



SAP:

Data-Driven Sales Coaching

The Situation

SAP is a global software corporation with more than 90,000 employees worldwide. The organization's sales staff, dispersed across more than 130 countries, is responsible for securing sales opportunities, facilitating relationships with new and existing customers, and meeting their sales quota. In 2015, SAP's leadership team set out to increase the already industry-leading quota attainment rates of its salespeople.

Surveys of salespeople showed that they did not receive as much sales coaching from their managers as they would like, largely due to time constraints. Sales coaching, defined as the ongoing process of engaging salespeople in coaching with the goal of improving sales performance, is crucial for the development of sales staff. ATD's research report *Sales Coaching: Building a Successful Sales Force* found that the top benefit of sales coaching, cited by 73 percent of respondents, is increased sales skills.

To give sales staff more opportunities to be coached, SAP's business operations and sales learning teams developed the Data-Driven Coaching program in 2015. By pairing salespeople with trained coaches outside their line of reporting and using data reports

to guide coaching conversations, the teams hoped the program would engage the sales staff and help them increase their quota attainment rate.

Finding Coaches

SAP offers its employees several forms of coaching training. If employees are interested in receiving a coaching certification, they can complete an online training course, consisting of four modules containing eight to 10 three-hour sessions each, and become internally certified. Additionally, they can take still more modules, log their coaching hours, and become certified with an external coaching organization. Employees with less time to dedicate have other options, from SAP's 90-minute massive open online course (MOOC) to its virtual live classroom offerings.

As a result of these training offerings, the organization had a built-in bench of employees from a variety of roles qualified to serve as coaches for the program. Using sales coaches who were not the sales staff's direct managers had the added benefit of ensuring that coaching conversations were strictly coaching sessions (as opposed to check-ins or status updates). Additionally, this approach gave salespeople a safe space to talk freely without worrying about how their manager would view them.

The sales learning team had two primary methods of identifying potential coaches. The first was an internal coaching database that employees certified as coaches could opt in to and volunteer to serve as coaches to their colleagues. The second was SAP's learning management system (LMS), which identified employees who had taken coaching courses. The team contacted these employees and asked if they would be willing to serve as a coach in the Data-Driven Coaching program.

When pairing coaches and coachees, the team paired employees who spoke the same language and, when possible, paired employees who were in the same time zone and worked in similar lines of business. However, some differences were not an issue; many employees coached across time zones by holding coaching sessions over the phone.

After being paired with their coaches, the salespeople would schedule coaching sessions with their coach as needed. Requiring coachees to do the scheduling would help ensure coachees were engaged and willing to be coached.

Data Reports

To ensure coaching conversations were guided by facts, SAP's sales learning team made use of the data available in its internal systems, including its LMS and its customer relationship management (CRM) and human capital management (HCM) systems. These reports compared the coachee's sales numbers against those of the top-performing

salesperson in the coachee's line of business and region. A coachee responsible for selling HCM software in North America, for instance, would be compared against the top-performing salesperson selling HCM software in North America. The reports included individual key performance indicators (KPIs) such as deal close rates, revenue per salesperson, current opportunities, and deals closed in the past.

Coaches and coachees received updated data reports once per month, which helped them identify how their performance across relevant KPIs compared with that of the top performers. This allowed for a basis for possible topics and goals for each coaching session. For example, a coachee with a low pipeline may believe they need to learn how to close more deals, but the report may show that their deals have significantly fewer products than the top-performing salesperson in their region. The report could thus help the salesperson better decide which topics they wanted to be coached on, and, working with their coach, select a goal for each coaching session.

The Results

The program has run multiple times over the last three years. Hundreds of SAP salespeople have been coached and almost 100 SAP employees have volunteered to serve as coaches. SAP has seen improvement in several overall KPIs since the program was implemented, including an increase in numbers of unique accounts worked with, distinct products pitched, and new opportunities created.

Lessons Learned

- Allow employees outside a coachee's line of reporting to serve as coach. At SAP, any employee who had taken a coaching training could coach others. By not pairing coachees with their managers, the program prevented coaching sessions from going off topic into areas managers may typically discuss with their employees, such as ongoing projects or responsibilities.
- Use KPIs to guide coaching sessions. SAP's program produced reports that generated data from the organization's CRM, HRM, and LMS, which helped coachees select topics to be coached on. Some KPIs SAP used in their reports include deal close rates, revenue per salesperson, and current opportunities.
- Don't be afraid to pair up coaches and coachees in different locations. SAP's coaches did not need to be in the same location as their coachee to hold effective coaching sessions. Coaches in different countries or time zones held sessions over the phone with great success.

Additional ATD Resources

- [3 Keys to Effective Sales Coaching](#)
- [Coaching Training](#)
- [Be Everywhere All the Time: Virtual Sales Coaching for Success](#)
- [“Creating an Internal Coaching Program”](#)
- [Coaching Certificate](#)
- [ATD SELL: Leading and Enabling a Thriving Sales Organization](#)

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