal or professional stories. Let the rep know that you've been where they are, and they're not the first salesperson to face these challenges.

ENCOURAGE SELF-REFLECTION

Sales coaching should be guided by the rep as much as the coach. Let them determine their progress through regular self-reflection sessions, where they can evaluate their performance and identify areas for future growth.

If needed, you can guide the rep with some open-ended prompts, but remember to let them take the reigns. Regular reflection will help them build greater self-awareness.



HOW TO DEVELOP SALES COACHES WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION

Sales coaching is a skill that can developed over time and with proper training. The best way to develop strong coaches in your organization is to invest in that training. Ensure your managers are confident stepping into the role, and bring in guest experts to fill any knowledge gaps.

FOLLOW A FRAMEWORK

Before you implement a new coaching program, make sure you have a solid plan in place. Establish what the overall objectives are, what specific areas you will target for improvement, and how success will be measured. Outline what tools and technology your coaches will need.

Some organizations choose to follow a particular methodology for their sales coaching. If you choose to go that route, make sure whatever model you adopt is flexible enough to change as your coaching program evolves or your sales strategy shifts over time.

BUILD A CULTURE OF IMPROVEMENT

One of the best way to develop stronger sales coaches is to ensure your company culture promotes personal and professional growth. Lead by example by sharing your own coaching stories, offering advice to sales managers, and if possible, involve other leaders and executives in the process.

GET FEEDBACK

Ask for regular feedback from reps about how your coaches are doing. Many coaching outcomes can't be quantified, but your reps will know whether or not a technique is working. If they aren't seeing the benefit, it may be time to try a new framework.

Reps are also a great source for new coaching ideas. Ask them what areas they're struggling with, where they need help, and what coaching methods they find most helpful. This will help your coaches tailor their approach to be even more effective.

WHEN TO ASK FOR OUTSIDE HELP

You may follow all of the above advice and still find your coaches need additional support. Consider bringing in an expert sales coach to guide your team, establish best practices, and help build a coaching model that works for your organization.



INTERNAL VS. EXTERNAL COACHING

Many companies default to hiring internally, moving a sales manager into a coaching role. Although this may sound ideal, it can take time for managers to build up their coaching skills and it's not always a smooth transition.

Another option is to hire an external sales coach. The benefit of outsourcing this role is that you gain an outside perspective of your company's sales function, from an expert who has worked with dozens of companies. They bring objective insight to the team and can help troubleshoot areas for improvement.

External sales coaches also tend to have experience across a wider range of markets—they know exactly what works and what doesn't, and can put together a custom plan for your company based on best practices.

FINDING THE RIGHT SALES COACH FOR YOUR TEAM

If you choose to work with an external sales coach, there are a few key things to keep in mind. The first is to find a coach who understands your organization's unique goals, and is willing to adapt their approach to meet your needs. A great sales coach understands that there is no one-size-fits-all model.

A good coach will also challenge your way of thinking. Their job is to diagnose what isn't working, suggest new ideas, and identify opportunities for improvement. Look for a coach who can provide constructive feedback and innovative ideas—not someone who will encourage you to keep doing what you've always done.

Lastly, a great sales coach is focused on helping their client become the master. They want to impart as much knowledge as possible so that when the engagement ends, you'll be able to operate independently.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A SALES COACH

Most sales coaches have firsthand experience selling and have worked as a manager and/or SDR. Their experience doesn't necessarily have to be in your industry, but it may be worth inquiring to see if they've worked with clients in your niche before. Keep in mind that a wide range of experience can be equally as valuable as someone who specializes in your market.

A better way to narrow your search is to ask yourself if the coach or company has experience solving the specific problem you need help with (ie., building a sales development function from scratch, developing a playbook, leadership advice, etc.).

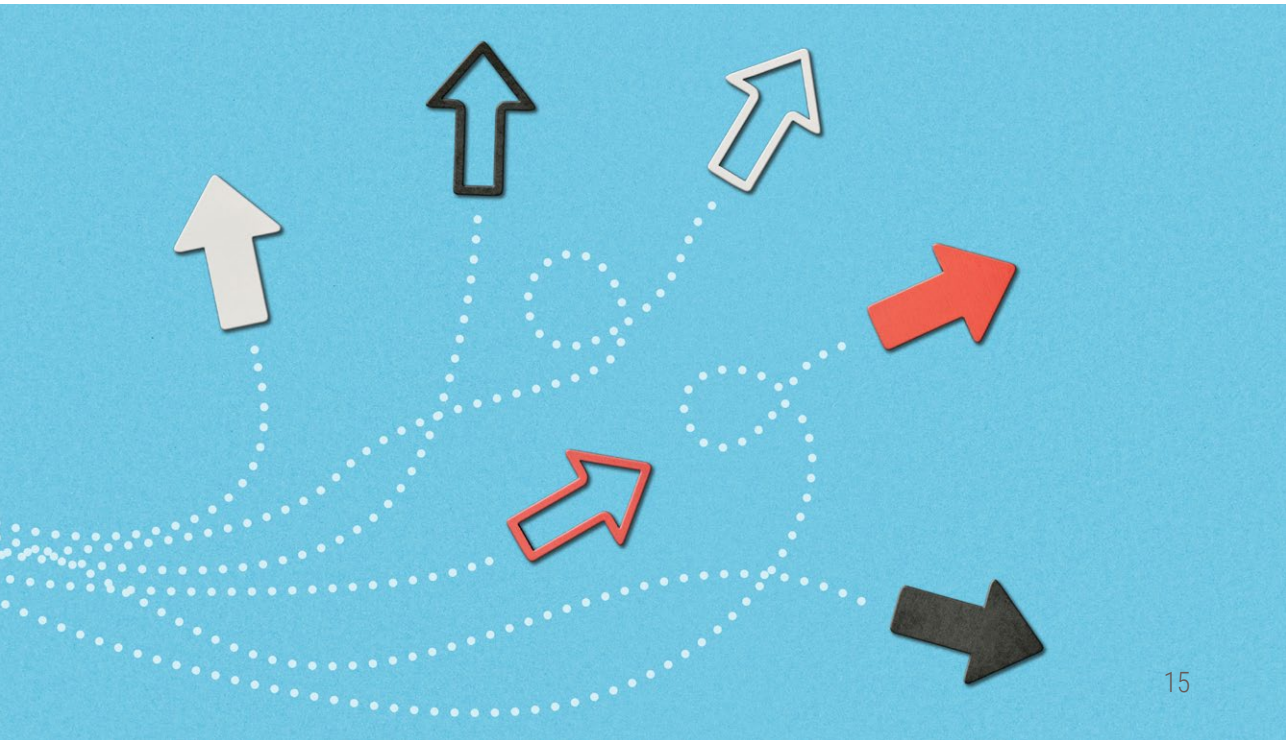
Next, you'll want to read reviews and case studies. What kind of results has this person or company helped others achieve? Past clients can also provide insight into an individual's coaching style, to give you a better idea of whether it aligns with what you're looking for.

CONCLUSION

Coaching is critical to the success of your sales team. Regular check-ins help reps stay accountable, build stronger skills, and work toward continuous improvement. With a clear path for professional development, employees are more satisfied and more likely to stay at the organization long term.

It's important to distinguish between sales coaching and management. The two roles require different skill sets, and if a manager moves into a coaching position then they will need time to build up those skills. Active listening, communication, and adaptability are key.

Whether you choose to hire internally or outsource, a great sales coach can make all the difference for your organization—helping reps surpass quota, boosting retention rates, and growing revenue all at the same time.



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