



## Coaching: Helping Others Succeed

by Patrick Malone, CSE

With society's current focus inward, the concept of helping others succeed may not seem like the answer to the perennial question, "What's in it for me?" And yet when one does stop long enough to contemplate the commonality of the success around us, we begin to see how helping others succeed plays a central role in our individual success.

Years ago when I first started out in my career, a sales trainer told me that my success was directly related to my customer's success. At the time I didn't see that as particularly insightful. After all, any sales person with successful customers will be successful, because successful customers buy more than unsuccessful customers. Home Depot is more successful than most local hardware stores, so I initially interpreted that message to mean, sell to more Home Depots.

Fortunately as time passed, I matured in my career and that message took on a whole new meaning. I began to see that if I could show my customers how my products and services could help them succeed, then I could transition from being simply a sales person to a business consultant, and maybe even a trusted advisor. Achieving those levels of relationships had a significant impact on my sales performance.

So my customers' successes led to my success, and I was promoted to sales management and a new opportunity to test the theory that success comes from helping others succeed.

How could I, the new district sales manager, help my sales reps succeed? Again the answer seems relatively straightforward. Since I was a good sales person I would work with my reps and close more deals for them. After six months of running myself ragged closing deals without impacting the total district sales, I realized that once again I had misinterpreted the trainer's advice. For the first time in my life I began to see the real value of helping others succeed.

Over time, I developed a simplified process for coaching others to acquire the feel of a skill and building enough muscle memory so that they could make it their own. The process involved six simple steps:

1. **Set Expectations.** Without a clear definition of the skill, there is little hope for people to make it their own. In addition, those expectations must reference some criteria that the person can measure. How else will they know when they are successful?
2. **Demonstrate.** It is a proven fact that we retain more when we "see" it in addition to just "hearing" it. Successful coaching demands more than just the transfer of information. How many of you ever improved your golf game by reading a book? Most of us require a fairly skillful coach in addition to information alone. Therefore coaching requires enough skill to demonstrate the skill being coached.
3. **Practice.** This is where most of today's coaching efforts falls apart. Many of today's students expect instant success. "Give me the magic pill, I'll take it and then I'll be successful." That may be today's reality, but the real problem arises when the coach buys in. If you want to be well liked you probably will not make a good coach. Expert coaches adopt that old Marine Corps drill instructor attitude - Never Satisfied. Professionals know the value of practice and pushing the envelope.
4. **Execute.** Expert coaches also understand that some students are great in practice but fold under the reality of executing in the real world. That's why it is critical that

coaching extend onto the real playing field of business. This is where the coach is put to the greatest test. Sometimes failure is the greatest teacher; at other times, success holds the magic. Expert coaches decide in the moment which course of action will benefit the student most.

5. **Debrief.** Every sales call or interaction is an opportunity to coach. The key to success here is what happens in the debriefing. Start by pointing out the successes. Everyone likes to hear what he or she did well. It reinforces the individual strengths. If there is room for improvement, select the one or two most critical areas and work on them first. Overwhelming the individual with a laundry list of items to be improved will only guarantee failure. Most importantly, when there is an area for improvement, point the student towards the improvement. Never criticize the error, as that will only ensure it will be repeated again. Point out the solution or point in the direction of the solution. You will find the results much more satisfying.
6. **Repeat.** No one ever reaches the point where some coaching would not be beneficial. Michael Jordan, Larry Bird, Tiger Woods, Michael Schumacher all continue to use the services of coaches during their careers. It is the concept of "continuous improvement" played out with our human capital rather than simply against a process.

Helping others succeed is the path to our organizational success as well as our personal success. You will also find it to be very rewarding when measured against all the criteria for success. In no time in our history is our business community in more desperate need of expert coaches. Try it and you might find yourself exceeding your own expectations.