OUT+COME | PRACTICAL HANDBOOK

The Sales Manager's Coaching Handbook

How to coach rather than inspect, and how to tell whether it worked

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Four jobs managers confuse

Most sales managers do four different jobs and call them all management. Mixing them up is why coaching tends to disappear when the quarter gets busy.

Job	What it is	A typical question
Managing	Setting targets, allocating resources, holding people accountable	What is the plan for the quarter?
Inspecting	Reviewing deals and the forecast	Where is this deal, and when will it close?
Training	Teaching knowledge or skills, usually to a group	Here is how we handle pricing questions.
Coaching	Improving how one person sells, through observation and feedback	What did you notice on that call, and what would you try next time?

THE RULE

Inspection is about the deal. Coaching is about the person. Keep them in separate meetings, so that neither pushes the other out.

Diagnose before you coach

Not every performance problem is a coaching problem. Before you coach, work out which of three things is going on.

Is it...	Signs	What helps
Skill	They do not know how, or do it inconsistently	Coaching, practice and feedback
Will	They know how, and are not doing it	A direct conversation about expectations and motivation
Process	The system, tools, targets or handoffs get in the way	Fix the system, not the person

Ask yourself: if their life depended on it, could they do it? If yes, it is not skill. If the best rep on the team would struggle in the same circumstances, it is probably process.

The coaching conversation: observe, ask, agree, follow up

1. Observe. Use real evidence: a recorded call, a shadowed call, an email, a pipeline review. Do not coach from memory or rumour.
2. Ask. Let the rep describe what they noticed before you say a word. People remember what they discover.
3. Agree. Pick one behaviour to change. Make it specific and measurable.

4. Follow up. At the next session, look for evidence that they tried it, and what happened.

What it can sound like

> *Manager: Which part of that call would you like us to listen to again? Rep: The bit where they pushed back on timing. Manager: What did you notice? Rep: I jumped to a solution too quickly. Manager: What could you try instead? Rep: Ask what is driving the timing first. Manager: Let us agree that for your next three calls, and look at one together on Friday.*

Run call reviews without embarrassing anyone

- The rep goes first. Ask what they would change before you offer an opinion.
- Choose one clip and one skill. Do not review a whole call line by line.
- Start with something specific that went well. Be exact, not generic.
- Ask before you tell. If you must tell, give one clear observation and one suggestion.
- Agree one behaviour to try next time. Write it down.
- Keep it private unless the person has chosen to share it with the team.

Coaching experienced reps

Experienced reps often feel they do not need coaching, and often have blind spots they cannot see. A few things help.

- Ask more than you tell. Treat them as the expert and ask what they would do.
- Use data and recordings, so the feedback is about evidence, not opinion.
- Give them a stretch: a new segment, a harder deal type, helping someone else improve.
- Let them coach you on something. It builds trust and keeps you learning.

An intervention ladder for underperformance

Step	What you do
1. Notice and ask	Say what you have seen, and ask what is going on. Listen.
2. Coach on a specific behaviour	Agree one or two behaviours, support them for a few weeks, and look for evidence.
3. Set clear expectations and support	Write down what good looks like, by when, and the help you will give.
4. Formal process	If it still is not working, follow your company's formal process. Involve HR early.

Employment rules differ and details matter. This is a guide to the conversation, not employment advice. Check formal steps with HR or your adviser.

Did it work? How to tell

- Behaviour: do recent calls show the agreed behaviour, compared with before?
- Follow-through: did the rep try what you agreed? If not, why?
- Leading indicators: better discovery, more next steps agreed, shorter stalls.
- The rep's own view: do they feel it helped?
- Results come last. They lag behaviour by weeks or months.

Common mistakes

- Coaching on deals instead of skills.
- Trying to fix five things at once.
- Telling instead of asking.
- No follow-up, so nothing sticks.
- Only coaching the weakest people. Strong reps benefit too.
- Skipping coaching when you are busy. That is when it matters most.

A six-week starter plan

Week	Focus
1	Separate your pipeline review from your 1-on-1s. Tell the team why.
2	Listen to one call per rep. Note one strength and one skill each.
3	Run your first coaching conversations. Agree one behaviour per rep.
4	Follow up. Look for evidence. Adjust.
5	Review calls again. Introduce rep self-scoring.
6	Look at what changed. Decide what to keep.

Observation sheet

Rep	Date	Call or evidence	One strength (be specific)	One skill to work on	Agreed behaviour	Evidence at follow-up

NEXT STEP

A second pair of eyes?

These guides share general ideas. If you would like help applying them to your own team, market and numbers, we would be glad to talk.

Book a pit stop: outpluscome.com

This guide is general information and not legal, employment or professional advice. Examples are illustrative.