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At Sandler, our VISION is to be the undisputed market leader in driving sales performance through tech-enabled, data-driven sales training. Our MISSION is to drive market-leading growth for the brands we partner with.

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Beyond Technique: Four Ways to Elevate Sales Coaching to the Next Level



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When we ask sales leaders to define the term “sales coaching,” the most common answers we hear are:

- ▶ “Giving salespeople constructive feedback on recent deals and opportunities.”
- ▶ “Sharing best practices with the team in a group setting.”
- ▶ “Debriefing on exactly what went wrong on a deal we just lost.”
- ▶ “Giving specific corrections on a particular technique, with no ambiguity.”
- ▶ “Brainstorming together as a group about new business development ideas that the team has not yet implemented.”

Although all of these activities are (or at least can be) effective actions for someone who leads a sales team, none of these would qualify as “sales coaching” in the Sandler sense of the term. Furthermore, there is a problem: These misconceptions often supplant *actual* sales coaching. Their focus on short-term outcomes keeps authentic coaching from happening at all. That costs individual salespeople commissions every quarter of every year ... and keeps overall team revenue below where it should be.

Sales coaching is not just about hitting targets or refining techniques. It is not about rectifying mistakes we, as leaders, think we have identified. Moreover, it is not something that happens in a group setting. Instead, it is about identifying and strengthening what drives each unique, individual salesperson – in private. **Coaching is about empowering the salesperson to take control of his or her life and career.**

The best sales leaders know this. They use coaching sessions to move beyond standard mentorship discussions and to ask a deeper set of questions that make performance improvement a personal priority for the salesperson. This approach, central to the Sandler methodology, encourages self-awareness, resilience, and personal transformation, inspiring salespeople to reach their full potential.

Effective sales leaders do much more than announce team quotas and share the best techniques. They *coach* each salesperson individually and holistically, nurturing the mindset that sees challenges as opportunities for growth, promoting resilience, and supporting each salesperson’s unique pattern of personal motivation. One-on-one sales coaching is both an art and a skill, and the quality of the personal coaching usually determines the leader’s ability to cultivate and retain a resilient, loyal, growth-oriented team.

Creating a safe, open environment is essential – an environment where salespeople feel secure enough to discuss personal vulnerabilities. This is the only kind of discussion that fosters personal and professional growth, including but not limited to income growth.

Contrary to popular belief, effective sales coaching is more about expanding a salesperson’s self-awareness than reinforcing a given sales technique. Also underappreciated by sales leaders is the fact that the language and nonverbal communication used during coaching sessions profoundly influence levels of personal engagement, trust, and understanding between the coach and the salesperson.

Four topics, in particular, take this vitally important, frequently misunderstood one-on-one conversation well beyond the bounds of technique: (1) Self-concept; (2) Identity versus Role Distinction; (3) Personal Goals; and (4) Behavioral Reflection.

1 Self-Concept

As a sales leader, you are responsible for understanding, and helping to elevate, a given salesperson’s unique self-concept—the distinctive beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions they choose to reinforce about themselves. A salesperson’s self-concept significantly influences their approach to work, their ability to handle feedback from customers and prospects, and their resilience in the face of rejection and unanticipated setbacks.

Helping to foster a healthy self-concept within each salesperson enhances confidence, motivation, and a sense of purpose. Supporting a salesperson over time as they develop a more positive self-concept creates an environment where they are more likely to see themselves as capable and valuable contributors, independent of immediate results -- and as the primary cause in the matter of life events that mean the most to them. This outlook is fundamental to a growth mindset, to a continually deepening sense of resilience, and to the kind of self-awareness that benefits both the individual and the team.

Example of a Coaching Conversation Focused on Self-Concept

Coach: “When you think about your strengths in this role, what comes to mind?”

Salesperson: “I am pretty good at building rapport with clients.”

Coach: “That is a strength. How do you see that skill contributing to the team’s success and your own goals?”

Salesperson: “It helps build trust, which often leads to long-term relationships and better sales outcomes.”

Coach: “Exactly -- and that is part of what makes you unique here. Beyond numbers, your approach and the trust you build set you apart. How can we expand on that as part of your growth, do you think?”

Salesperson: “Well, I think I could develop my listening skills further.”

Coach: “Great insight. Let us work on that together. How could you deepen those skills to enhance your self-concept as a trusted advisor ... rather than ‘just a salesperson’?”

2 Identity vs. Role Distinction

The Identity vs. Role Theory, or I/R Theory for short, is the concept of **separating who a person is (their identity) from what they do (their role)**. A sales coach can help the salesperson see that their personal value and self-worth extend far beyond their job performance or revenue numbers. Recognizing this allows individuals to face challenges with resilience and makes them more likely to view setbacks as learning opportunities rather than personal failures. Separating Identity from Role encourages an outlook that empowers salespeople from their aspirations, their ability to learn, grow, and adapt, and their enduring personal qualities, not just their job title or results.

Example of a Coaching Conversation Focused on I/R Theory

Coach: "That is common, but think about it—is that really who 'you' are?"

Salesperson: "I think I see what you mean. Part of me is constantly learning and growing, regardless of my role. There's a part of me that's always looking forward and finding new ways to connect with others. That part is all about contribution, you're right."

Coach: "Exactly. Your value as a human being extends way, way beyond sales figures. Way beyond any other narrow role you might be called upon to play. How can knowing that help you in other aspects of your life?"

Salesperson: "Knowing that and acting on it can help me build strong relationships with family and friends and help me in things like volunteering activities."

Coach: "That is wonderful. It is important to recognize and celebrate who you are as a person--are not just your role."



3 Personal Goals

Personal goals are individual aspirations. They are the driving force behind your salesperson's motivation and dedication. Some salespeople will aim to hit income targets to support their families, while others will prepare for a future leadership role or will hope to find a healthier work-life balance. Others will have totally different reasons for getting up in the morning. Your role as a sales coach is to understand these personal aspirations and empower each person to align their personal and professional journeys.

Example of a Coaching Conversation Focused on Identifying an Important Personal Goal

Coach: "Let us look at how your career goals align with your aspirations. Where would you say you want to go in life? Please understand: This is not about tactics; it is about the big picture. It is about figuring out why you are here ... and what legacy you plan on leaving when you go."

Salesperson: "I've been thinking a lot about leadership lately, not just in sales but in other areas. I think becoming a better leader and positively impacting people who report to me is ultimately what I am here for."

Coach: "Great. How do you see developing leadership skills helping you?"

Salesperson: "It could help guide my team and advance my career. It could also support my community work, which is important to me."

Coach: "Excellent. Let's plan for growth in all those areas, impacting both the job and the community. What steps could you take to help you develop these leadership skills?"

Salesperson: "I could take on more mentoring within the team and attend leadership workshops."

4 Behavioral Reflection

In "The Sales Coach's Playbook", Bill Bartlett notes that coaching salespeople to grow their skills over time inevitably focuses on three critical words: **more**, **better**, and **different**. These words encapsulate the approach a coach should take to help salespeople enhance their performance by changing behavior patterns. The idea here is that to improve, salespeople may need to hear questions that inspire them to:

- ▶ **Do More of Something That's Working:** Increase the frequency or intensity of a successful behavior.
- ▶ **Do Something Better:** Find more effective ways to execute a behavior.
- ▶ **Do Something Differently:** Change how a behavior is executed to achieve better results.

Example of a Coaching Conversation Focused on Behavioral Reflection

Coach: “What was something that worked for you last week that you would like to see yourself doing more of in the coming week?”

Salesperson: “I realized that focusing on reconfirming the buyer’s pain right at the start of the discussion has been helpful. It’s led to more engaged conversations and clearer paths to solutions, so I’d like to do more of that.”

Coach: “Great. Now, what’s something that happened over the past week that you think you could have done a little bit better?”

Salesperson: “I think I could have been more proactive in following up with prospects. I waited too long and missed out on a moment of high interest.”

Coach: “Okay, and what would that look like specifically?”

Salesperson: “Specifically, it would mean setting reminders for myself to follow up within two days instead of a week, and preparing personalized messages based on our initial conversations.”

Coach: “That is a great plan. Now let’s look at something you did this week that you’d like to try doing a little differently next week. What comes to mind?”

Salesperson: “I’d like to try changing my approach to handling objections. Instead of answering immediately, I want to acknowledge the concern more fully, validate that concern, and use that concern as a pathway to explore deeper, underlying needs.”

Becoming a better sales coach means investing time and attention one-on-one in understanding and supporting each team member’s self-concept, beliefs about identity and role, personal goals, and specific commitments for the coming week about what should happen more, what should be replaced with something better, and what needs to happen differently the next time around. Facilitating this continuous, dynamic process of over weeks and months gives salespeople a sense of agency and fosters a working culture of trust, empowerment, and enhanced performance.

Coaching is not us giving feedback. It is not us sharing best practices in a team setting. It is not us delivering a monologue on what we would have done. And it is not a brainstorming session devoted to getting the person to share tactics with colleagues. It is us asking questions that help that individual salesperson to develop a more profound sense of purpose, a personal mission that extends beyond the pursuit of short-term goals. This kind of discussion results in a stronger, healthier sense of self, a more profound, enduring commitment to personal and professional growth, and (last but certainly not least) sustainable improvements in sales performance.

The Sandler Selling System. Concisely Summarized.

People often ask us to provide a concise overview of what it means to sell “the Sandler way.”

That’s a more daunting request than it might at first seem, because the Sandler Selling System comprises much more than a list of techniques. Rooted in behavioral science, and powered by modern data analytics, the Sandler methodology empowers both sales leaders and front-line salespeople not just to change the way they look at the profession of selling ... but to change the way they look at themselves. How do you condense that into a concise overview?

Recently, David Mattson, Sandler’s executive chairman, took up the challenge. The result: an aggressively, responsibly abridged version of his recent book *How to Sell to the Modern Buyer: The Sandler Way*. This condensed version offers a responsible [ten-]page overview of the key behaviors, attitudes, and techniques of sales professionals who observe the timeless Sandler principles.

Feel free to download it, use it as a reinforcement tool for yourself and your team, or share it with someone who’s wondering what all the fuss is about.



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SANDLER ADVISOR – Volume 25, Issue 1

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