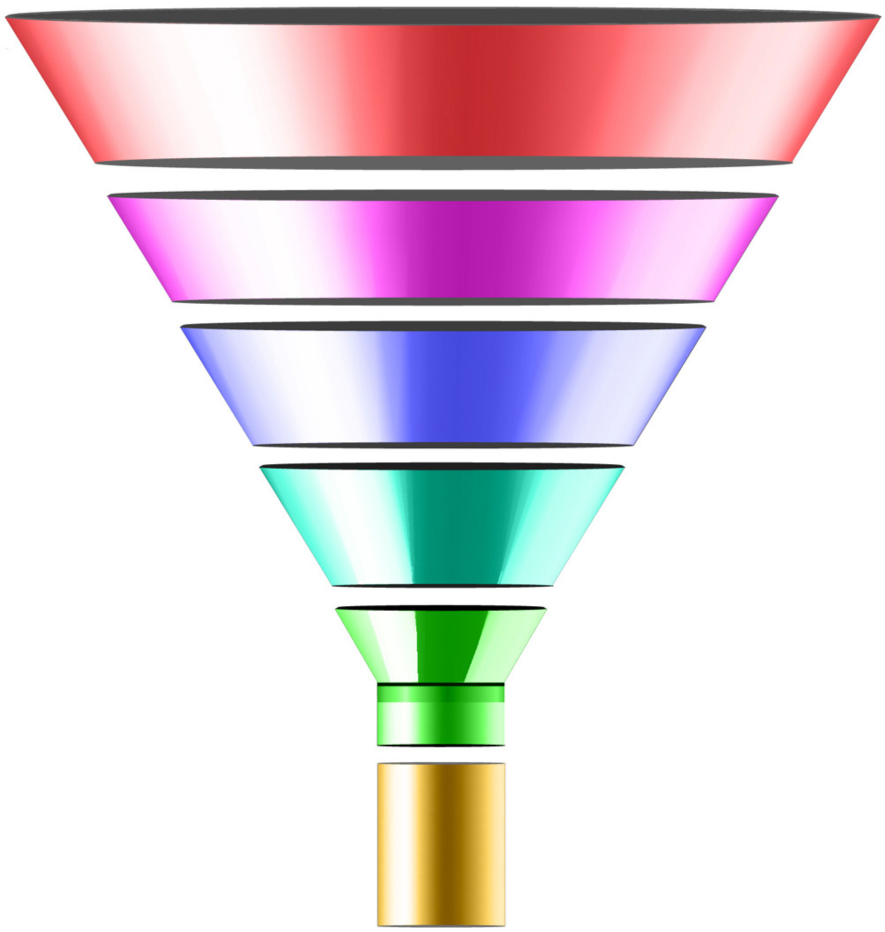
9 Coaching Tips

for Sales Managers

to Drive Better Sales Funnel Results



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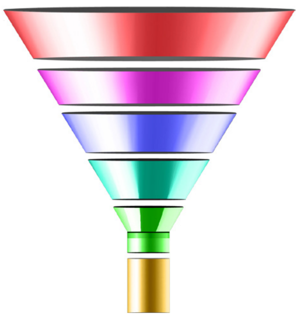
Introduction



> *If my sales management house was on fire, the sales funnel is the one tool I would grab on the way out the door.*
>
> \- *Sales Manager, Healthcare Technology Company*

If you're a sales manager you know your time every day is like the sand in an hourglass quickly falling from the top to the bottom. It's a chal- lenge to use that time productively.

One of the highest ROMAs - return on manager activities – is helping your salespeople maximize their sales funnel effectiveness. Managing the funnel requires salespeople to identify the right priorities, plan their work, and organize well to get it done.

In this performance paper you will learn 9 critical sales funnel coaching tips to help your salespeople do exactly that.

Good Selling!
Mark Sellers

CEO and Founder, Breakthrough Sales Performance®
Author, *The Funnel Principle*, Named by *Selling Power Magazine*
a Top Ten Best Sales Book to Read

1

Commit to regularly scheduled funnel inspections for each rep.

Improving sales funnel management begins with knowing the true health of the funnel at any time. The best way to do this is to inspect the funnel. We call these Funnel Audits.

Through the Funnel Audit you have a powerful tool for coaching your team. It reveals where and how the funnel needs to be improved. It gives focus and clarity on the priorities that need attention. It gives you an easy way to hold reps accountable.

Here's how the Funnel Audit works. Each month the salesperson completes the Funnel Audit Worksheet. The salesperson and sales manager remotely call in and go through the Funnel Audit. The Worksheet leads the manager and rep on a structured conversation about funnel health and where and why the funnel has changed (or not). The Audits take 60-75 minutes.

A key part of the Funnel Audit is the 30 day funnel plan. It helps you keep your reps accountable. The plan specifically details the accounts and opportunities that the rep will commit selling time to and defines specific, measurable and time bound goals and actions. Then, at the next Audit you can see which goals and actions the rep completed or not.

Transform your effectiveness by transforming that of your salespeople. Do Funnel Audits.

2

Help your salespeople see where, how and why their funnels have changed.

Knowing where, how, and why a rep's sales funnel has changed is powerful information.

Knowing what has changed helps a salesperson justify doing what's working and stop doing what's not working. It lets them prioritize, plan and organize their way to success.

As a sales manager you should help your salespeople see what's changed across three categories: adding new sales opportunities to the funnel, moving opportunities through the stages, and closing sales.

If one of your salespeople consistently does not add new opportunities to the funnel then she needs to know that her funnel will eventually be very weak in the middle. There can be many causes of this including expecting too much new business to come from existing customers or simply not having visibility to activity at the top of the funnel to be aware of the problem. If the rep is activly trying to add opportunities then you can help her evaluate the effectiveness of those activities. For example are trade shows generating new leads? What about email campaigns? Is the website optimized to collect visitors? Are leads being passed to the rep efficiently? The Funnel Audit helps you quickly and effectively discuss this important part of managing the funnel.

If opportunities don't move stages month after month it's the Funnel Audit that catches this problem. You can clearly see if opportunities have moved from one stage to another and you can discuss why. You will want to know if early stage opportunities have moved into the TVR section especially since TVR is the best indicator of funnel health. Isolating this problem helps you coach the rep in how to move opportunities faster, if that's possible, or at least how to deploy creative selling activities to get more stage movement. You can also advise to avoid doing things just to be busy.

Finally, some of our clients need to improve closing results. The Funnel Audit can reveal this problem and help you coach the rep in how to improve.

3

Don't confuse a forecast call with a Funnel Audit call.

Every sales manager is responsible to deliver an accurate forecast usually each month or quarter.

However, one common and costly mistake I see sales managers make is confusing the forecast call with a Funnel Audit. Both are important and both are very different.

A forecast call goes something like this: The manager calls the rep and asks which deals will close this month or quarter. Or, she might ask just how much revenue is forecasted to close, not concerned with where it comes from. The manager might modify what the rep told her before passing on her forecast to her boss.

The Funnel Audit is different from a forecast call. The Funnel Audit is a structured conversation every month about the health of the funnel and ends with a 30 day plan to work it. This conversation covers all stages of the funnel, not just one or two that might be used to create the forecast. There are many questions around what's working and what's not in adding opportunities, advancing them, and closing them. There are questions to learn what's working in generating new leads. Lots of questions!

The Funnel Audit conversation has a big impact on the accuracy of the forecast call. Make sure the Funnel Audit conversation doesn't take a back seat to the forecast.

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Don't make the Funnel Audit a deal review discussion.

This is the second most common and costly mistake sales managers make when inspecting the funnel.

Making the Funnel Audit a discussion mostly of the deals the rep is working on, where they are and what's happening with them robs the rep of the value of the Audit. You can't expect your reps to steadily get better at funnel management if you let this happen.

One reason it happens is because sales managers don't take enough time between
Funnel Audits to have deal conversations. That's not an easy fix but it is a simple one. Make time to discuss deals.

A second reason it happens is that during the Audit it's likely that you will ask questions about the deal as it pertains to funnel stage and value and commitment. This is normal and OK. But it's when those deal discussions end up lasting 20 minutes that the focus slips away.

Make time for deal discussions outside of The Funnel Audit.

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Be consistent in your Funnel systems and processes.

Nothing throws off your salespeople more than changes to how you manage your region. Though some changes will occur it's not necessary to frequently change your process for managing the sales funnel.

Let's start with the Funnel Audit. You should discuss the same information each time. You want to know 'dashboard' stuff like the quota gap, the size of the funnel (TVR), Target TVR, number of TVR opportunities, and number and potential dollar value of opportunities stage by stage.

You want to discuss what's changed about the funnel – or not. You want to review the 30 day plan. You should do this every 30 days. It doesn't have to be on the same day but should be close to it.

You want to have a solution for 'housing' your funnels. This could be an excel spreadsheet or a CRM product.

Finally, don't confuse continuous improvement with unnecessary changes. It's a good idea to periodically step back and evaluate the effectiveness of the process. Likely there's room to improve something. Go ahead and improve it. This can take place every 90 to 180 days.

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Use the Funnel Audit to make a difference one rep at a time.

Many years ago one of the simple but profound lessons I got as a young competitive golfer was from a good friend of mine named Jeremy. He knew I loved to practice. I would go to the driving range and hit balls and chip and putt for hours at a time.

One day he commented that whenever he went to the range he made sure he had a specific objective. Sometimes the objective was to work on his short game like flop shots. Sometimes he worked on long irons. Sometimes the objective was making putts from 6-8 feet. I took that advice and it made me a better golfer.

You should look at the Funnel Audit with each salesperson the same way. Identify something specific that each of your salespeople needs to improve right now and use the Audit to help.

For example, if a rep needs help adding more early stage opportunities from customers then focus on how she can get better at that. Maybe she needs to broaden
her lead generation efforts. Maybe she should look beyond existing customers for new leads and work on new customers. Maybe she needs help asking better stage questions to disqualify opportunities faster. Help with that. Maybe she should stop attending local trade shows that are costly but that fail to produce new leads.

The Funnel Audit is powerful because it lets you see the patterns that a rep gets into and even the habits they have learned to own. Some of these patterns can become obstacles to breaking through and becoming more effective. Usually they're too close to see these things. This is where you can make an impact.

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Help your reps get the right things done.

With salespeople busier than ever the challenge is to make time for getting the right things done – their sales priorities. As a sales manager you can help by identifying the priorities and holding your people accountable through goals and actions on the 30 day funnel plan.

Each Funnel Audit ends with a 30 day plan. The salesperson identifies the specific accounts and opportunities he'll work on and what exactly the goal is for each one. At each Audit you and your salespeople review progress toward achieving the goals. Though this seems straightforward it's not easy to do. The first challenge is to get good at writing goals and actions.

A goal is something to be achieved that the customer commits to. For example, instead of defining a goal as 'deliver a proposal' try defining it as 'getting the customer to agree that our offer (that's in the proposal) meets their needs'. The action is delivering the proposal. Another common example is a trial or demo. Instead of the goal being 'do the demo or trial' ask yourself what you hope to achieve through the demo or trial. Are you hoping to get the customer to acknowledge a need? See the financial costs of the problem? Commit funding to change? These are all commitments the customer must make to advance the sale. See them as goals. It's the only way to really make progress for a sale.

If you don't do this then your salespeople can easily be too impressed with how busy they are with actions. But actions and busyness don't guarantee effectiveness.

Think of how many times over the course of the year your salespeople decide how to use their precious time and resources to advance a sale. Think of how many demos or trials or samples or any other selling resources are used without any impact on the sale.

Getting even a little better at this can add up to a tremendous improvement in sales effectiveness over time. Now think of getting all of your salespeople better at this and you've got a big impact on your region quota. Expect to see shorter sales cycles, better qualification of opportunities, better sales strategies, and better use of their selling resources.

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Remember that veterans and stars need coaching too.

One of the biggest mistakes I see sales managers make is not coaching their veteran salespeople and their sales stars.

This is unfortunate because both need coaching. Veterans are not necessarily stars but both present some challenges to sales managers.

One problem is that veterans might not seek coaching because they don't want to appear weak especially to a younger sales manager. It gets worse when the young manager tries to coach and is rejected. What's exposed is the manager might not know how to coach a veteran. So it's not that veterans don't want coaching. They just want coaching that makes sense to them.

To coach veterans think of earning their trust first. Ride with them. See how they go about planning for sales calls, making presentations and strategizing. Eventually ask them to share with you what their goals are and why these are important. If a veteran has grown so tired and unmotivated to improve you'll have to start there. They have to want to get better for your coaching to have any impact. Always respect their experience, but don't be shy about objectively pointing out areas to be improved.

Stars need coaching too. Though they sometimes are highly independent and appear to not need anything from anybody (!) they can respond favorably to the right coaching.

The best way to coach a star is to take the time to learn how they make it happen. Ride and observe and be quiet. Be clear that your intentions are to learn. During lunches or even waiting until the end of the day ask some questions about why they do certain things. You'll gain a lot of respect and credibility. Eventually you might be invited to help – maybe she asks you a question about an account or presentation. Instead of giving answers think of questions you could ask that get her thinking. She'll figure it out from there.

Your job as a sales manager is to make a difference for each salesperson. Some people will need a lot of attention and others just a little. Earn credibility with each one and tailor your approach.

9 Book next month's Funnel Audit with each salesperson now.

The key to making sustainable improvements in maximizing sales funnel performance is to commit to regular, structured Funnel Audits month after month. The Audits reveal critical insight into each salesperson's funnel and into how they approach this most important task. They allow you to see patterns and habits – good ones and bad ones. You can coach objectively to what you see and learn.

So the best time to book next month's Funnel Audit is at the conclusion of the Audit you just completed with each person.

This will go a long way toward making an impact for each salesperson.

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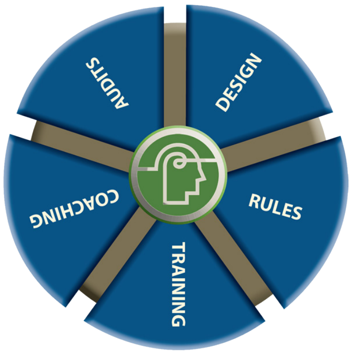

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- Sales Leaders — What's Your Funnel IQ?
  Rethink the most valuable tool in your bag to sell more and exceed plan

- Get the book! *The Funnel Principle*

- Download a chapter from *The Funnel Principle*

- Check out Mark Sellers's Funnel Principle Blog

About Mark Sellers

Mark Sellers, an Advantage Performance Group partner, is an international sales consultant, CEO and founder of the sales consulting firm Breakthrough Sales Performance®. In 2008, he published *The Funnel Principle©* book and introduced a game-changing standard in the sales funnel called The BuyCycle Funnel™.

About Advantage Performance Group

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