

---

# The Top Ten Traps Facing Sales Directors

---



John Pennington

# THE TOP TEN TRAPS FACING SALES DIRECTORS

## Introduction

In 2004, Accela along with Trainque sponsored “The Five Most Dangerous Issues Facing Sales Directors Today and How to Guarantee a Permanent Improvement in Sales Results” research paper. Now, ten years later, Accela has taken this research as well as their own additional research and factored in changes that include the continued rise of the internet, the GFC, and the growing importance of Asia and how these challenges affect sales results. The result is “The Top Ten Sales Traps Facing Sales Directors in 2014”.

This paper examines the top ten sales traps that face sales directors in 2014, and explores how to avoid them as well as offers solutions to common problems sales directors face with each of these traps.

## Summary of Research

This paper explores the top ten sales traps that sales directors face in 2014. The ten traps are:

Failing to identify and select the best candidates. Sales managers often feel pressure to fill vacancies in their sales team quickly to ensure that there is a representative out there selling. This pressure can lead to cutting corners, misjudging potential sales hires, failing to hire effectively as a result of time pressure, or not

hiring effectively as a result of subjective or loosely defined hiring characteristics.

Another sales trap is failing to induct new salespeople so that they are motivated and able to achieve success quickly. Effective induction training is essential, as it assists new recruits in experiencing growth within the organisation and offers motivation. However, sales managers may encounter problems if the induction is not well planned, if there is an over-emphasis placed on product knowledge as opposed to client and sales knowledge, if there is no benchmarking to assess induction, or if induction is not ongoing or tied to future performance. Furthermore, if the line manager has little or no involvement in the induction process, sales people may also experience low motivation and problems will result.

A third trap is having no documented sales process. An organisation benefits most from having a well-documented sales process. Not having one can lead to problems such as no sharing of best practice, a lack of sales focus, a failure of sales objectives being followed in CRM, no consistent coaching, and poor pipeline management.

Another sales trap is not understanding how to define and use sales competencies to achieve high performance results. Competencies are the groupings of sales skills, knowledge, abilities, and behaviours required for job success. Not understanding how to define and use competencies may lead to not knowing what good competencies drive results or not being in a position to utilise competencies to create improved performance, defining competencies loosely instead of making them trainable and repeatable skills, designing competencies in

such a way that they are not applicable for the entire range of proficiencies, and not tying competencies into the end to end sales process in a practical and meaningful way.

Yet another sales trap is wasting resources on poorly planned, implemented and embedded sales training. Problems that can result are sales training that is not tightly linked to the challenges and demands of the selling environment, management that does not provide critical insight for the preparation of training, training initiatives that are combined with non-training issues, and training that is not supplemented with real world examples and relevant experiences. Additional problems can involve the failure to set expectations and define learning outcomes as well as failure to manage attendance and training feedback.

A sixth trap is not leveraging existing resources and expertise effectively. To leverage resources effectively, sales managers must identify the specialty knowledge that exists within their sales team. When this doesn't happen, critical drivers of sales may then be poorly reported and understood. Additional problems can include activities that are not aligned with sales opportunities, failure to productively use existing contacts and networks, and the failure to encourage, manage, or report on sales coaching.

The seventh trap involves having a limited or non-existent budget for investing in the development of a sales team. This trap may occur when you don't understand the link between sales targets and sales skills. An additional problem is the thought that it is possible to hire ready-made top performing salespeople that do not require further training.

Another trap is that time pressure and distance limit the ability to build and attend sales training initiatives. Salespeople frequently spend a great deal of their time covering their territories as opposed to sitting in an office. This means that

solutions become limited to the lowest common denominator. Sales managers also mistakenly think that email and conference calls can replace structured training. An additional problem is that a variety of costs may prohibit regularly centralised group training.

Another sales trap involves sales managers not having the process skills or motivation in coaching individuals and groups to best practice. The problems that result include time pressure, a lack of foundation for a strong coaching culture, a lack of a tools to guide coaching efforts, and a lack of plans and reports to provide qualitative data.

The 10th trap is no ongoing reinforcement that encourages continuous growth in salespeople. Ongoing reinforcement creates an environment where sales people are consistently learning and being rewarded for their improvement. However, when there is no ongoing reinforcement, the result is that investment is wasted in expensive training. It is also sometimes difficult to get managers to buy into the reinforcement process. Additionally, there are times when reinforcement fails to recognise the range of skills and methods needed to be effective.

---

➤ Sales Trap n.: An incorrect action or strategy undertaken by a salesperson or sales organisation because of a mistaken belief, fallacy, or partial truth (Canada)

---

## Trap 1: Failing to identify and select the best candidates

Sales managers feel pressure to fill the vacant positions in their team quickly. It is essential that there be a representative out there selling; the longer the territory goes unserved the more difficult it is to get it back in shape. Additionally, territory that goes uncovered means that existing sales team members must cover the additional territory.

Further, both the manager and the team are under pressure to meet sales targets. This can cost in sales because this pressure frequently results in the manager making poor decisions or being satisfied with average performers instead of top performers. The team may also face huge drains on their time, energy and morale.

### Problems

#### Cutting Corners

One of the biggest problems occurs when a manager attempts to cut corners instead of putting enough time into process, preparation, interviews, KPI's, job advertisements and descriptions. This problem is compounded if the manager outsources to Human Resources.

#### Easily Misjudged

A Sales Manager is frequently the easiest to fool in the hiring process. This is because they tend to look for the positive and base decisions on who they like. Salespeople like to go on "gut feel".

#### Time Pressure

There are a number of factors that make a slow hiring decision reflect badly on the sales manager and his or her leadership, as well as team morale. For example, there could be something wrong with the manager or the team that would not be attractive to a new hire. Disorganisation is one such thing. Additionally, the manager may have

problems with recruiting as a result of unclear parameters on what the job entails. The manager may also have problems with recruiting because he or she spends too much time looking at what he or she has done in the past instead of focusing on finding candidates that can grow as the company grows.

#### Subjective or loosely defined characteristics

Terms such as "team player", "independent", "self-starter", "networker" and so on are tossed around but in most cases these terms mean different things to different people. Also, they are often not clearly defined as to how they relate to success in the role, let alone based in any evidence or scientifically proven research.

### Solution

#### Use your top sales people to create an optimal benchmark.

Using top sales people to create the optimal benchmark allows for knowing and understanding what is possible objectively. Additionally, creating an optimal benchmark allows for discerning areas of strength and weakness as well as generate recommendations for improvement. It also allows the consistent application of a universal standard for achievement to the entire sales team.

#### Create behavioural based interview questions based on gaps to your benchmark.

Determine what skills are needed, and ask what the sales person has done in the past in specific situations to determine if the potential employee can fill these skills. Determining how an employee did behave will offer a good gauge



to determine how the salesperson will behave. Additionally, behavioural interview questions don't only help discern attitudes and predict behaviour; they also allow the sales manager to determine what gaps may exist in experience, attitudes, knowledge, and abilities. Behavioural interview questions should be more pointed, probing and specific than the types of questions asked in a traditional interview.

#### Assess employee engagement.

It's not enough for the salesperson to simply know or understand what is required of the role; the sales manager must also be sure it is what they want to do so that when the pressure is on they don't check out. Dig deep into the salesperson's desire, plans and goals to determine if this role is a stop gap or an important step in their career.

### Trap 2: Failing to induct new salespeople so that they are motivated and able to achieve success quickly

Inductions are where salespeople encounter the culture and expectations of the department for the first time. Effective induction training is essential, as it helps new recruits experience growth within an organisation, and will offer motivation. If inductions are not conducted well there can be instant problems with a new salesperson that result in the embedding of bad habits, skills, and attitude.

#### Problems

##### The induction is not well planned.

At best there is a broad induction of rules and procedures. The next stage is four weeks riding along with an experienced salesperson with no plans, goals, responsibilities, accountability or in depth review and skilling. Invariably the inductee and the experienced salesperson get bored with

this process within the first few days; they both declare that the training is over and the inductee is ready to make some sales calls.

##### There is an over emphasis on product knowledge.

If 80% of a sales person's job and how they are to be measured is sales then an induction program should spend the same time proportion on this focus. There is no good reason why this wouldn't be the rule, yet it is rarely observed. This is a key driver of call reluctance, since product information doesn't equip the salesperson with the skills needed to sell. If new recruits are taught in the early stages that product knowledge - as opposed to client and sales knowledge - is the major focus, it can dramatically set the culture of sales performance back.

##### There is no benchmarking to assess successful induction.

Induction is the most important part of a new salesperson's training. Identifying the best inductions in the organisation and engaging in the process of comparing the present inductions with the processes and results of others to arrive at an explanation of the business processes that lead to success is essential. Establishing benchmarks offers the opportunity to apply a well-defined standard to what makes a successful induction. Inductions can then be assessed and their success quantified.

##### Induction is not ongoing or tied to future performance.

Quite often the induction skills, training, coaching and monitoring fail to reflect on the job skills and behaviours. Surprisingly the induction program can be removed from the KPI's and indeed the bonus structure. This disconnect causes frustration and can be demotivating for salespeople. It is particularly so for the high performers, who will feel dragged down as opposed to empowered.

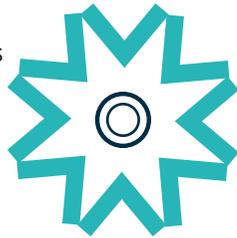
### Induction performance abdicated by the line manager.

Discipline, leadership and respect are all set in the first days of a salesperson's time with an organisation. Where a manager has little or no involvement in the induction process and its outcomes, sales people will fail to display motivated responses.

### Solutions

#### Focus

About 10% of induction should be focused on operational issues such as expenses, travel policy, and how to use equipment and software. About 20% of induction should focus on product and service knowledge. The remaining 70% should be focused on how to understand and sell the product.



### Plan induction based on well documented outcomes

Each hour of induction should be planned with roles, goals, and responsibilities, as well as the opportunity to be reviewed. Conducting induction in a well-organised and goal driven way will help in acquiring sales people who feel integrated into the corporate culture, and who are more likely to meet productivity goals as well as less likely to leave the company.

### Assess your inductees skill proficiency against performance competencies.

Induction should be based on the competencies and clusters of competencies that ensure success in the role the inductee is to be reviewed against, and the induction training customised to this. Utilising a skills proficiency benchmark offers a clear picture of where a sales person is effective and what still needs work.

### Build a customised Personal Development Plan.

The development plan begins with induction and continues on with the line manager. Benefits to having a customised Personal Development Plan include increased understanding of goals and what is expected of the sales person, faster time to required performance and a platform for an outstanding career.

### Create a line of sight.

Creating a line of sight means that the salesperson can see that every task they do leads to sales, which in turn leads into the bigger picture of success in the business. From the CEO on down they can see the strategies that lead to tactics, which in turn leads to sales targets. This clarity ensures that the business mission statement, goals, strategies, tactics and sales persons budgets all align. The induction then must align to this so that every action from the bottom up makes sense.

### Trap 3: No documented sales process

---

➤ “You don’t close a sale; you open a relationship if you want to build a long-term successful enterprise”  
**Patricia Fripp**

---

Companies need a cohesive sales team that understands the product as well as the customers in their market. Frequently, when an organisation is confronted with challenges – such as sales people not meeting sales targets, failure to secure large accounts, or bringing in less business than is optimal – the organisation assumes that hiring a new sales force or offering alternatives to existing incentives is the key to prompting change. These are temporary fixes, however. What an organisation benefits most from is having a well-documented sales process.

## Problems

### No sharing of best practice

Best practice serves as a benchmark for what consistently works. When best practice isn't shared, sales people will have a poor understanding of what consistently achieves results.

### Not followed in CRM.

A company's sales people must have a common understanding of the objectives of the sales department. CRM helps quantify the set objectives, but too often CRM software offers cookie cutter solutions that don't fit with the organisation's sales process. The sales process needs to be built first so that the CRM can then be adapted to your sales process rather than the other way around. Or worse still just ignored by your salespeople as it is not useful to them in gaining sales.

### No sales focus

---

---

➤ “Pretend that every single person you meet has a sign around his or her neck that says “Make me feel important.” Not only will you succeed in sales, you will succeed in life.”  
**Mary Kay Ash**

---

---

Many sales processes fail because the process is more focused on the organisation selling the product than on creating value for customers. The main focus of any business should be in the value being sold to the customers.

### No consistent coaching.

Sales coaching is one of the least well understood activities that sales managers engage in. Sales managers may discuss the importance of coaching, but fail to follow through with an effective coaching plan. Sales people are not developed to their full potential without effective sales coaching. The sales coaching process is a dynamic one that is shared between the manager and the sales person and is specific to each individual sales person. The sales person and the manager get to know each other, and more importantly, the manager gets to determine the sales person's goals as well as observe which areas need improvement and create an action plan designed to make the person a top performer.

### Poor pipeline management.

Frequently managers are so accustomed to managing sales on their own that when they hire their sales team they neglect to instill a process for building, managing, and tracking a sales pipeline. Poor pipeline management can be a result of failing to manage territories. This can lead to sales people making optimistic statements without data to back them up. It can also lead to a vast amount of sub-optimal activity.

## Solutions

### Establish a system for sharing best practice

---

---

➤ “The most important thing is not which system you use. The most important thing is you have a system.”  
**Zig Ziglar**

---

---

Establishing a system for sharing best practice allows the sales person to focus on the task at

hand rather than trying to determine the best way to accomplish the task.

One effective strategy is to gather a sample grouping of top performing salespeople and record what they do and how they do it, as well as their beliefs and state of mind. This allows the sales manager to see what is working and apply it more broadly.

### Pay attention to the CRM

CRM offers valuable data. However, care should be taken to avoid generic, one size fits all solutions with CRM. The first focus should remain in defining the sales process, as investments made in areas other than the sales process cannot realise their full potential if there is not an established process that serves to underpin things such as sales training and compensation packages that are based on performance. The best place to start is to build the reports that will improve performance and then work back from that as to what is required in the CRM.



### Establish a plan for managing the sales pipeline

Sales managers can work to establish plans for managing the sales pipeline by identifying three major factors: the account budget, the length of the sales cycle, and key decision-makers. When sales people are trained to establish and manage this information they will avoid being overly optimistic or spending time chasing down unqualified leads.

## Trap 4: Not understanding how to define and use sales competencies to achieve high performance results

---

➤ “Finding individuals who possess these unique sales skills and strengths is the key to building a superstar sales team.” **Anonymous**

---

Competencies are the groupings of sales skills, knowledge, abilities, and behaviours required for job success. Leading sales organisations understand how to respond to the challenges posed by changing customer needs, organisational growth, and the effort to improve profitability by transforming how the sales team performs. This transformation occurs in part through measuring core competencies and having salespeople make improvements on competencies they are weaker at. Sales teams that do not clearly define or use sales competencies have problems measuring sales team performance and will find it difficult to achieve the highest performance. This means that companies ultimately may be held back by the very thing that should be driving them forward: the sales force.

### Problems

#### You don't know what you don't know.

If a manager doesn't know what good competencies are or which ones drive results, they are not in a position to use competencies to create improved performance. Without understanding competencies it will be difficult to achieve the highest performance because the sales team will not be able to effectively address changes both within and without the organisation.

**Competencies are loosely defined and difficult to measure concepts instead of trainable and repeatable skills.**

If a competency is too vague or impossible to measure, sales people cannot make efforts to improve these competencies. Likewise, managers will have a difficult time working to improve competencies in their sales staff if they don't have any idea how to accurately define or measure them.

**Any competencies that are present are not applicable for the entire range of proficiencies, for example, inexperienced through to sales masters.**

Sales competencies must have the ability to apply to everyone in each cohort or team. Organisations that do not choose competencies that apply to everyone end up without a universal measuring stick for improvement, which hinders the sales team's ability to reach its highest level of performance. For example, if in a sales organisation competencies such as sales competencies are presented in such a way that only experienced salespeople understand what is being said, beginners may then be less successful because they have a narrower understanding.

**Competencies do not tie into the end to end sales process in a practical and meaningful way for salespeople.**

Salespeople in general are focused on making the sale and improving their numbers. When competencies are not tied into the end to end sales process, a salesperson may have difficulty understanding why a particular competency should be developed. We very often found that the competencies in the job ad were different from the Job Description, different from the KPI's and were different from what the high performing salespeople used to drive their results.

## Solution

**Achieve alignment between learning activities, the sales process and sales strategy.**

Top-performing sales teams use the sales process as part of the groundwork for developing competencies. In turn, the competencies enable the organisation to



better assess what a salesperson's developmental needs are. The more they are aligned, the more that people will see the benefits they can produce the more motivated they will be too use them.

**Use competencies for selection criteria for new hires or placements.**

This allows for the discovery of potential sales team members who will display the highest performance that is in line with sales team goals as well as reduce turnover. Sales people are more likely to both stay with an organisation that clearly defines areas for improvement as well as become more successful salespeople. It enables those less likely to perform to be easily weeded out in the hiring process and those that do make the cut to have the highest probability of being a high performer.

**Salespeople can use competencies as a roadmap to their own on the job success.**

If sales people are given a clear idea of what is expected from them in terms of improvement, then they have a better understanding of what it will take to succeed in their position with the company. Competencies serve as a guide to success. Sales people can use competencies as a guide to help them take responsibility for their actions and remain focused on their own self-improvement. Additionally, competencies can serve as motivators to improvement.

**Use to plan for and execute continuous performance improvement for internal and external training staff.**

The goal of both internal and external trainers should be to move the proficiency of competencies to the highest level possible in the fastest possible time. Results as measured by changes post-training allows management to see what and who is working as well as where more improvement is needed.

**Use for coaching to identify individual needs and set expectations**

---

---

➤ **“I absolutely believe that people, unless coached, never reach their full potential.” (Bob Nardelli)**

---

---

Coaching offers managers the opportunity to work together with a salesperson in learning what needs improvement in order to help the sales person perform at his or her best. Competencies allow management to identify areas in which each individual is doing well as well as to set expectations for areas that need improvement.

**Trap 5: Wasting resources on poorly planned, implemented and embedded sales training**

---

---

➤ **“A goal properly set is halfway reached”**  
**Zig Ziglar**

---

---

In part, training helps sales people reach their highest potential. When training is not well planned or implemented, however, the valuable time spent training may be wasted.

**Problems**

**Sales training is not tightly linked to the challenges and demands of the selling environment.**

If sales training does not start with a clear understanding of the landscape of the market and the product’s position within it, it is impossible to tailor the training to ensure that the sales people are motivated and engaged in the training.

**Management does not provide critical insight for the preparation of training.**

Management must work to provide experience, observations, skills, and knowledge to their sales team to create relevant and insightful training. If management does not use their own strengths to plan effective training then the time spent on training may be wasted.

**Combines non-training related issues into training initiatives.**

Training is often treated as a catch-all designed to cover all issues within the sales environment. When training doesn’t focus on strictly training related issues, confusion about expectations may result and failure can be seen to have occurred when it was not an issue that training could actually address. For example, performance management may be about attitude whereas training is about the skills.

**Management does not supplement training events with real world examples and relevant experiences.**

Training in and of itself is good, but when there are not real world examples and relevant experiences to apply to the knowledge being provided, the salesperson can fall short of understanding how the training applies to what he or she is doing every day. Sales managers must get heavily involved with applying their

insights and knowledge to the creation of training programs.

### **Not setting expectations and defining learning outcomes.**

Not providing clearly defined expectations and learning outcomes with training means that a sales person may not understand the point of the training or what the training is trying to teach. In setting expectations and defining the learning outcomes in training, sales people benefit through more enhanced learning, which leads to higher levels of success.

### **No management of attendance, feedback and testing and assessing improvement.**

Not managing attendance, feedback, or testing and assessing improvement means that the sales manager has no idea who in the sales force is attending training, what works, or how the training is improving his or her sales people. There is a lack of accountability and no opportunity to reward success or discipline failure, which devalues the training. Without the critical eye of management on what is happening sales people can become very wayward; if they see that management doesn't care, why should they?

## **Solution**

Management needs to be involved in and take equal responsibility for the following:

### **Focused preparation for sales training initiatives.**

Training should be tailored to the challenges related to the selling environment. It should also have clearly defined expectations and learning outcomes. Focusing on this will allow salespeople to get the most from the training and see the highest success. For example, if the sales team experiences a great deal of rejection it would be good to tailor training to include ways in which individuals can better and more quickly recover

from rejection. Additionally, it would be unwise to focus all training on what is one of the most common focuses in sales training – focus on the product – when it is also essential for the training initiative to focus on the customer ecosystem.

### **Motivating participants.**

A sales team that is motivated and excited about the knowledge they are gaining learns more than a team that is unclear



about the objectives of the training. Motivating in training can be offered by doing things such as turning presentations into competitions or providing activities where salespeople work in groups. It can also be offered by such simple activities as communicating effectively.

### **Managing instructional delivery.**

Managers must become involved in the kind of instruction being delivered. This means examining who is delivering the instruction and what resources and methods are being used. Additionally, managers should remain involved in the choice of assessments being used. For example, is a personality and behaviour assessment the only assessment being used or is it combined with a skills assessment as well? Is the training well-tailored to the needs and challenges of the sales force?

### **Creating an environment conducive to testing and assessing.**

Remove distractions and communicate effectively to convey clear training objectives. This will afford sales people a clear understanding of what will be assessed. Have a clear policy on mobile phones, work distractions, and emails.

### **Trap 6: Not leveraging existing resources and expertise effectively**

Too often organisations are more focused on “reinventing the wheel” as opposed to examining what resources and expertise already reside within their sales team. As a whole, every sales team has a huge knowledge base. To leverage resources and expertise effectively, sales managers need to identify the specialty knowledge that may exist within their sales team. Some knowledge may be solution-specific based on what the salespeople sell; other knowledge may be more internal to the organisation. They then need to sales coach in the optimal topics, tailored to each learner and conducted in using the best methods.

#### **Problems**

**Critical drivers of sales are poorly reported and understood.**

The depth and breadth of reporting is too often focused entirely on the lagging indicators of sales and the leading indicator of activities are raw numbers without any measure of the quality of those activities. In addition, the targeting and quality of opportunities is not measured. This means that managers are running blind and have no way to identify and share best practice linked to reported benchmarks.

**Activities are not aligned with where the sales opportunities are.**

Sales activity is wasted by focusing on areas that don't hold opportunities. Salespeople become distracted and unfocused on their objectives, as well as not being able to effectively take advantage of appropriate leads.

**Not productively using existing contacts and networks.**

Sales managers often don't take full advantage of their social networks. This is an essential process,

because the more contacts made, the more potential leads, and the more those leads are of high value. Neglecting to use the appropriate sales network translates into fewer leads.

**Sales Coaching is not encouraged, managed or reported efficiently**

Sales coaching is often held back by the organisational environment.

#### **Figure 1**

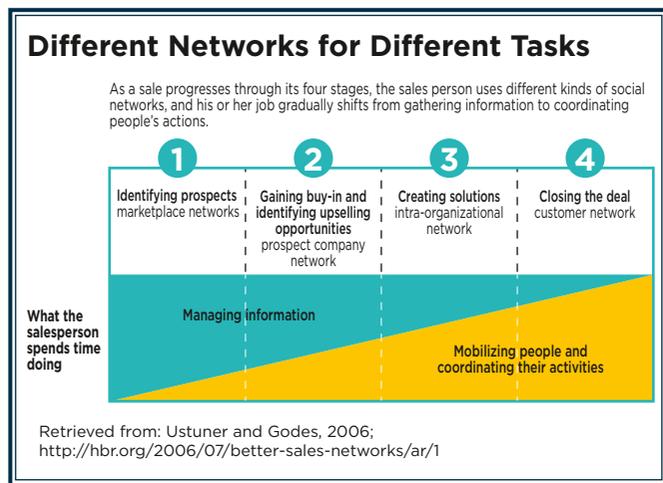
**Seven questions to decide where the culture of an organisation impacts sales coaching effectiveness**

- 1.** How does it compensate and reward sales coaching?
- 2.** Do senior sales managers sales coach?
- 3.** Is there infrastructure, time and resources dedicated to sales coaching?
- 4.** Is sales coaching linked to sales results?
- 5.** How do the sales people view and relate to the sales coaching?
- 6.** Who are the heroes of sales coaching?
- 7.** What rites and rituals surround sales coaching?

#### **Solution**

**Targeting and booking meetings with the right people quickly and easily.**

A salesperson who has a keen understanding of social networks will succeed. Each stage of the sales process – from finding a lead to closing a deal – requires that the salesperson build and use a different kind of network. For example, a grouping of prospects is the network that a salesperson needs to generate leads, while a network of experts that may help finalize the sale is an ideal network for closing the deal.



### Getting easy referrals to high quality targets.

The first area to analyse is existing clients and contacts and how they have provided referrals. If they have not, why not? Either they have not been sought correctly or there is an underlying problem that is stopping them that needs to be addressed. Once identified, a step by step referral process needs to be implemented to ensure that these are easily and quickly converted to prospects, opportunities and sales.

### Use a sales coaching model

Effective sales coaching not only offers a clear idea of what to do, but also provides a plan of steps to take as well. A sales coaching model will provide those steps to implement the process effortlessly, right away.

### Use a sales coaching reporting system to support your coaches

Sales coaching starts with the competencies that will drive success; however, how these valuable best practice, tips and tools are rapidly shared across a sales team will largely determine how rapidly you change behaviours to produce increased sales results. The system should highlight who is doing what coaching, how often and what impact it is having on individual and team performance.

## Trap 7: Having a limited or non-existent budget for investing in the development of your sales team

Developing the sales team is essential to increasing success. When there is a limited or non-existent budget for the development of the sales team, sales people may have difficulty with improvement. The sales process won't be effective without sales people; effectively trained sales people are the backbone of the sales process.

## Problems

### Not understanding the link between sales targets and sales skills

The biggest lever the sales division can pull to increase sales is to improve the number of calls made, the quality of who is being called and the quality with which these calls are planned and executed in moving through the sales process. When this is mapped out it becomes clear that an improvement in the competencies that a salesperson needs for success is the place where these improvements can be made. These improvements can come from 1) the individual sales person taking responsibility for their improvement, 2) their managers taking responsibility for coaching their salespeople, 3) internal resources such as Marketing and Human Resources giving the salespeople the tools to implement the sales process effectively, 4) Internal trainers improving the salespeople's competencies and 5) External trainers improving competencies where the expertise or capacity is not available internally.

The next stage is to ensure that the best competencies to improve are identified and the methods used for improvement are the best for each individual and that they are implemented optimally. However, if you want to reach sales targets resources must be spent on sales skills.

Therefore, this is the one area in which it is essential not to cut investment; however it is frequently the first place an organisation will mistakenly cut if they cannot see the link between results and skills.

**Thinking that it is possible to hire ready-made top performing salespeople that do not require further training.**

An error that sales managers make is thinking that they can hire people who are ready-made to perform at the highest level. It is actually very difficult to locate skilled salespeople. The truth is, it takes training, coaching, and ongoing development of skills to make a top salesperson.

**Solution**

**Cost benefits analysis to gain leadership buy-in that investing in sales development can deliver revenue.**

Understanding how sales team development can improve sales will offer the sales manager the opportunity to clearly see how the cost of training will pay off in sales. Calculating the return of investment in sales development first and foremost involves taking the appropriate time to prepare the analysis, taking into consideration the training conditions to be analyzed. However, taking too much time to prepare the analysis may also negatively affect outcomes. Conducting a cost benefits analysis therefore requires a sense of timing, a strong understanding of analytics, and the ability to prepare and effectively execute sales development strategies.

**Government funding for training.**

The State and Federal Government offers extensive incentives for new and existing employees that have not been educated in the required sales skills. These include cash payments, payroll tax exemptions, and regional incentives of up to

\$4,000 per eligible employee. This is often not investigated because it is seen as too difficult to understand or qualify for, which is often not the case. The other is that operators in this space often have expertise in the funding but little commercial experience in sales training.

**Maximise non face to face training through online learning.**

Online learning programs offer the ability to train remotely, and often at the learner's own pace. Online learning programs are also a way to offer full-scale training at a lower cost than face to face programs.



**Use external trainers for the practice and performance phases of learning and online resources for the preparation and presentation phases of the learning process.**

Electing to do this can increase effectiveness as well as reduce costs by up to 50% on traditional sales training methods.

**Trap 8: Time pressure and geographic distance limiting the ability to build and attend sales training initiatives**

Salespeople are busy people who are often focused on making the sale. They often spend a great deal of their time covering their territories as opposed to sitting in an office. The busy nature of sales and having sales people spread across territories inherently limits the ability to build sales initiatives that all sales team members can attend.

## Problems

### Solutions are limited to the lowest common denominator.

One of the biggest problems is that a manager tries to limit training solutions to the lowest common denominator. This can result in solutions that aren't universally beneficial to the entire group.

### Time off the road, travel and accommodation costs prohibit regularly centralized group training.

Time and cost can lead to a lack of centralized group training. This training strengthens the sales force as a whole and is essential to a cohesive team. When it doesn't occur, there may be a lack of cohesiveness or understanding of the goals in place for the team.

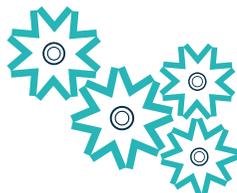
### Thinking email and conference calls can replace structured training.

Emailing and conference calling is a good way to touch base with the team. However, these methods cannot effectively replace structured training when it comes to clearly outlining universal goals and expectations. Sales team and member improvement may also be lacking in situations that utilize only email or conference calls as opposed to structured training.

## Solution

### Use competency framework to focus on the most important group wide performance issues.

Competencies allow for management to apply a universal standard across the entire sales team. By focusing on competencies, managers can focus on the most pressing performance issues in the group.



### Train management in how to increase individual responsibility and accountability in the salespeople.

Management must have a system in place to constantly measure and monitor the performance of the salespeople. One way management can do this through focusing on competencies and applying them universally across their sales team. Management can also prompt their sales team to come up with a plan to hold themselves accountable on both an individual and team basis.

## Trap 9: Sales managers without the process, skills or motivation in coaching individual and groups to best practice

Most managers realise the importance of developing their salespeople; however, many managers lack the process, skills, or motivation to be effective in this development. The manager may also find it daunting to try to develop a diverse group of individuals. In truth, every interaction between sales manager and sales person affords a coaching opportunity; managers who take advantage of this and work to build a strong coaching culture within their organisation are most likely to succeed in the present competitive selling environment.

## Problems

### Time pressure

Sales managers are under pressure to manage time to its most efficient. This often means condensing training, and many times coaching falls by the wayside, even as sales managers expect higher performance.

### No foundation

A good foundation is essential for a strong coaching culture. Sales managers who aren't open

to the idea of coaching as an ongoing departmental need won't have a strong coaching culture.

### No tool kit

Too often sales managers don't have a tool kit to guide their coaching efforts. Coaching tool kits provide direction in how to coach, and can be tailored to ensure that best practice is followed.

### A lack of plans and reports

A sales manager can understand what is actually occurring through the use of concrete quantitative data found in plans and reports. Without qualitative data, determining where improvement needs to happen is difficult.

## Solution

**Implement a structured coaching approach that is flexible enough to cater to individual coaching situations.**

---

➤ **“Every day, in every way, I'm getting better and better.”**  
**Coue**

---

This allows every individual to identify the areas that he or she needs to work on while applying an easily followed universal standard for coaching across the sales team.

**Provide a coaching guide and diary that is easy to maintain and is easy to report on.**

A coaching guide offers the proper instruction, and a coaching diary allows sales people to be individually accountable for their performance and improvement.

**Provide senior management with the direction to coach their coaches so that the best practice is lived and breathed rather than directed for others.**

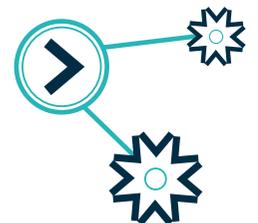
Having everyone on board with what happens in coaching sessions helps ensure that best practice is integrated into every aspect of the coaching. Managers can help guarantee that this happens by being provided clear direction on best practice as well as

**Provide support programs to expand and enrich new learning.**

These programs can be conducted either in person or online, and they offer salespeople the valuable opportunity to improve as both individuals and as a team.

**Link expected behaviours to strategic outcomes.**

Showing salespeople how their behaviours link to strategic outcomes will prompt improvement through understanding. This can be accomplished by utilising plans and reports to provide quantitative feedback.



## Trap 10: No ongoing reinforcement

Ongoing reinforcement creates an environment where sales people are consistently learning and being rewarded for their improvement. When there is no ongoing reinforcement of training initiatives, sales people don't continue to grow.

## Problems

**The investment is wasted in expensive training.**

Doing too much with the training initiative is just as bad as doing too little. Additionally, emphasising training that doesn't focus on

how your particular sales people learn is not conducive to success.

### Hard to get managers buy in

One challenge in sales organisations occurs when the organisation fails to get sales managers actively involved in the reinforcement process. However, it is essential that managers get involved because without systematic and ongoing reinforcement, sales people can quickly forget what they have learned and instead revert back to original behaviours.

### Reinforcement fails to recognise the diverse range of skills and methods needed to be effective.

If sales training is too small it may not address all of the skills and methods needed to be effective. Sales training that is too small can be too personal and end up neglecting team members. This may lead to boredom in people who aren't being adequately addressed on an ongoing basis in training.

### Short term business pressures are allowed to squeeze out the time required for meaningful reinforcement.

Pressures such as limited time and increased distance may divide the sales force and prevent the formation of a cohesive team. It is important to make sure that distractions such as these don't squeeze out the time needed for meaningful reinforcement.

## Solution

### Coaching feedback and reporting system

A coaching feedback and reporting system allows sales people to offer continuous feedback on what works and what doesn't. Having this feedback allows managers to assess how successful different aspects of the coaching program are.

### Sales toolkit for just in time sales training solutions

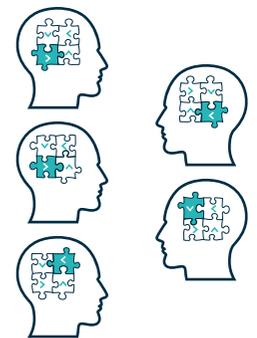
It is important to provide a sales toolkit to help sales people use the right tool to accomplish with precision each time they approach a sale. Sales toolkits offer the salesperson the opportunity to go to one place to find all the tools they need to be successful. This requires providing more than what is needed for each individual sale; a sales person will likely not use every tool for every sale.

### Structured and engaging ongoing sales learning options

These options don't all need to be in-person. Online sales learning opportunities can enrich and provide opportunities for improvement in salespeople. Sales learning activities that aren't boring, too impersonal, or neglectful will enrich and engage your sales people.

### Regular, varied and meaningful team interaction

Salespeople are frequently separated from the team through working territories. Offering regular opportunities that provide opportunity for meaningful interaction can help sales people learn from others and arrive at new and interesting solutions for sales dilemmas. Engaging in team interaction also ensures that everyone is on the same page.





## **About Accela**

Accela is an Australian owned company, established in 2005, renowned for exceptional sales management and leadership training, coaching and consulting. Accela has assisted many Australian blue chip and international companies realise their teams' full potential with a comprehensive range of development solutions. To complement their existing methodology, the Hub was created for clients to measure, report, manage and continuously drive faster, easier sales results.

Accela has over 30 accredited trainers and facilitators across Australia and New Zealand, and over 40 accredited local multi-lingual trainers across Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Tokyo, London, Frankfurt, Milan and Paris.



[www.accela.com.au](http://www.accela.com.au)