



10 TIPS

**To Transform Sales Leaders From
Micromanagers Into Great Coaches**



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Executive Summary

Is micromanagement really just a form of coaching? Many sales leaders think so, and are certainly well-meaning when using this approach to try to drive their sales team to better performance. But by micromanaging, and focusing on the wrong measures of success, they actually may be holding their reps back from building the skills needed to excel and from feeling fully invested in the sales process.

In a recent webinar, 10 Tips to Transform Sales Leaders from Micromanagers into Great Coaches, Jeff Schmidt, senior vice president, global sales, for ClearSlide, Steve Richard, founder of VorsightBP, and David Sill, director of inside sales for Zyme Solutions, examined the difference between micromanaging and coaching. Presented here is an overview of their recommendations to sales leaders for helping reps to chart their progress, proactively solve problems, and feel personally empowered to improve.

To view the original webinar, go to:
<https://www.brighttalk.com/webcast/10971/160377>



Tip One

Choose The Key Details That Create Success

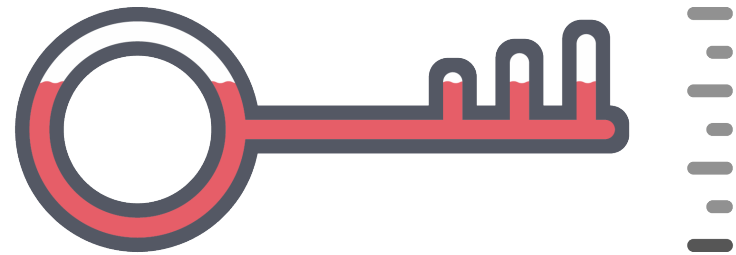
Activity metrics are essential to tracking the performance of your sales team. But if sales representatives don't understand why they need to achieve certain metrics, and how doing so can lead to measurable results, they're not likely to improve.

There is a clear distinction between working hard (i.e., making lots of calls, sending tons of emails) and achieving engagement, where a sales rep is actually making a connection with customers and closing deals. Focus on the latter when measuring a sales pro's individual performance.

To be meaningful, sales activity metrics also need to consider a system or methodology that your entire team can buy into, align with, and thrive in. In such a system, sales processes and methodologies are coupled with automation to enable sales leaders to clearly articulate how they want their sales teams to progress, provide an easy-to-follow path for achieving those goals, and identify the metrics that reps should use to chart their progress toward greater sales success.

How important is having a system or methodology in place? It can make all the difference as to whether your reps are successful. It is predicated on precision, detail, and belief, and translated into metrics that can be managed – those that can help your sales reps to visualize and navigate the path to success with greater clarity.

For example, while a front-line employee will be most concerned with technical features, leaders are focused on overall business impact and long term goals. Creating a system that teaches sales teams to know how to have conversations that are tailored to each kind of stakeholder will be more effective than one that allows free-form discussions. Systems can help your team better align to your prospective buyers and ultimately achieve their goals.



Tip Two

Share, Don't Spy

Sales leaders cannot focus exclusively on tactical details. Grilling your reps all day long with nitpicky questions – How many calls did you make? Why didn't you log that deal into the system? Why were you an hour late coming back from lunch? – is an approach that will wear thin quickly.

These types of questions are legitimate for managers to ask, of course, but they don't help reps to build skills and improve their performance. Think of sales pros like people who are committed to going to the gym every day. They are eager to progress, and to see the results in terms of their personal and professional growth.

Instead of focusing on tactical details, bring everyone on your team – both new and seasoned reps – into discussions about how everyone can do things better. Let them know that each person has a seat at the table, is welcome to make suggestions, and has a voice that counts. After hearing ideas from others on how to improve sales success, the whole group can discuss these recommendations and decide whether to implement them or stick with what is already considered the best known method.

For example, perhaps a sales rep has found that calling prospects at the end of the business day to remind them about an appointment set for the following day reduces the chance of cancellation compared to making that call earlier in the day. And the sales rep is finding that, over time, he or she is improving her probability of success by employing this one specific follow-up tactic.

If the team decides – together – that this tactic should be included in their formal playbook, they will be more inclined to accept the new approach, use it to full effect, and share results. They aren't just told to do something new without any explanation as to why. They are invited to be part of both the learning and change processes.



Tip Three

Ask, Don't Tell

In addition to encouraging the team to share and agree on best practices, sales leaders need to help sales reps learn to arrive at solutions to problems on their own.

Why is this important? It's a better learning experience. People place more value on, and are therefore more likely to learn from:

The conclusions they make themselves versus what they're told to do.

The advice they ask for versus what's freely offered to them.

How do you get your sales team to think about solutions when they're having difficulty closing business? You can build a framework for critical thinking by asking open-ended questions such as:

What is the problem?

What is the likely cause for the problem?

What do you think are some ways to solve that problem?

Which strategy do think would be most effective – and why?

The goal of this line of questioning is to get your reps thinking strategically about how to work through problems interfering with their sales success, while also guiding them towards the outcomes that you're trying to manage (i.e., better team performance and more sales).

Another tip: Every sales manager should ask their reps one simple question – often: Where is the prospect in their buying journey? This question can encourage open-ended discussion about where and why sales reps might be having trouble closing a deal, and lead to proactive problem-solving.



Tip Four

Give The Specific, Objective, Data-Driven Feedback Your Team Craves

Are you in? Are you committed? Why aren't you working harder? Sales managers who focus more on activities instead of results, tend to ask these types of questions of their sales team.

Look at the results a rep is achieving, both good and bad, and backed by hard data. For example, tracking engagement, not just activity, will provide better insight into not just how hard your rep is working, but how effective they are, which is better predictor of goal attainment. Work backwards to identify the series of activities that led to those results. Then determine what activities and how much engagement can lead to better (or even more impressive) results.

By providing specific, objective, and data-driven feedback to your sales team, you can help them see clearly how they are performing against their targets. Understanding their progression toward results will help sales reps to see how they can move things forward.



Tip Five

Coach Your Team Through Hands-On Learning — Not Lectures

Think about how powerful it is for a sales rep, on their first day or week on the job, to have the leader of the sales organization sit down beside them and start making sales calls. The rep listens in and hears everything – including the calls that don't go well. The lesson they learn immediately? It's OK to fail.

No lecture on “how to sell” can take the place of a live demonstration. So they can push boundaries and learn from their mistakes, reps need to know that every salesperson, no matter how seasoned or what leadership rank they have earned, strikes out – a lot.

Some other approaches include:

Role-playing. Sales training is not an abstract lecture. To learn, sales reps need to be “in it” to really understand it. Walk sales reps through various scenarios – good and bad. And take turns playing the role of customer so they can experience the sales call, meeting, or presentation from both sides.

Conducting a live sales call in front of the entire team. For sales pros, there is no theater more compelling than watching their fearless leader risk failure – in front of a live audience. They will be riveted to their seats, and therefore, will remember and learn.

Hiring sales managers with frontline experience. These seasoned sales pros can be valuable mentors. Also, because they can coach from personal experience (i.e., showing vs. telling), they can earn the whole team's respect.



Tip Six

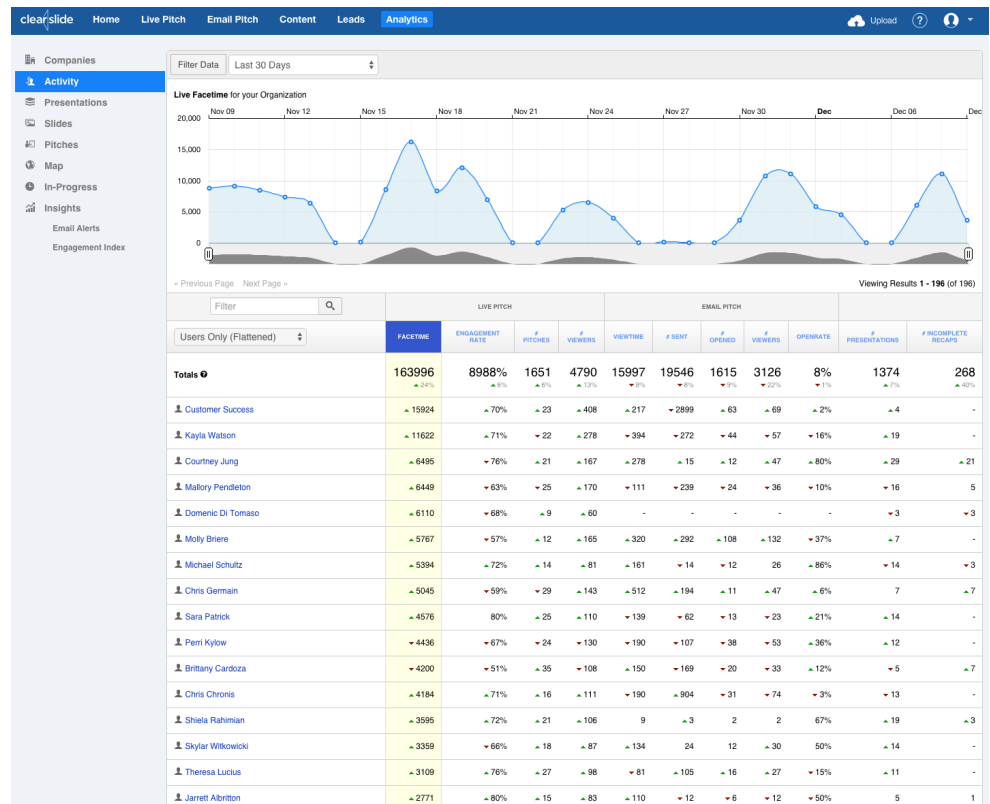
Be Transparent About Performance And Use Rankings

Like activity metrics, rankings need to have meaning if they are going to be used as a measure of performance for your sales team.

Rankings can be a powerful, motivational tool provided that sales reps have a clearly defined and communicated process for accountability, and understand how their performance ties into the success of the whole team. In short, rankings need to be connected to the “big picture” of sales success, and not just plastered on the wall.

Now that you’re tracking the right metrics as outlined in tip #1, keep things interesting by gamifying your rankings. Create contests to encourage action around the activities that matter. Once you’ve identified who consistently achieves higher rankings, ask those reps to share how-tos from their successes.

And when your reps accomplish key milestones, be sure to ritualize the celebration of their successes. This will encourage them to keep chasing wins – and can help foster healthy competition throughout your whole team.



Tip Seven

Use Praise Strategically

It's essential to strike the right balance when providing praise to your sales team. If you don't praise them enough, you risk losing credibility, becoming detached from your team, and even fueling some feelings of resentment. Conversely, if you overpraise, or give kudos for the wrong things, your words will ring hollow and you won't motivate your reps to improve even further.

Be specific and timely with praise, but also be selective when bestowing kudos. Openly acknowledge the types of achievements you want to see from all of your sales reps. More than that, work to build a sense of excitement around these successes and celebrate them – whether it's an individual sales rep, a regional team, or the whole company meeting a specific goal.

And when giving praise, explain why the achievement is significant, and what a team member did to reach that goal. How did they get that deal closed so quickly? How were they able to identify other decision-makers in the buying process? How did they land an account at a company no one else was able to crack into?

When your entire sales team can gain a clear sense of the type of performance that is both valued and lauded by the company, they can more easily align themselves with the “system” that is so important to their overall sales success. (See Tip #1.) This is especially important for new hires, who need to learn the road map of progression to achieve results.

Lastly, whenever possible, provide “skip-level praise.” Yes, a sales rep will appreciate it if their direct superior acknowledges their achievement in a sales kickoff meeting. But if the public kudos comes from someone higher up in the organization – a senior vice president of sales, for example – they are likely to remember that moment for the rest of their lives and be even more motivated to take their performance to the next level.



Deliver Constructive Criticism

Your sales representatives are individuals. And they are not you. So, when having a formal or informal dialogue about a rep's performance, remember that 100 percent of your capability may not be the same measure as 100 percent of your employee's capability.

Consider these questions before providing feedback on performance: *Is the sales rep truly capable of achieving the basic expectations that I have outlined? If not, why? Is it a motivational issue? A systemic issue? Or is it simply that the employee is not a good fit for the job?*

Thinking about these things will help you to fine-tune and “humanize” your feedback. But here again, be careful not to be subjective. Blend your feedback with appropriate, quantifiable data that can help the sales rep understand where specifically they might be falling short on performance, or where, if they applied a little more effort, they could really excel.

Don't let your expectations shape the whole discussion when giving feedback on performance. Ask the sales rep, "What are your expectations for yourself?" Then ask, "How can I help you get there?"



Tip Nine

Have the Courage to Deliver Bad News Quickly

When you clearly emphasize to your sales team that you all are, in fact, a team, you can help discourage the type of “lone wolf” behavior that can undermine the success of the whole sales organization.

You know this type of rep: He or she will declare, “Don’t worry, I’ve got this. I’ll bring this deal in,” perhaps knowing full well that the chances are quite slim they will succeed. And when things do go south, they wait until the last possible moment to say, “Sorry, boss. The deal slipped.”

Sales leaders must work to create a culture where every rep knows they can raise a flag at the first sign of trouble and look to the team for help in solving a problem. They need to know failure is OK. (See Tip #5.) But they also need to understand that failure is not always an inevitable conclusion, and if they move fast enough and get the support they need, they may be able to right the ship and avoid disaster. At the very least, sharing bad news quickly gives the organization more time for damage control.



Tip Ten

Saying “Do Your Job” Isn’t Micromanagement

Have you ever been in the unpleasant position of telling an underperforming sales rep, “Just do your job,” and that person’s response was, “Don’t micromanage me!”?

Here’s a secret: That type of response is nothing more than a smoke-screen. What the person really means to say is, “I just want to be in my comfort zone.”

Any successful salesperson knows that to reach your full potential in this profession, you have to leave your comfort zone – all the time. It’s how you learn and grow.

But many sales leaders are guilty of using this smokescreen, too. After all, saying, “Well, it’s not my style to micromanage,” sounds much stronger than, “Well, I just want to give people the space to do their jobs. It’s really down to them to sink or swim.”

Well, the problem is they’re likely to sink. Unless, you, the sales leader, actually takes the time to roll up your sleeves and follow the tips outlined above to help guide your team to sales success.

The true stars on your sales team won’t look at what you are doing as “micromanagement.” They will understand you are coaching them. And they will be inspired by the spirit of progression, and their ability to close deals and grow with the organization.



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