



How you can use quality feedback to raise the averages of your sales team

Why quality feedback matters

Of all the factors of team performance the people element is the one whose potential has no set limits. Sales depends on two major factors. First are favorable circumstances. Unfortunately, circumstances are not under our control. The second factor which produces results is efforts.

Efforts can be further looked at in three distinct dimensions:

- Quantity of efforts,
- Quality of efforts and
- Direction of efforts

Whatever quantity, quality, and direction of efforts a salesperson puts in the field today, produces results tomorrow.

Thus, if a manager wishes to raise the averages of the entire sales team, he needs to look at the knowledge and skill levels of each member of the team.

One of the most robust ways of doing so is giving appropriate feedback on the field after observing a few sales calls made by the salesperson.

The issue faced by most first-time sales managers

The core issue of why sales managers feel difficulty in giving feedback is that they may not know how to do it. Most of the times, good high performing salespeople are one day “knighted” as sales managers. As first-time managers of frontline salespeople, they often do not realize that skills required by a sales manager are different than those needed for excelling as a successful salesperson.

They, therefore, in a well-intentioned way, try to clone themselves.

An easy way, frequently tried by newly promoted sales managers, is to go on joint calls with salespeople, observe a little, point out the mistakes made by the salesperson and hope that the salesperson will learn. This essentially makes the feedback a one-way conversation. But this may not be the best way of giving feedback, says [Joe Hirsch in his article *Good Feedback Is a Two-Way Conversation*](#) published in Harvard Business Review (June 01, 2020).

THE MERCURI VIEW

Giving feedback to the salesperson after joint calls is one of the most important ways of increasing capability and effectiveness of salespeople

Asking rather than telling is an extremely robust way of giving feedback.

It is Mercuri belief that beginning the conversation by asking more open questions opens up the salesperson and yields more information. This can be followed by asking open leading questions by steering the conversation.

Any conversation which is two-way fosters trust and brings about a longer lasting change in the salesperson’s skill level.

A must-ask powerful question to end such conversations is “If you were to do this visit again, what would you do differently?”



Rather than being seen as a sales manager with a higher hierarchical title doling out feedback, it would be much more effective to have a partnership approach and engage in a two-way feedback conversation-he argues.

The humbler but more effective way: A 2-way feedback conversation

Of course, salespeople make mistakes on the field. Some of these mistakes get observed during the joint calls made with the sales managers. Managers do need to take corrective action. But they have two apprehensions, according to Joe.

First, they are anxious that their feedback (especially negative) can hurt the feelings of the salesperson. Second, they also fear that this may demotivate the salesperson leading to diminished productivity. So, they conclude that feedback can be counterproductive.

This results in managers either giving only positive feedback full of effusive praise or a tenuous, confused feedback where the salesperson, at the end of the conversation, is not clear about whether the manager wants him to repeat a behavior or stop it. This may ultimately contribute to a possible sub-optimal performance of the entire sales team.

Joe Hirsch argues that the core of the issue lies more in the “how” part of the feedback, the way it is given. He postulates that a humbler two-way conversation would result in a more rewarding conversation with better results.

‘Mirror Holding’ More Effective Than ‘Window Gazing’

Using a powerful metaphor, he states that giving feedback in the form of “see-and-tell” is like a “window-gazing” approach. If two people are gazing at a window, both would have different perspectives. Both perspectives are completely valid but may be substantively different. However, usually because of imbalance of power, ultimately, there will be only one view, which is that of the manager! The salesperson may agree to the sales manager’s views a few times, but after a certain threshold of tolerance, may start avoiding going on joint calls with the sales manager altogether.

As opposed to this, “window gazing” approach, Joe Hirsch suggests a “mirror holding” approach. This dramatically shifts the trajectory and tone of the feedback conversation and has the following elements:

- The sales manager follows a more “partnership” like approach rather than a hierarchical approach
- The sales manager shifts from “Tell” to “Ask.”
- Sales managers ask more questions which focus on the salespersons’ strengths, cutting to the heart of employee’s experience.
- Challenges are diagnosed in case the salesperson is holding back.



- Shapes a path towards commitment to improvements by making the conversation more actionable for the future.
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As Joe Hirsch sums it up, “Making that small adjustment in your mindset can produce a world of difference in your message — and just might help others see themselves in an entirely new way”

Key Takeaway – Giving feedback: A Way to raising the averages of the sales team

The key takeaway we can pick up from the article is this –

- While giving feedback, sales managers should move the conversation from “window gazing” to “mirror holding” by shifting from “Tell” to “Ask”.
- A two-way feedback conversation is way more powerful in producing positive changes as compared to a directive, instruction-driven, one-way communication.

The article [Good Feedback Is a Two-Way Conversation](#) by Joe Hirsch published in Harvard Business Review June 01, 2020 is [here](#).

Author Information – *Joe Hirsch* is the managing director of Semaca Partners, a boutique communications firm, a TEDx and keynote speaker, the author of *The Feedback Fix* and an award-winning educational leader. His work and research on high-performance feedback has been featured in Forbes, CNBC, Inc. and other major outlets.

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