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Sales Training AND Sales Coaching, not Sales Training OR Sales Coaching

Business Report Overview by Brian Armstrong MBC
and Dr Grace McCarthy, 2009

Research Paper overview

In 2009, business coach Brian Armstrong and Master of Business Coaching coordinator Dr Grace McCarthy analysed the merits of sales training as opposed to sales coaching in Australian businesses, and found that return on investment was maximised by combining the different methodologies.

The difference between sales training and sales coaching?

Do you know the difference between [sales training](#) and [sales coaching](#)?

Most business leaders don't, according to a new Australian report

Sales coaching and sales training are terms that are often used interchangeably - sometimes because the buyers of such services are not clear on the differences, and sometimes because the providers of sales training have re-branded their offering as sales coaching to catch coaching's current wave of popularity.

For Business Leader, Coach and Researcher Brian Armstrong, co-author with Sydney Business School's Dr Grace McCarthy of a the report 'Sales Training AND Sales Coaching, not Sales Training OR Sales Coaching', the difference is best summed up by one of the respondents in the research study: "One of the interviewees put it quite clearly," he says. "Training is about the skill set - the process, the methodology - and coaching is about the mindset."

But - as every football team knows - the two go hand in glove, with a coach in charge of strategy and a trainer drilling basic skills. The report outlines a strong response from interviewees about the complementary nature of coaching and training. They described training in isolation as the 'old model', while adding coaching is the 'new model'.

"They certainly do support each other," says Armstrong. "One without the other won't be as effective. If you're giving people a lot of coaching about limiting patterns, awareness and motivation, for example, but they don't have the basic skills to back that up ... that's more effective than not having coaching, but it's also not giving them the full picture."

Return On Investment

While data was not available to measure Return On Investment (ROI) for this approach, anecdotally interviewees suggested that ROI increases when training and coaching are used **together** rather than being viewed as separate interventions. The key, according to Armstrong, is for companies to be clear about the differences between the two delivery mechanisms - and choose the right one for their requirements.

"Get clear about what's being offered, what your people's needs are, and then match them up," he says. The same advice can be directed at companies providing the services, according to Armstrong, who suggests that clarity of offer is vital to meeting clients' needs.

Previous studies which have explored [the ROI for training AND coaching](#) demonstrate the commercial benefits that can be achieved. This study did not specify actual figures for ROI when the process worked, but most respondents agreed that coaching and training did have a positive impact on performance. There was general agreement that both hard and soft measures were required and that hard measures from training (such as call rates, sales revenue and conversions) are easier to measure than soft measures (such as motivation, behaviour and attitude). Respondents suggests that sales performance had improved and attributed that to coaching and training, but could not isolate exactly what had brought about the improvement.

Inside or Outside Job?

The report suggests that the argument about internal managers as coaches versus external coaches remains undecided. Many respondents felt that managers could add value, given their knowledge of their industry, products and services, the customers and the individual being coached. However, managers need skills and awareness to cope with the dual role.

Equally strong was the argument for using an external coach. Respondents in this camp felt that sales people are more likely to be guarded, defensive and reluctant to try new ideas in front of their boss. An external coach, they also suggested, does not get bound up in the content, as a manager as coach may do, moving into training mode rather than a coaching mode.

Armstrong and McCarthy suggest that a combination of both external and internal coaches can work well, with external coaches raising awareness of the need to change, and internal coaches as powerful allies in implementing change.

The Number One Priority

The report concludes that both sales training and sales coaching have a role and are valuable, but that the nature and benefits of both needs to be more clearly defined by those offering the services. "Organisations also need to get clear about what they're looking for," says Armstrong. "What is consulting? What is training? What is coaching? Then they can select the correct one for their requirements. One is not better than the other – it's a matter of matching up your needs to the resources available."

A full transcript of this report is available from Shirlaws for \$195 inc GST. You can [download the order form](#) to receive the full report.



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