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**Sales Managers: Overwhelmed  
and Underdeveloped**

**2017 CSO Insights**

**Sales Manager Enablement Report**

## 2017 CSO Insights Sales Manager Enablement Report

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## INTRODUCTION

*“The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails.”*

*William Arthur Ward*

The process for getting a driving license varies around the world, but in almost every country, new drivers must reach a certain level of competence before they can earn their license. Time behind the wheel can improve their confidence, but first, they must be taught how to drive well. Sometimes, this happens in a classroom setting. At other times, the new driver gains experience while guided by a more experienced driver. After many years of driving, most naturally reach a level of “unconscious competence” where driving just comes naturally. This unconscious competence gives them the skill to react quickly and effectively to stressful situations such as a small child chasing a ball into the street.

Learning to lead salespeople effectively is much the same. At first, sales managers must apply their skills consciously. After a while, the methods they use are applied with little thought. Unfortunately, few sales managers are taught to manage before they are sent “on the road” with their salespeople. In essence, they never earn their “license to manage.” Bad habits formed early on or adopted by emulating their managers become engrained and are repeated year after year, with much the same results. They develop an unconscious competence, but one that exhibits all of the wrong behaviors. Worse, when sales get stressful, these bad habits are magnified.

### Sales is in a period of rapid transformation

There is no doubt that B2B sales is becoming more complex. Here are three of the most notable changes to which salespeople need to adapt:

- **Access to information:** Buyers have access to more information than ever before and can now decide, based on the complexity of their specific buying situation, when and how they want to engage with sales professionals. Sellers are no longer in control of the information flow.
- **More buyers and roles:** Our research shows that there are more buyer roles involved than ever before: On average 5.8 decisions makers are involved in complex buying situations. The roles involved in making buying decisions have also changed. Often, the committees making these complex buying decisions involve individuals from several levels in the organization, from different departments, and across multiple time zones, each with their own unique agenda. As the sale moves through the customer’s buying cycle, the makeup of the committee can change, with new buyers added and others dropping out of the picture.
- **The need to create value:** While buyers are gathering information themselves, they often can’t complete the puzzle. They need to understand specifically how a product or a service



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can help them solve their unique problems and achieve their goals. Even though they are spending less time with salespeople in the early stages of their customer's journey, salespeople are still expected to have the business acumen needed to translate product value into the customer's context.

### Sales enablement is a growing trend, but sales performance is not improving

Given the complexities of today's dynamic selling environments, it's easy to see why so many organizations are putting an increased emphasis on sales enablement. Unfortunately, despite the increased investments in sales force enablement, many organizations are not seeing the expected returns in sales performance. For example, while sales force enablement as a discipline grew from 19.3% in 2013 up to 32.7% in 2016 (Figure 1), quota attainment decreased from 63% in 2012 down to 55.8% in 2016 (Figure 2). Please see our [CSO Insights 2016 Sales Enablement Optimization Study](#) for more details.

If you look at the data in chart form, it appears that quota attainment is inversely related to sales enablement efforts. In fact, in our latest study, only one-third of respondents said their enablement initiatives met or exceeded the majority of their expectations. Clearly, something is missing.

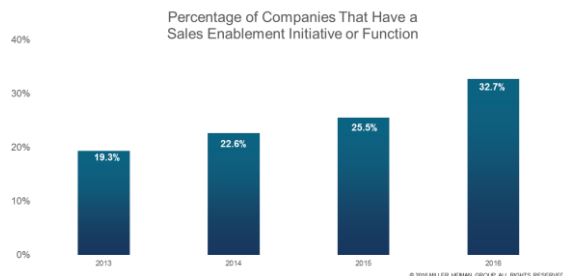


Figure 1

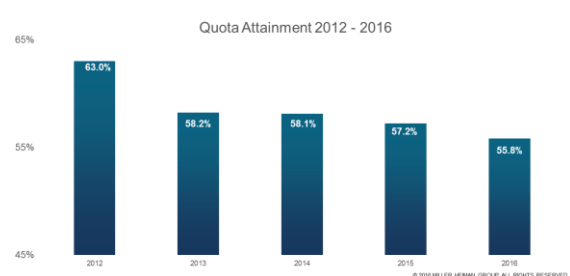


Figure 2

### The missing ingredient: Sales manager enablement

The sales manager is the salesperson's frame of reference. He or she directly impacts, ideally based on the sales strategy, what the salesperson sells, where they sell, how they sell, and to whom they sell. Furthermore, their span of control may often extend to six or more direct reports.

Year after year, our studies show the correlation between sales management skills and quota attainment. So, if sales managers are the key, why do so many enablement initiatives pay them so little attention? Furthermore, even if your sales managers received some training when they were first promoted, why should we assume that the skills they were taught carry forward to the roles they are expected to fulfill today? We've already noted that sales is in a period of rapid transformation and that salespeople need to adapt. Shouldn't sales managers be taught to adapt as well?

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Our work with clients shows a broad range of reasons for this investment gap: failure to connect investments to sales results, not having adequate budget to cover both salespeople and their managers, and a general lack of awareness of the complexity of the sales manager's role and its impact on sales execution, performance, and transformation.

Despite the reasons given, the leverage effect must not be underestimated. Our research shows that unless sales organizations invest in developing their sales managers, they have little to no chance of achieving even average sales performance KPIs, including quota attainment, win rate, and revenue plan attainment.

### ***How could a Sales 2.0 or a Sales 3.0 organization ever be successfully led by Sales 1.0 managers?***

Many selling experts talk about the "Sales 2.0" or even the "Sales 3.0" organization. Sales 2.0 reflects the changing habits of today's buyers and leverages tools like social media to engage them in more effective ways. Sales 3.0 leverages technology even further to make salespeople more efficient and more effective in everything they do. At CSO Insights, we take the Sales 2.0 and Sales 3.0 concept beyond technology to include important philosophical changes, such as customer-core and the emphasis on the customer's journey as the design point for internal processes.

At their heart, Sales 2.0 and Sales 3.0 are all about adapting salespeople to the reality of smarter buyers' changing behaviors. These changes are not insignificant, and unless your sales managers adapt their management techniques, they will become a drag on performance and keep even the most forward-thinking sales enablement initiatives from reaching their full potential.

21<sup>st</sup>-century sales managers face some tough challenges. In this, our first *CSO Insights Sales Manager Enablement Report*, we will provide additional background, data, analysis, ideas, and proven concepts to help you develop a holistic sales manager enablement program designed to meet those challenges.

In the following chapters, we will discuss:

- Why sales managers have the hardest job in sales
- How to build a business case for sales manager enablement
- How to assess your current sales manager maturity
- How to design a holistic sales manager enablement program
- Why sales coaching is so crucial and how to get it right
- How to leverage technology for ultimate sales manager effectiveness
- How to overcome obstacles and ensure a successful rollout

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We hope you get great value out of our report, finding practical ideas you can implement immediately as well as insights for strengthening your long-term approach to sales enablement. As always, we love to hear from other sales professionals. Contact us with your comments and questions.

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### CHAPTER 1: The sales manager: the hardest job in sales

*“Pressure pushing down on me  
Pressing down on you.”  
Freddy Mercury*

Listen to Freddy Mercury’s “Under Pressure,” and you will understand how sales managers often feel. From day one, the pressure begins. Going back to our driving analogy, there is no freedom of the “slow country road.” Instead, it’s a frantic pace, with unpredictable drivers creating situations that call for snap decisions. To complicate matters, they have a “fleet” of salespeople—with a wide range of driving skills—trying to follow them through busy rush-hour traffic and around hairpin turns. At the same time, the backseat is filled with vocal “passengers,” including sales operations, finance, service, production, product management, marketing, enablement, human resources, and learning & development, not to mention the C-Suite when a critical deal is on the line.

Only the best sales managers can survive and thrive in an environment like that.

#### Sales manager’s key challenges

Based on data from our [2016 Sales Performance Optimization Study](#), the dominant challenges for sales managers are the inability to generate enough qualified leads (53.3%), followed by difficulty with competitive differentiation (41.3%), and too long sell cycles (32.1%). See *Figure 3*.



*Figure 3*

What makes these challenges, and the many others highlighted in our study, particularly difficult to deal with is that they cover a wide variety of areas, e.g., customer management strategies, sales management, and operations. They also span the gamut of people management skills including hiring, coaching, and onboarding.

Improving performance always requires focus. But, with so many competing areas, the question becomes: Where should sales managers focus their efforts for maximum impact?



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### The complexity of the sales manager's role demands balance



Figure 4

We've broken the role of sales manager down into three different areas that must be managed simultaneously: customers, business, and people. See *Figure 4*. Notice that this is an equilateral triangle where all sides are equally important. This focus on three vital areas at once is one of the things that makes the sales manager's role particularly complex. But, when all sides are equal, the center triangle—sales manager effectiveness—is also the most solid.

Before we get deeper into the topic of focus, let's look at the three sides of the sales manager triangle:

- **Customers:** Whether they lead an inside sales team or a field sales force, every sales manager's customer role is two-fold. At a strategic level, they ensure that the account and territory strategies of their organization are implemented on the frontline during customer engagement. On a tactical level, they also spend face-to-face time with customers, sometimes with salespeople and sometimes alone, either dealing with complaints or helping their salespeople create business.
- **People:** The sales manager's people role is exceptionally demanding. Many are responsible for the entire lifecycle of the salesperson, from recruiting new hires to developing them to full-productivity. To that end, they spend considerable time with their sales teams, in regular team meetings and 1:1 sessions, reviewing activities and results and coaching their salespeople's behaviors. The sales manager is also the role that ensures the implementation of the organization's performance management system.
- **Business:** Last but not least, sales managers are responsible for being the liaison between management and the front lines. They create the forecasts and other reports that business and sales leaders use to make decisions. When more information is needed, e.g., customer escalation issues, the sales manager is the go-to for details.

The challenge with achieving balance across these three areas is that they are competing with one another much of the time for the sales manager's limited bandwidth. There's also a misperception that adds to the challenge:

### Although the role is called "sales manager," sales managers don't "manage" sales

While this might seem like a small detail, let's think about it for a moment. When you ask leadership where the focus of their sales managers should be, they will often speak in terms of results such as revenues, market share, and growth rates. The problem with focusing on these lagging indicator results in a sales manager role is that this role does not control these results. At least not directly.

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The sales managers' goals can only be achieved through the performance of their sales teams. In fact, all managers can really manage are activities, budgets, processes, and other "things." Salespeople require leadership and coaching to release their full potential. People cannot be managed; they must be led. Finally, when it comes to the buying decisions that lead to revenues, managers are even further removed as the decisions are made by outside buyers. For that matter, sales managers cannot "manage sales" either since buying decisions are ultimately out of their hands.

Asking a sales manager to increase sales, without giving them the skills and understanding to know which levers to pull and how to pull them, is like putting them on the Autobahn without a license to drive.

### Where should the sales manager's focus be?

High performing people, regardless of their role, focus on the intersection of what matters and what they can control. For the sales manager, that means managing the right activities and coaching the related behaviors (leading indicators) that lead to the desired results (lagging indicators).

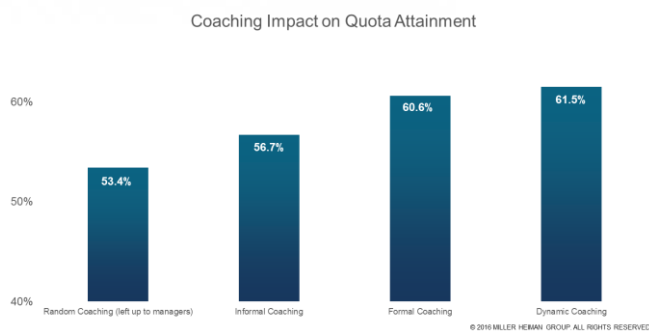


Figure 5

Coaching is a key concept here. As we've already mentioned, people cannot be managed. They can only be led. In a sales context, coaching is a leadership skill that draws out a salesperson's full potential by getting them to focus on the activities and behaviors that lead to the desired results.

In our [2016 Sales Enablement Optimization Study](#), we found that a formal or even dynamic coaching process helped more salespeople to achieve their quota (by 10%), and win rates could be improved even more. See *Figure 5*. We will take a closer look at sales coaching in chapter 5.

### Focus on leading indicators (activities and behaviors) to achieve lagging indicators (sales results)

Let's be very clear here: We are not saying there shouldn't be a focus on sales results. What we are saying is that the sales manager needs to focus on how to achieve the desired results instead of focusing on measuring the results afterward. As we've said before, you can't manage results. You can only monitor them. By the time you know what your results are, e.g., revenues and orders from last week or last month, they are already history.

For sales managers to ensure that these sales results can be achieved, they must focus on the related leading indicators that tell them if they are on the right track, i.e., managing the right

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activities and coaching the related behaviors, along the entire customer's journey. Examples of leading indicators include conversion rates, by volume, value, and velocity. These conversion rates show the progress of leads and opportunities along the customer's journey and the internal processes.

While not the metrics sales leadership is concerned about, these are important metrics for sales managers because they give immediate feedback, such as whether a new campaign in a specific industry is working or not or whether a particular salesperson is repeatedly stumbling during a specific decision gate in the customer's journey. An enabled sales manager can provide coaching to get things back on track for these types of issues while it still matters.

Sales leaders don't control salespeople's activities directly, and they don't coach salespeople directly. So, for sales leaders, it's perfectly OK to measure sales results. It's just not effective for sales managers to focus on performance in the same way. We have put together a framework called the [sales manager's mantra](#) designed to help the sales managers improve their focus to [drive their effectiveness](#).

Please refer to these additional research assets for more details:

[Sales Manager Triangle](#) (requires membership)

[Sales Manager: Sharpening Focus](#) (requires membership)



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### CHAPTER 2: Making the business case for sales manager enablement

*“Unless commitment is made, there are only promises and hopes; but no plans.”*

*Peter Drucker*

So, if sales managers have the hardest job in sales, we must be giving them more support than any other role, right? Sadly not. Most sales managers receive no “drivers education,” no formal training, no practice simulations. We just stick them on the sales equivalent of the Autobahn and leave them to figure it out for themselves. If they survive, we reward them. If not, there are a number of salespeople waiting on the on-ramp who would love a shot at management. Unfortunately, these untrained managers can do a considerable amount of damage to morale, customer trust, and performance before they “figure things out.” That is assuming they ever do.

#### Why “figuring things out” hinders you from achieving sustainable and ambitious sales results

At first glance, “figuring things out” may not sound too bad. There is a generally accepted 70/20/10 rule in learning theory that states that 10% of learning is formal, 20% happens through mentoring or coaching, and 70% is informal learning where we figure out what works on our own. We could quibble about the percentages, but that’s not the relevant issue. The real problem in sales is when we rely on the 70% and forget about the importance of the other two approaches to learning.

At the end of the day, the figuring-things-out-only method is not repeatable, it is not sustainable, and it is not scalable. Moreover, in sales, where most managers are looking for immediate results, it takes too long. Case in point: If you and I are both managers, what I figure out will be different from what you figure out because we are different personalities with different experiences and approaches to thinking, decision-making, processing information, and dealing with challenges. Both of our approaches may achieve the results we’re looking for, but we often can’t explain in detail why our approach worked and how we did what we did. If we can’t explain our success, we certainly cannot formalize our processes into something that others can emulate. Worse, since we may not even be sure which of our activities or behaviors (or which combination thereof) led to our results, we may not even be able to repeat our own performance.

Unfortunately, many sales managers are still expected to learn like this. What they do and how they do it is based on what they figured out and what they “learned” from their managers who also had to figure things out on their own.

No sales leader can afford to take this approach to sales manager enablement. Time is money, especially for a sales leader with ambitious revenue goals, but limited budgets. If you want to apply those budgets to impact performance, the wisest way to invest is to invest in the role with the highest leverage effect—your sales managers.

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### The investment gap: salespeople vs. sales managers



Figure 6

At CSO Insights, we have been monitoring the investments in salespeople and sales managers for over two decades, and every year, the results are the same: Organizations invest more in their salespeople than in their sales managers. See *Figure 6*. There's also the issue of what they invest in. While our study did not explore this in detail, we know from conversations with clients that many of their investments are in general management and leadership courses that are not specific to the role.

You might think that the changing nature of B2B selling and the pressure of digital transformation would force sales leaders to develop the role with the greatest leverage. Our *research says* that sales managers had an average of 6.2 salespeople reporting to them. They directly influence each of these direct reports: what they sell, where they sell, how they sell, and to whom they sell. Sales managers are not only responsible for implementing the current sales strategy and to ensuring performance and productivity, but they are also the key to driving longer-term sales transformations. In our [2016 Sales Enablement Optimization Study](#), 18.6% of organizations did not make any training investments in their sales managers, as compared to the 5.5% who scrimped on training when it comes to salespeople. See *Figure 6*.



Figure 7

Even more light is shed on the problem when you compare investments made by those organizations with an enablement function and those without. Those with an enablement function have a stronger focus on developing their sales managers. They spend noticeably more in the ranges between \$1,500 and \$5,000, and the number of those who don't invest in their sales managers at all is much smaller (11%) as compared to those without enablement (24.7%). See *Figure 7*.

Note that sales manager enablement can be owned by different teams in the organization. For example, learning & development often provides generic manager development programs. However, wherever enablement is located, sales manager enablement should be integrated into any current and future sales enablement programs. Highly effective sales managers reinforce sales enablement efforts. Developing both approaches in an integrated way creates synergies.

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### Investing in and developing high-performing sales managers is a no-brainer

If investing in sales manager enablement has such a positive impact on performance, why aren't more organizations doing it? One possible answer is a lack of general awareness of the impact, but more often than not, the immediate answer lies in limited budgets. However, like the customer who haggles over price, it often isn't so much the cost of the investment as it is the lack of perceived value. Sales leaders looking to improve performance need to get better at making the business case for the investment in sales managers.

To help you create your business case, we'll close out this chapter by looking at the general impact of investing in sales managers and developing their capabilities here. In chapter 5, we'll analyze this in even more detail by looking at the specific impact of coaching.

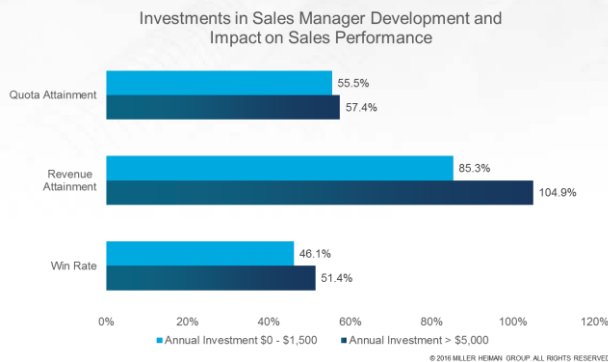


Figure 8

Sales manager development has a clear and measurable impact on KPIs such as quota attainment, revenue plan attainment, and win rate. See Figure 8. As an example, let's look at win rates. The study's average win rate for forecast deals was 46.2%. Those study participants who invested less than \$500 got pretty much the same average win rate (46.1%). Those who invested more than \$5,000 achieved a much better win rate of 51.4%. That's a difference of 5.3 points and an improvement of 11.5%.

These improvements in key performance indicators form the foundation of the business case for sales manager enablement. Additionally, there is another reason that's often overlooked: the impact on turnover rates. High-performing salespeople expect a sales manager to empower them to be even more successful. If that's not the case, and they don't feel supported in their quest for even greater levels of success, they often leave. In this context, the additional costs that are associated with high turnover rates, such as recruiting and hiring costs, onboarding costs, and the costs of underperforming territories, are directly attributable to poorly developed sales managers.

### The leverage effect of sales managers must not be underestimated

Before we leave the discussion of building a business case (for now), let's put a fine point on the concept of the leverage your sales managers provide. Financially minded business leaders are always looking for investments that "pay dividends," meaning they continue to provide a return beyond the initial investment. As the organization makes future investments in sales force enablement or changes to strategy, having a staff of highly competent sales managers who can reinforce those investments ensures the organization a higher return on their investment.

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Now, think about how many salespeople a sales manager leads in your organization: 6, 8, 10, or even more? If improving their capabilities can, in turn, improve the performance of multiple individual contributors, how could you afford NOT to invest? For organizations looking to transform their sales organization, once they've gained executive support and agreed on their destination, investing in sales manager enablement is the surest path to success.

Please refer to these research assets for more details:

[Four Reasons To Invest in Sales Managers](#) (requires membership)



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### CHAPTER 3: Assessing your current sales management maturity

*“If you don’t know where you are going, you’ll end up someplace else.”*

Yogi Berra

Today’s beginning drivers have it easy. Instead of looking for street names and memorizing turn-by-turn directions, many of them can just plug their destination into their GPS system. This allows them to focus on driving safely while the computer gives them soft-spoken instructions for what to do next.

Of course, to function correctly, the GPS needs to know two things: our point of departure and where we are headed. These are the same two data points we need to know to put together a successful sales manager enablement program.

In this chapter, we’ll focus on determining your point of departure, which in the parlance of sales enablement is your sales manager maturity level.

#### Assessing organizational sales manager maturity

At CSO Insights, we split [sales manager maturity](#) into two dimensions. The first is a general assessment of **organizational maturity** that looks at role definitions, promotion paths, assessments, existing sales manager development programs, the current level of coaching, and the sales managers’ current focus, and how they are measured and compensated. In our sales manager maturity assessment model, this dimension is segmented into four levels. To understand these levels better, let’s take a look at the challenges faced at each:

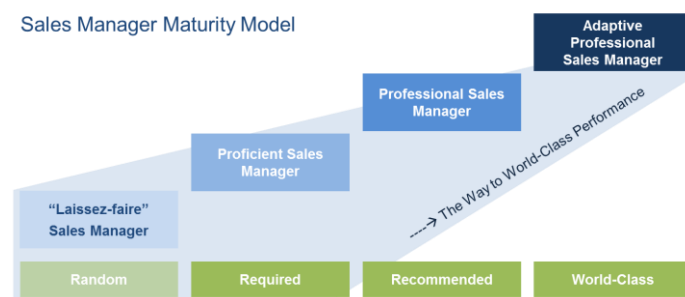


Figure 9

- The first level is random or “laissez-faire,” meaning that there is no role clarity, no formal processes, and no guidelines. This approach is not scalable because, at best, what works and what doesn’t is a matter of tribal knowledge. Best practices are not easily accessible, and processes are poorly defined. Even those who succeed may not be able to explain what they did, or they may attribute it to the wrong activities and behaviors.
- The [required maturity level](#) describes the basic requirements every sales organization should have in place to allow sales managers to become proficient in their role. While this level is a giant step forward in formalizing sales manager enablement, one of the most important goals is attitudinal. At this level, sales managers consciously change their



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perspective from the “it’s all about me” perspective that served them well in their sales role to the “it’s all about them” perspective that makes them effective sales managers.

- The [recommended maturity level](#) is the checkpoint for every sales leader – what should be provided to allow sales managers to be true professionals. Among other things, this means that sales managers develop balance and competency across all three areas of the sales manager’s triangle: customers, business, and people. (See Chapter 1)
- The [world-class maturity level](#) refines the criteria of the recommended level into a flexible, balanced, and adaptive approach that transforms frontline sales managers into frontline sales managers, coaches, and leaders.

This organizational assessment helps to identify areas for structural improvements, such as sharpening the sales manager roles, formalizing the coaching approach, tailoring the development approach, or addressing changes in the way sales managers are currently measured and compensated. As an example, your result could show a certain maturity in developing your sales managers, but you might also have a gap regarding role clarity and promotion processes or an informal coaching approach.

### Assessing sales managers’ capabilities

The second dimension to of sales manager maturity is the **skill assessment**. To promote balance, we’ve aligned these skills to each of the three areas of the triangle:



Figure 10

- **Customer:** Relevant capabilities include customer management, selling, business development, and relationship development. Customer management covers the strategies, methods, and processes for connecting and engaging with prospects and clients. The sales manager’s challenge is to execute these customer-management strategies successfully, and that requires the sales manager’s own selling capabilities be developed to a strategic level. Likewise, business development and relationship skills have to be evolved and integrated into the defined coaching and development practices.

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- **People:** Coaching is the most important capability to be developed, especially for newly promoted sales managers, for two reasons. First, as we discussed in the last chapter, coaching – if applied correctly – has the power to bring out the sales team’s full potential. Second, coaching is a new skill for new sales managers. It isn’t one that can be transferred from a sales role to the manager role. Again, based on the sales manager’s leverage on performance, developing the coaching capability as quickly as possible has to be a key priority. Additional capabilities in this area include interpersonal, communication, and listening skills, as well as hiring and resource-allocation capabilities.
- **Business:** Relevant capabilities include account and territory management, opportunity management, funnel management, call/cadence planning, and performance management. Being fluent in all business management topics allows the sales manager to quickly assess and prioritize various requests and activities in the light of the business’s goals. Funnel management and forecasting skills are of particular importance as the business uses the output from these activities to make critical investment and direction decisions.

### Many organizations have multiple sales manager roles, but few define them well

It comes as no surprise that, in many organizations, the role of the sales manager is poorly defined. As we discussed in our introduction, many sales leaders focus on what they perceive as the focus of the role: making the numbers.

In reality, a typical organization has many different types of sales managers: inside sales versus field sales, those who lead quota-carrying salespeople directly and the managers of the managers, managers who manage territory-based teams versus those who manage regular and large accounts. You could even break managers down by whether they manage their teams remotely or if coaching just requires a walk down the hall. Furthermore, there are also sales managers who lead teams of focused sales specialists and subject matter experts including presales, sales engineering, solution sales, and business development.

The first step in assessing skills is to define the relevant sales manager roles in your organization and then to discuss how they are the same and how they are different. All of these roles require a balanced focus across the three corners of the sales manager’s triangle. However, the specifics of the skills that must be mastered for each role has to be defined in the organization’s context.

### Strengthening your business case

In the last chapter, we talked about the business case for sales manager development from an impact on performance perspective. In addition to helping you create a roadmap for action, the sales manager maturity assessment can also strengthen this business case—a good thing since as you assessed maturity levels you no doubt identified additional areas for investment.



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An effective business case has four key elements:

- **Business reasons:** The financial or business reasons for investing in sales manager development must take center stage. This report is designed to provide the evidence you need, but there is more to making a successful business case than just plugging your numbers into our findings.
- **Assessment:** While leadership wants to see the impact of their investments, they will also want to know where the current organization is falling short. The assessments discussed here help you provide specific examples that can be woven into the business case. The assessment results also demonstrate that you have a handle on what needs to be done.
- **Context:** The reasons for sales manager development must be connected to the organization's context by mapping the business strategy to the current sales execution plan. This will help identify strengths, gaps, and weaknesses as well as ensure alignment to the business's overall goals. Even after the initial business case is made, gaps, and weaknesses in enablement must be analyzed in light of market dynamics as well as changing business strategies to ensure development investments remain aligned.
- **Champions:** Every new initiative benefits from a group of key influencers and supporters who willingly champion the cause and commit to doing the work. In this case, the group will ideally consist of committed professionals from other departments such as sales enablement/training, sales operations, and HR, as well as a few high-performing and interested sales managers. The earlier this group is formed, the better.

To test your business case, ask yourself how well it answers these questions:

- Why should we reprioritize investments?
- In what are we investing?
- How much do we need to invest?
- How will we develop and deliver the program?
- How will we measure success?
- How will we get there?

Remember, sales leadership's natural bias toward investing in individual sales professionals is a hurdle that must be overcome. This requires a compelling business case composed of research and a thorough current-state analysis that shows sales leaders how reprioritizing investments can help them reach their business goals.

Once we understand our point of departure, important details of the journey start to come into focus such as the changing business landscape you must travel and the "corporate weather" you may experience along the way. These elements won't always be predictable, but leveraging your knowledge of company context will help you identify the steps to be taken and the degree of effort they will require. In the next chapter, we'll start looking at these steps in more detail.



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Please refer to these research assets for more details (require membership):

[Sales Manager: Maturity Assessment Framework](#)

[Assessing Sales Manager Maturity](#)

[Sales Management Assessment Tool](#)

[Sales Management Maturity Assessment Tool](#)

[Four Reasons To Invest in Sales Managers](#)

[Building A Case For Sales Manager Development](#)



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### CHAPTER 4: Designing a holistic sales manager enablement program

*“Learning without thought is labor lost; thought with learning is perilous.”*  
Confucius

You know your point of departure. You know where you are going. Now, it’s time to pull out your road atlas (or your smartphone) and plot your course, identifying the path you will take to your destination and the key milestones along the way.

This chapter looks at the components of a holistic sales manager enablement program: training services and supporting content, including defined coaching processes and content services such as guidelines and playbooks. We’ll begin with addressing one of the main misconceptions about sales manager enablement: That it is ONLY about coaching.

#### A coaching program is not enough

Clients often tell us they need a “coaching program.” And, after all the emphasis we put on sales managers being the key to sales transformation because of the impact they have on sales performance through coaching, we can’t blame them for wanting to start there.

However, a coaching program is by no means a replacement for a holistic sales manager enablement program. It is a very important part of that program, no doubt, but to coach effectively, sales managers need to know what behaviors and activities lead to the desired results and how to guide their team to the goal. That requires sales manager specific training services and supporting content based on the defined sales methodologies and corporate context. See Figure 11.



Figure 11

Many organizations that claim to provide sales manager development offer only general leadership and coaching programs, but not programs and services tied directly to the unique role of the sales manager and their specific challenges. For example, they may onboard new managers with a set of internal management policies and teach them how to conduct performance reviews according to HR’s prescribed standards. They may send their managers to offsite seminars that teach them management skills. These are all great as a foundational layer, but they are not what moves the sales performance needle.

First, these general leadership and general coaching programs don’t teach managers the specific skills and behaviors they need to lead their team’s efforts in the field. To create value, these

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programs must be positioned as a foundational layer on which the tailored sales manager development program is built. The real core of such a specific sales manager program and what makes a program most effective is its alignment to the particular behaviors and activities that lead to the desired sales results.

Furthermore, coaching salespeople is only one aspect of the sales manager's role. And, as we will see in Chapter 5, coaching has to be formalized and tailored to the sales manager role to be effective. If we revisit the sales manager's triangle we introduced in Chapter 1, coaching belongs in the people corner of the triangle. A holistic sales manager enablement program must also address the business and customer elements of this complex role. Let's take a look at each of these elements in more detail.

### Building the roadmap that will get you to your destination

Every organization has a different starting point, and often a different vision of what they want to achieve through their enablement programs. That's why no two roadmaps will ever look exactly alike. As we look deeper at a holistic sales manager enablement program in light of the three corners of the triangle, we're going to assume the organization has had a laissez-faire attitude toward sales manager enablement and is striving to reach the required level. Leaders of more mature sales organizations should refer to the Research Note, [Sales Manager: Maturity Assessment Framework, for more on how to progress to their desired level.](#)

- **Customers:** As we've mentioned, the key challenge is to change the sales manager's perspective from "it's all about me" to "it's all about my team." For more mature organizations, this may only be needed for newly hired sales managers who are moving from an individual contributor role to management. However, organizations that have never had a formal sales manager enablement program in place may find a surprising amount of "it's all about me" attitudes even among their most seasoned management veterans.

One way to spot this attitude is to look for managers who seem to take an inordinate amount of responsibility (or credit) for individual deals. They also tend to speak less in terms of developing individual salespeople and more in terms of how to achieve the desired results.

The training needed to reach the required level of sales manager performance is less skill development and more a shift in their perception, their thinking, and their decision-making. If your focus is to develop sales managers to the recommended level, it's about taking the skills and the change of perspective to the next level. Overall, role plays and simulations, especially on how to interact with salespeople on calls and in meetings with customers, can be a foundation in this area. Moreover, ensuring the sales managers' managers know how to encourage other-focused thinking in their direct reports can reinforce the shift in attitudes.

- **Business:** The business area is about the mechanics of sales, e.g., sales methodologies, processes, forecasting, and reporting. Even organizations with a random approach to sales management development may have done some work in this area, e.g., a defined



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cadence and process for producing forecasts. However, there is usually vast room for improvement, i.e., in defining processes for evaluating opportunities and determining how to apply these evaluation criteria to the different sales pipeline or funnel stages on a team level.

Organizations that are starting out at the random maturity level should seek input from successful sales managers. While “figuring it out” is not a scalable method for driving performance, those who have discovered best practices on their own may be eager to see these practices codified and shared. They are also natural champions of your enablement efforts.

- **People:** This corner of the triangle is all about leading the individual salespeople that make sales so dynamic, and it is where coaching fits in. In our experience, and as we will see in the following chapter, coaching has to be formalized to create business results. If not already established, you should define and prioritize the relevant coaching areas. Then, you should develop a sales coaching process as the connecting element between the customer’s journey and the internal process landscape.

Teaching coaching skills begins with the general programs that teach sales managers the fundamentals of management, e.g., how to motivate people, how to conduct effective performance reviews, how to provide constructive criticism, etc. Then, the specific sales coaching skills that are unique to the organization, such as how to conduct pipeline reviews, can be developed much quicker and more effectively.

But remember, the people area is about more than just coaching! Sales managers must develop other skills such as recruiting and hiring. And, of course, the often-underestimated interpersonal skills such as communication and listening.

In addition to traditional enablement approaches such as classroom or online training and process documentation, there are many more effective (and fun) ways to drive reinforcement and adoption such as job rotation and peer-to-peer mentoring. A great vehicle for promoting this level of collaboration is to build a sales manager online community platform for sharing and mentoring.

Please refer to these research assets for more details: (require membership):

[Sales Manager Triangle](#)

[Sales Manager: Maturity Assessment Framework](#)

[Sales Manager: Capability Framework](#)



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### CHAPTER 5: Why sales coaching is so crucial and how to get it right

*“The definition of terms is the beginning of wisdom.”*  
Socrates

There are a lot of specific skills that must be mastered before a driver reaches the level of unconscious competence, e.g., what certain signs and symbols mean, who has the right of way, how to parallel park, and if they happen to find themselves in a major European city, how to safely navigate a roundabout and still make it home in time for dinner. While all of these skills are important, some are more vital than others because they are critical to success. For sales managers, coaching is such a skill.

Sales coaching is a word that’s often used but rarely defined. For most people in sales, coaching is perceived as opportunity coaching even though there are many more aspects of the sales role that must be coached. Furthermore, many salespeople don’t feel “coached,” even if their managers call it that. Individual salespeople often describe it more in terms like “reviewed” and “managed.”

So, let’s start by defining what sales coaching means:

**Sales coaching is a leadership skill that develops each salesperson's full potential. Sales managers use their domain expertise, along with social, communication, and questioning skills to facilitate conversations with their team members that allow them to discover areas for improvement and possibilities to break through to new levels of success.**

As importantly, sales coaching is not asking things like, “What’s your forecast this month?” or telling a salesperson, “You need to build more pipeline.” Instead, effective sales coaches consider the salesperson’s personal goals, their individual style, and their current strengths and weaknesses before engaging in a dialogue. Then, the focus of such a structured conversation is to discover areas for improvement regarding behaviors and activities that should lead to the desired results.

#### Coaching areas have to be defined

If coaching is reduced to opportunity coaching only, the organization misses out on much of the performance benefits of coaching. At CSO Insights, we separate coaching into [five different areas](#) that can be implemented step by step, according to your context:



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**Lead and opportunity coaching:** The purpose in this coaching area is to discover where customers are in their journey and what it means for the sales process and the ways the salesperson might be able to help them move forward. In addition, sales managers should look for overall areas for opportunity management improvement. Unfortunately, many sales managers leave this sort of coaching until the opportunity is either stuck or when they think it is in the final stages of the journey and want to know why it hasn't closed. However, lead and opportunity coaching that takes place earlier along the customer's journey can be more impactful on overall results.



Figure 12

Note that even though this is where most sales managers spend most of their time coaching, the majority of sales managers in our 2016 study said they spent less than an hour a week coaching in this area. See *Figure 12*.

**Pipeline or funnel coaching:** This coaching area looks at the number of leads or opportunities in the sales team's funnel or the salesperson's funnel, identifying the most valuable deals that can be won, helping to manage risks, and allocating resources accordingly. During funnel coaching, sales managers should assess the types of deals in the funnel, e.g., many small opportunities or fewer large volume deals, as well as the assumed close dates, stages, and risks of each opportunity. Most importantly, the sales managers must weigh the value of the opportunities against their probability of being won.

**Coaching skills and behaviors:** This is the most important coaching area in times of sales transformation, such as when moving from a product selling approach to value-based selling. Behavior and skill coaching is essential to drive adoption and reinforcement of sales enablement efforts in these times of great change, as well for more day-to-day sales enablement efforts. See the final chapter in this report for more ideas on how sales managers should work closely with the sales force enablement team. Coaching skills and behaviors overlaps with other coaching areas, e.g., lead and opportunity coaching, but we recommend thinking about it as a distinct area to ensure it receives the proper emphasis.



Figure 13

See the final chapter in this report for more ideas on how sales managers should work closely with the sales force enablement team. Coaching skills and behaviors overlaps with other coaching areas, e.g., lead and opportunity coaching, but we recommend thinking about it as a distinct area to ensure it receives the proper emphasis.

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**Account coaching:** Account coaching is vital for organizations that manage key or strategic account programs. This type of coaching is focused on relationship management and development as well as lead identification. Relationship management coaching seeks to help the salesperson develop the relationships within their accounts. Lead identification coaching focuses on two phases of the customer's journey: identifying the business challenges in the early phase and looking for additional ideas to create additional business during the implementation and adoption phase.

**Territory coaching:** Territory coaching is necessary in organizations where salespeople manage a specific territory regardless of whether they are in the field or part of an inside sales team. Territory coaching takes a focused, higher-level approach built on market and territory analyses as well as territory definitions. The purpose of territory coaching is to increase sales performance by keeping salespeople focused on the right industries, right organizations, and the most relevant buyer roles in each territory. Territory coaching, like account coaching, also includes lead identification coaching.

### Coaching needs to be formal to be effective

As you review the coaching area definition, you might notice how closely aligned it is to the customer's journey. In world-class sales organizations, sales processes, funnel management, and account and/or territory management are also aligned to the customer's journey.

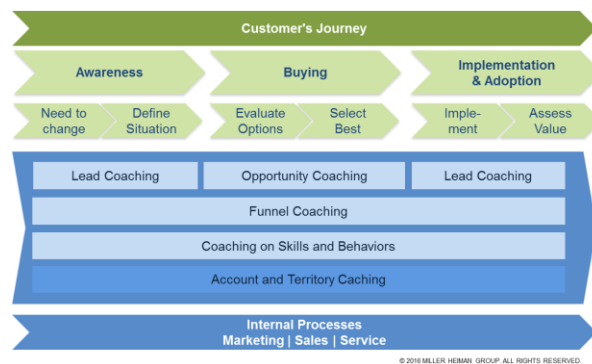


Figure 14

Consequently, an organization's coaching approach has to fit into the sales system. We recommend [developing a coaching framework](#) that maps the coaching areas to the customer's journey and to the internal processes from marketing to sales to service.

Your coaching framework sits directly between the customer's journey and your internal process landscape, bridging between both sides. See *Figure 14*.

There are four levels of sales coaching maturity:

- **Random:** There is no coaching process defined. Coaching is left up to each manager.
- **Informal:** Coaching guidelines are available, but there is no formal coaching process. Managers are told that they should coach, but there is no monitoring or measurement.
- **Formal:** Coaching areas and the coaching process are defined and implemented. Sales managers are expected to coach accordingly, and there is a formal effort to develop their skills. Periodic reviews help optimize processes and guidelines.

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- Dynamic:** The coaching process is connected to the sales force enablement framework to ensure reinforcement of sales enablement efforts. Sales managers are required to coach, and they are measured and compensated accordingly. Ongoing reviews are even more formal and help to not only optimize the process but also to adapt it to market dynamics and the changing selling environment.

In our [2016 Sales Enablement Optimization Study](#), the random approach, where coaching is left up to each manager, was still the most common. See *Figure 15*.

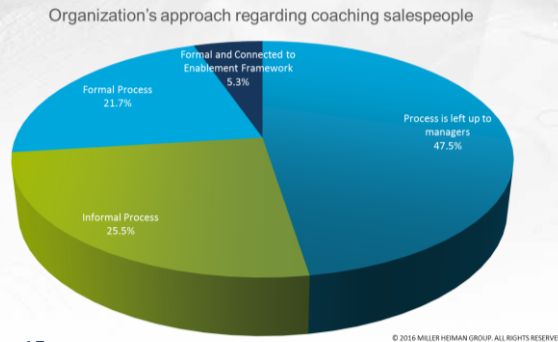


Figure 15

Almost 50% of our study participants are still in random coaching mode. A quarter are working on an informal basis, but only 21.7% have implemented a formal approach, and only 5.3% have made further efforts to align their coaching process with their enablement framework. Now, the next questions are, “Does it matter?” and if so, “How?”

**Almost 75% of sales organizations waste resources due to random and informal coaching approaches, and only about one-quarter leverage the huge performance potential of formal and dynamic coaching.**

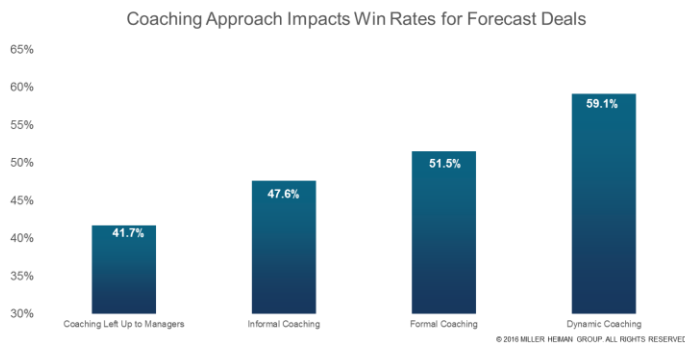


Figure 16

Our study shows that the coaching approach matters a lot. If coaching is left up to each manager, sales organizations have a hard time achieving even average performance. Let’s look at win rates for *forecast deals* as an example. See *Figure 16*.

Organizations that use an informal approach end up 4.5 percentage points below the average win rate of

46.2%. That is an actual decrease of 9.8%—a huge impact. Informal approaches start to move things in the right direction, but they lack formal implementation and reinforcement, which leads to a result that’s around average. However, when the approach gets formalized, the win rate improves a significant 5.3 percentage points above average for an actual improvement of 11.5%. The results are even more impressive for a dynamic approach that is based on a holistic sales force enablement program that connects the enablement and the coaching frameworks. In this case, the win rate climbed by 12.9 percentage points, which is an actual improvement of 27.9%. What sales leader can ignore a 27.9% better win rate?

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Investing in sales force enablement to build coaching frameworks and develop sales managers, especially their coaching capabilities, is the key to seeing the kinds of performance improvements sought by sales leaders everywhere.

### “We have no time for coaching”

Do you have time to lose deals? Or, can you afford to end up with average performance?

According to our data, sales managers lead, on average, between six and seven salespeople. Depending on the industry, the complexity of the customer’s challenges, the organization’s services, etc., this number might be smaller or larger. Yes, coaching each of their direct reports across all five coaching areas can be time-consuming. And, as we shared in the discussion on the sales manager’s triangle, sales managers must juggle a number of responsibilities other than people. Clearly, sales managers cannot afford to spend ALL of their time coaching, regardless of how critical it is.

Let’s look at some data to see how much time is actually required, starting with the area sales managers spend the most time on: opportunity coaching.

The largest segment of respondents (42.6%) to our [2016 Sales Enablement Optimization Study](#) reported that their sales managers coach between 30 and 60 minutes on opportunities per person per week, 31% coach less than 30 minutes, and 26.5% coach one hour or more, per person per week. See *Figure 17*.

**To be clear, it isn’t so much about the amount of time a sales manager spends coaching a salesperson as it is about their effectiveness.**

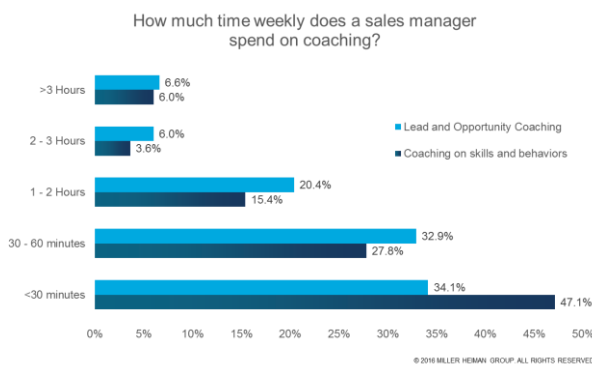


Figure 17

If sales managers are well-equipped with the right content services and have honed their coaching skills through training services that give them ample time for role-playing and other simulations, 30 to 60 minutes a week per salesperson may be ample. On the other hand, if they are not prepared, spending even more time on what they perceived to be coaching is not going to improve results. In fact, it could do just the opposite by lowering sales team morale and wasting valuable selling time.

Now, let’s do the math. For opportunity coaching, it means that a sales manager who leads eight salespeople needs half a day a week to coach all of them for 30 minutes or a day a week to coach each of them for one hour. That equates to 10% or 20% of an average forty-hour work week. (Even less, if your sales managers work longer hours in the hopes of greater gains as many do.)

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The data for coaching on skills and behaviors showed similar results, although with even less time spent because coaching on opportunities often includes time spent coaching on skills and behaviors. In this area, 45.8% of respondents coached up to 30 minutes on skills and behaviors per person per week. Leading eight salespeople, we can add half a day to coach each one for 30 minutes on skills and behaviors.

As we outlined at the beginning of this chapter, coaching also includes funnel/pipeline coaching and account/territory coaching. However, when the sales manager gets lead and opportunity coaching and skills and behavior coaching right, these additional coaching areas can be easily added to the coaching discussions. So, as this example shows, sales managers with well-developed skills who adhere to a formal coaching approach can effectively coach leads and opportunities as well as skills and behaviors in 20-30% of their time. As the results from our study show, this is time well invested.

**The reasons for sales coaching are multi-faceted! The reasons not to coach are nonexistent!**

Please refer to these research assets for more details: (require membership):

[Designing a Sales Coaching Framework](#)

[The Sales Coaching Framework: Account & Territory](#)

[Driving Results Through Effective Sales Coaching](#)



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### CHAPTER 6: The role of technology in sales manager enablement

*“Technology is nothing. What’s important is that you have a faith in people, that they’re basically good and smart, and if you give them tools, they’ll do wonderful things with them.”*

*Steve Jobs*

Over the years, technology has made driving far easier. Any new driver who has ever tried to navigate a car with a manual transmission through rush hour traffic knows what we mean. Plus, most modern cars come with a “cockpit” that looks like it would be at home in an airplane, with signals and alerts telling us pretty much everything we need to know from when it’s time to fill up the tank to when the roads are slippery. And, don’t forget the GPS system that tells us where we are, which routes to take to our destination, and approximately how much time it will take to get there given current traffic conditions. Technology can also make the role of the modern sales manager much easier.

In fact, technology is such a vital component of sales that we include it in our definition of sales force enablement:

**Sales force enablement is a strategic, cross-functional discipline designed to increase sales results and productivity by providing integrated content, training and coaching services for salespeople and frontline sales managers along the entire customer’s journey, *powered by technology.***

The last few chapters led you through the steps of assessing your departure point and designing an enablement program to help you reach your desired destination. Now, it’s time to determine how you can leverage technology to help your sales managers be more effective in their role.

#### Sales technology for sales managers goes beyond traditional CRM

Most sales organizations have some sort of core CRM system: Salesforce.com, Oracle, Microsoft Dynamics, SAP, etc. These powerful applications are considered a *must-have* for selling in complex, B2B sales organizations today. However, they are far from being the only technology requirement. As already pointed out in our introduction, our CSO Insights [Sales Performance Optimization Study](#) has shown a steady decline in performance over the past five years in terms of percentage of salespeople achieving quota and percentage of overall revenue plan attainment. Sales technologies can reverse this decline by increasing a sales organization’s efficiency and effectiveness. Of course, that includes sales managers as well.

But as we see in the following chart, reflecting data from CSO Insights [2016 Sales Best Practices Study](#), the successful adoption of other technologies by sales organizations is the exception versus the rule. See *Figure 18*.

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Figure 18

Let's explore a few ways technologies can improve sales manager performance.

### Optimizing hiring effectiveness

Hiring is a never-ending responsibility of sales management. CSO Insights [2016 Sales Enablement Optimization Study](#) found that the average turnover rate today is 16%. In addition, nearly two-thirds of the firms surveyed shared that they are planning to add net-new salespeople. So, what can companies do to optimize their ability to hire the right people to fill those positions?

Our study found an increasing number of organizations utilizing sales aptitude/competency testing as part of the new salesperson hiring process. See Figure 18. Almost half (47.1%) of the study participants ask sales candidates to take online assessments as part of the hiring process. These tests can be used to assess three areas: a sales candidate's behavioral DNA (attributes they are born with that you can't teach, such as being detailed oriented), the type of corporate culture a person works well in, and the learned skills they can bring to the job. The feedback from these assessment systems provide managers with additional data points on whether a person wants to do the job, can do it, and are a good cultural fit for the organization. Some organizations take it one step further, using testing to look for other attributes such as an aptitude for sales management. This way, they not only hire the best salespeople, but they also have a pool of potential management talent that they can develop.

### Optimizing coaching effectiveness

Technology can also ease the burden on sales managers by making a formal or even dynamic coaching approach even more time efficient and effective through automation.

For example, training reinforcement is one of the ways coaching can ensure adoption and implementation of learned skills. As part of the [2016 Sales Enablement Optimization Study](#), we asked study participants to share with us the various approaches they used to reinforce the training they offered to their sales teams. Topping the list was manager-led coaching, with a frequency rating of 70.2%. Of course, as we discussed in the last chapter, sales managers have only so much time to coach salespeople individually. In our work with clients, we have benchmarked several sales enablement projects where managers are turning to technologies like

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coaching playbooks, sales proficiency assessment tools, artificial intelligence, etc. to take on the role of “virtual coach” to great effect.

These technologies can suggest next steps in the sales process, offer up proven best practices, present sales tools and content to complete specific aspects of the sales process, etc. In addition, the systems can assess how well individual salespeople are doing as they execute based on that coaching. When the virtual coaching systems see a given sales person struggling at some aspect of selling, they can proactively alert their sales manager. Now the manager can step in and do coaching-by-exception, knowing which team members need help dealing with specific issues or tasks.

### Optimizing forecasting effectiveness

Forecast management is one of the most challenging tasks in sales management. Not only is forecasting time-consuming, but it is also rarely accurate. If we are honest about the forecast management process, we can easily surface several flaws: 1.) We rely too much on subjective assessments by salespeople on the status of a deal. 2.) If we do use data in the process, it is often backward looking and not real-time. 3.) A clear understanding of the buying process is often missing. One of the reasons we rely too much on subjective assessments is that our data is often suspect. In our CSO Insights [2016 Sales Best Practices Study](#), we asked participants to respond to the statement: “Our sales management team is highly confident in the data available from our CRM system.” A full 76% of world-class sales organizations responded affirmatively, as compared to only 30% from all other respondents.

Enabling sales managers to reinforce CRM adoption and utilization is the first step in resolving this challenge. Reliable data turns sales forecasting from a manual process where the sales manager collects individual assessments of critical deals and scrubs them based on their additional subjective assessment into an automated one where forecasts are created at the push of a button.

Technology can also make this data easier to access and digest. The past few years has seen the emergence of robust tools that analyze the forecast, opportunity, and activity data in CRM systems, as well as pertinent data from other internal and external sources on a 24/7 basis.

These solutions are like having a virtual sales operations team supporting your managers. They can identify which deals are at risk based on metrics such as days-in-stage in the sell cycle, the emergence of new competitors in an opportunity, negative events in the customer marketplace, etc. These metrics can then be used to either validate or challenge the subjective input regarding the status of a forecast opportunity so managers can take proactive action to deal with any threats as they emerge. We have published a number of case studies on this topic, including how one organization went from an already respectable 59% win rate to 76% after starting to use sales analytics in their forecast management process.

### Identifying which technologies your sales managers need

As part of our sales performance optimization benchmarking efforts, we have been introduced to and have reviewed over 50 technologies that can help improve the performance of sales





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managers. In addition to the tools mentioned above, we are also tracking the utilization of sales intelligence, strategic account management and territory alignment, buyer intent validation, sales training reinforcement, and cross- and functional-area collaboration solutions. These and other solutions are all designed to increase the effectiveness of sales management across the full array of tasks they are asked to perform. The case studies we have gathered demonstrate significant gains in sales team performance that can be attained, such as increases in revenues per salesperson of 51%, increases in win rates of forecast deals of 28%, decreases in sell cycle length of 29%, deal margin improvements of 21%, etc.

But, while the upside to successfully leveraging technology across your sales management team is significant, clearly, clearly no sales organization can absorb all those solutions at one time. So, how do you start to design the technology framework that best fits the needs of your sales management team? Let us suggest that a good starting point is to refer back to the [Sales Manager Triangle](#).

Take some time to look at the specific strategies and tactics you have in place for sales managers to deal with customers, business, and people. What aspects of sales management are they performing well in each of these core areas? Which areas need improvement? For the areas that are candidates for optimizing, what is the cost-of-doing-nothing and letting things remain as they are? Understanding which areas carry the greatest costs can help you prioritize your investments.

Obviously, we don't have room to cover all of the technologies we have reviewed in this report, but once priorities are set, advisory services clients can contact their [CSO Insights analyst](#) to set up a technology briefing. We will walk you through the options available to technology-enable your sales managers in each of those areas, as well as share the experience of other sales organizations that are a year or two ahead of you at solving those problems.



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### GOING FORWARD

*"Go back?" he thought. "No good at all! Go sideways? Impossible! Go forward? Only thing to do! On we go!"*

*J.R.R. Tolkien, The Hobbit*

It's time to hit the road. In this report, we shared a lot of information, data, and concepts on how to approach sales manager enablement. Now, we want to help you to integrate and apply that knowledge to move forward. To help you be successful with your sales manager enablement approach, we will address a few of the often-intangible obstacles you will need to overcome. Then, we'll close by answering a question: "Who owns sales manager enablement?" and by discussing the need to integrate enablement for salespeople and sales managers. We have research on this that provides direction, and we have some recommendations for you on the why and how to align or even integrate both enablement directions.

#### Invisible obstacles

In many ways, sales management is like driving on unfamiliar roads that twist and turn. You just never know what the next challenge is going to be. However, being prepared can help you reach your destination safely. Let's take a look at a few of the obstacles that could be around the next bend.

- **Inertia:** In many industries, the biggest obstacle is not the lack of agreement on the need for sales manager enablement; it is the fortitude to follow through and act upon the case for sales manager enablement. Most sales leaders accept the simple math and the various data that point in the same direction that sales manager enablement cannot be ignored. Continue to refer back to the data we shared throughout this report, especially Chapters 2 and 5. No sales leader can ignore two-digit improvements of performance KPIs.

Most sales leaders agree that their sales managers are the key role when it comes to ensuring sales execution and driving sales transformation across their organizations. Sales managers are at the frontline, where the rubber meets the road. And if sales execution and implementation don't happen at the frontline, they won't happen anywhere. The rational part of the discussion is accepted most of the time.

- **Resistance to change:** Interestingly, there is something less tangible that often stands in the way of developing sales managers properly and systematically. It's the notion that the change that will be initiated by a sales manager development program will come closer to the sales leadership team and impact them, their leadership style, and their behaviors. They're eager to approve budget for salesperson enablement because it doesn't involve a required change on their part, while approving budget for sales manager enablement might. Those reasons are often unconscious and are rarely verbalized. However, they exist, and we have seen it time and time again that getting approval for sales manager enablement is much harder than for enabling salespeople even if the business case is crystal clear.

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- Force of habit:** Furthermore, it's simply a habit to prefer the development of salespeople rather than sales managers. The habit exists because it is how many of today's sales leaders grew up as sales professionals and what they experienced when they became first-time sales managers. Being a salesperson, most sales leaders also experienced support and development. But when they were promoted into their first sales manager role, most of today's experienced sales leaders didn't get any specific support.

Part of overcoming these obstacles is to recognize them in your own organization. If you've received verbal commitment on the business case for sales manager enablement, and yet, nothing is moving forward, consider whether one of these three obstacles may be standing in your way.

The driving analogy we used throughout this report may help because it is one that we've seen resonate with many of our clients. The "license to manage" analogy we introduce in the introduction is especially powerful. The [sales manager triangle](#) is also useful in helping people visualize the complexity of the sales manager role and in raising the required awareness of the challenge. We've found that, even with a commitment to the business case, a lack of awareness of this complexity and the corresponding challenges stalls many initiatives. Or worse, enablement teams are tasked with enabling sales managers, yet not given the budget and authority to do so.

Finally, as we've discussed throughout this report, your sales manager enablement programs need to be connected to your overall enablement efforts and sponsored by the sales leader. Management needs to see that any new investments will not only pay their own dividends, but also improve the ROI on existing investment. For many clients, this concept of "connecting the dots" between sales manager enablement and sales enablement leads to the next question: "Who is responsible?"

### Who owns sales manager enablement?

This is a question we are often asked, just as we are asked: "Who owns sales enablement?" To answer this question, let's review our [CSO Insights definition of sales force enablement](#):

***Sales Force Enablement is a strategic, cross-functional discipline  
designed to increase sales results and productivity  
by providing integrated content, training, and coaching services  
for salespeople and frontline sales managers  
along the entire customer's journey,  
powered by technology.***

As you can see here, we have integrated two target audiences, salespeople and their managers, in the umbrella definition of "sales force enablement." When this definition was initially constructed, we used the term "frontline sales managers" because we wanted to be clear that we primarily meant the role of those sales managers who lead quota-carrying salespeople directly. Since then, we've decided that the term "sales manager" is more universally understood, especially by small to midsized sales organizations. Regardless of the terminology used, the

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enablement challenges remain the same: equipping and developing those sales managers who have the hardest job in sales.

Furthermore, we defined sales force enablement as a discipline because we know that enablement comes in different forms (project, program, function, or initiative), depending on an organization's context, culture, and level of sales and sales enablement maturity. Enablement often begins with a focus on one key area, such as sales training or structuring sales content and leveraging enablement-content technology. Regardless of where efforts begin, the first focus is almost universally and exclusively on enabling salespeople.

The [more mature enablement teams become](#), the more they start to realize that their enablement efforts are falling short of anticipated results, often because they do not "stick." They recognize that their enablement investments could have a much greater impact if the learning were reinforced and adoption ensured. Smart enablement teams enlist sales managers as allies by aligning training and content services and developing corresponding coaching frameworks. As we discussed throughout this report, sales managers who regularly work with their salespeople are in the best position to drive reinforcement and adoption. Only then can sales force enablement achieve significant business results. This is exactly why we call it sales force enablement!

Along this enablement journey, the roles that own enablement can change. Organizations often begin by assigning responsibility to the sales training area if training is the focal point or to marketing when content is the main focal point. [The more mature they become](#), the more they have to integrate content and training services (at least on a value-messaging level), the more strategic enablement becomes, the more orchestrating and cross-functional the discipline becomes, and the more likely enablement will reside in sales. Most of the time, enablement will end up reporting to the sales leadership team or to sales operations. For details, please have a look at this blog post on where enablement belongs (the results are very similar in 2015 and 2016).

**To sum it up: Sales manager enablement belongs TOPICALLY to sales force enablement as a strategic and cross-functional discipline.** However, sales force enablement can be allocated in different ways in different organizations, depending on context, culture, maturity, and company size. More important than the box in the org chart is the vision and the strategic and holistic approach the discipline follows.

### [Integrating sales manager enablement and sales enablement into sales force enablement](#)

Imagine you send your sales team to an expensive offsite training program to teach them how to integrate value messaging into the sales methodology. They come back jazzed and ready to hit the ground running. The only problem: Their manager didn't attend the course, is skeptical about its potential impact, and subscribes to a different theory on how to drive sales.

It happens all the time in sales. Of course, when the salespeople have their regular 1:1 with their sales managers, they are unlikely to receive any relevant coaching. In one possible scenario, the sales manager will continue to focus on the weekly forecast and the closing dates for a few other deals; not on how the salesperson is doing in implementing the newly learned behaviors.

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Or, perhaps even worse, they will coach the salesperson, but in a way that reflects a different philosophy on value messaging and possibly on the defined sales methodology. This leaves the salesperson confused and eventually negates any benefits from the investment in training.

The ideal scenario is for the salespeople to come back from training to find their managers well versed on the skills and behaviors that they will be adopting in the field. Even if the sales manager hasn't mastered them, they will at least be supportive of the effort and eager to share best practices and other learning throughout the team. That's the reason *sales force* enablement is needed. When the sales managers' coaching methodologies have the same foundation as the enablement services for salespeople, behavioral change can occur.

Of course, as we first stated in Chapter 4, sales manager enablement is about more than coaching. Sales managers have to develop skills they didn't need as a salesperson; salespeople must also develop new/additional skills. But coaching is the conjunctive and connecting element that has to be aligned to the enablement services (content, training, tools) that are provided for salespeople, to ensure reinforcement of the initial enablement services and to drive adoption, which is essential to create better business results.

**To sum it up: Sales managers' coaching approach should be the mirror of the enablement services salespeople receive regarding content, training, and tools.**

Developing sales managers to be better coaches is a mandatory component, though just one component, of sales manager enablement that has to be integrated into an overall sales force enablement framework. To get there, coaching has to be formalized, and sales managers have to develop adaptive coaching skills to create significant business impact.

### A few recommendations as you begin your sales manager enablement journey

Be aware that while sales managers can be the most challenging role to work with, they can also be the most rewarding. This sales manager enablement report is designed to help you get buy-in and build your strategy, but before we close this out, we would like to leave you with a best practice for implementation and adoption that we have learned from our work with clients.

**Run pilots before you roll out your sales manager enablement program to the entire organization**

Knowing what should be done from an outside perspective can look very different as compared to what people who are in the actual role perceive as needed. Running a pilot program can help you iron out the wrinkles in your plan and solve any initial disconnects. Invite early adopter sales managers and others who were nominated by their sales executives to be involved. Know that initial pilots can be rough, but don't fight to defend your approach. Instead, listen, listen, and listen some more. Often, this is the first time sales managers see that somebody actually cares about their development and what they think. If there are differing opinions, engage the pilot participants in designing their ideal development program. You will most likely experience that their awareness about the complexity of the role is not very different than yours before you

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started working on it. Piloting is a must-have step. Whatever happens during a pilot will make your rollout even better.

### Remembering these three Cs will drive your effectiveness

- **“C” for Change:** Nobody wants to be told to spend time on something if the WHY is not crystal clear and accepted. Create a change story that addresses WHY this initiative is important, WHAT is going to happen, WHO will be impacted and HOW, and WHEN it will take place. Then, enlist the sales leadership team to communicate and tell/sell this story as they are in the ideal position to create buy-in.
- **“C” for Collaboration:** Create a cross-functional support team to drive change from the very beginning. Sales enablement, sales operations, higher-level sales managers, as well as “early adopter” sales managers, learning and development, and IT are roles that should be included. Ideally, this team collaborates from the very beginning to process all the steps that are mentioned in this report.
- **“C” for Communication and Community:** As in every change or transformation, communication is necessary to sustainable success. A sales manager community can support communication of the big picture by the sales leaders as well as the practical communication about the what, how, and when by the team that runs sales manager enablement. Ideally, this community will be formed out of the initial sales manager pilot group. If they own it, they will use it to strengthen their role within the organization.

We hope you received a lot of value from this report and are ready to begin your journey toward world-class sales manager enablement. Of course, not every question can be answered in a report. The real value of research happens when it can be mapped to your context to help you take the right path towards your unique destination. If you have any questions, please ask your CSO Insights analyst for more details on how to apply our research to your context.

If you have any questions or comments on the information presented in this report, feel free to contact us.

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[CSO Insights](#) is the independent research arm within [Miller Heiman Group](#), dedicated to improving the performance and productivity of complex B2B sales. The CSO Insights team of respected analysts provide sales leaders with the research, data, expertise, and best practices required to build sustainable strategies for sales performance improvement. CSO Insights' annual sales effectiveness studies, along with its benchmarking capabilities, are industry standards for sales leaders seeking operational and behavioral insights into how to improve their sales performance and to gain holistic assessments of their selling and sales management efficacy. Annual research studies include: *Sales Best Practices Study*, *Sales Performance Optimization Study*, and *Sales Enablement Optimization Study*. Bi-annual studies include: *Sales Compensation and Performance Management Study* and *Channel Sales Optimization Study*.

