Increasing Conversation Quality with Asynchronous Coaching

A Guide for Navigating Sales Coaching During COVID-19

EXECVISION

We're entering uncharted territory—working from home now isn't a perk or a luxury... it's a necessity. As we settle into our new routines, it's important that we stay connected and try to keep our workday as normal as possible. Many sales leaders might think it would be easier to postpone coaching efforts until the pandemic clears up because it's too hard to coach remotely or you're too concerned about other things. Yet, with less at-bats and opportunities to speak to prospects, coaching on conversation quality is more important than it's ever been. But, how do you give your reps feedback if you're not sitting together in the office?

Asynchronously, of course.

What is Asynchronous Coaching?

Asynchronous (async) coaching is providing feedback when the coach and person being coached are not interacting together at the same time. Typically this type of coaching is outside of a direct 1:1 conversation with a sales rep. This coaching modality can be applied to most forms of sales coaching but is particularly advantageous for call reviews. Managers provide feedback in writing via email, Google docs, spreadsheets, coaching forms or conversation intelligence technology.

As you know or are figuring out, call reviews are the most difficult form of sales coaching to do from home. You can't sit side-by-side with your reps to listen to their calls with headset splitters. And, even if you can listen live to calls that are in progress, whispering or barging in on the call isn't going to generate lasting behavior change, and giving feedback in the moment via Slack or other chat is very hard for your reps to absorb. Keep reading to learn how you can do async call coaching that's as effective, and maybe more so, as your usual in-person coaching efforts.

Getting Started with Asynchronous Call Coaching

Sales leaders have a lot of data at their fingertips - such as activity and pipeline reports from your CRM or engagement stats from your sales acceleration tools. But these tools don't allow you to understand what is actually being said on reps' sales calls. So, for async coaching to work, you need to have access to your call recordings.

If you don't already have access, try reaching out to your sales operations or IT team for help. Your recordings probably live in one of these buckets:

The Big Pile of Call Recordings

You may have the MP3 or WAV files (or MP4s of online meetings with screen sharing) and not much else. Maybe you have no CRM metadata at all or perhaps you have some identifiers like the name of the rep, phone number called (or received), call duration, and the date and time the call took place.

We're not going to lie... it's going to be a crapshoot as to whether or not you can find a coachable moment on a call if this is your current situation, but it's better than not listening at all. Realistically, this is going to be time consuming, but it's necessary to help guide your reps through the new scenarios they're experiencing on calls.

As a Link in the CRM

Typically a field in the task record that your Dialer or Sales Acceleration Tool is creating after a call

While this also isn't the most glamorous way to access call recordings, a link in your CRM makes it easy to search for recordings by a specific contact and account name to see that there is a conversation tied to that CRM record. This is particularly helpful for finding later stage calls where prospects may be pushing out a decision due to COVID-19.

The benefit of pulling call recordings that originated in your dialer or enablement tool into your CRM is that you probably have access to the call outcome or disposition. This comes in handy if you want to find coachable moments fast—just look at all the calls dispositioned "Convo: No" or "Convo: Meeting Scheduled" or "Opportunity: Advanced" or "Opportunity: Not Advanced" to see why buyers are moving (or not moving) through the sales funnel.

What You Must Coach on Right Now

Inside sales just became a lot harder and you need to coach your reps and guide them through the new business landscape. There are a few key things you can do right now to get your reps hitting the ground running as they work from home, including:

Overcoming the "This Is My Cell Phone" Objection

Getting in touch with prospects just became significantly more difficult, no matter where they are in your funnel. People aren't at their desks and there's no guarantee they have access to their work line. That means finding and calling their mobile phone numbers. Many prospects and customers will have a knee-jerk reaction to receiving an unscheduled call on their cell phones. The instinctive reaction, "Do you know you are calling me on my mobile phone?" is easy to overcome if you teach your reps how to back off, apologize and ask if the person prefers to receive a call at a different number.

For example, you can instruct your reps to try something like this: "Jane, my apologies. I hate it when people call me on my cell phone. This is the number I have for you. Would you prefer that I call you back at a different number?" Most people will appreciate the acknowledgement and back off of the objection allowing you to continue.

Being Compassionate and Empathetic

If your team hasn't mastered empathy, now's the time. This is even more crucial if you're selling into hard-hit industries and regions. Show your reps how to bring their humanity to every call and use things like interruptions by kids and pets as an 'easy in' for building rapport. Say things like, "How are you faring? Seeing as you are in the sports and entertainment business, I'm really concerned about you. How can we help?"

Proactively Tackling References to the Economy & COVID-19

Prepare and coach your team on speaking to the current atmosphere. Help them formulate good reasons your buyers should be speaking with you right now. During this transition into the 'new normal' of working remotely for at least a few weeks, listen to as many calls as you can to identify what's working. Share those best practices with the rest of the team so they aren't spinning their tires. Some examples might sound like:

"The reason I'm calling is that I'm hearing many leaders are using this time to prepare for the future and look into new things that will help their organization bounce back to normal. Most executives have a little more time and space with no commute or travel. Are you free to talk now?"

"I know you are in fire-fighting mode. The purpose for my call is that we have some free resources for you that could be very helpful right now. For example we might be able to help you with X." For this to work, you need to be able to bring value—no bait and switch. Your primary motive is to help, not sell (for now).

The easiest way to coach these scenarios quickly for every rep is asynchronously, but your feedback needs to be targeted and productive. The next section will walk you through writing effective comments to help your team improve performance.

Providing Async Feedback

If your team isn't used to communicating asynchronously or you're trying to review more calls than usual, it's important that your feedback is clear. Here are some tips for providing feedback your reps will understand and can implement:

Context is Key

Make a habit of noting the timestamp of every notable comment in the conversation that sparks you to provide feedback. If your reps don't have access to their own calls for whatever reason, be sure to at least reference the call section, e.g. Introduction, Next Steps, Pitch, etc. It's also helpful to briefly summarize what the rep said or did to jog their memory.

Provide Clear Action Steps

"Try X next time" is good feedback. Make the feedback even better by providing resources the rep can reference as learning material. Right now, that means mostly their peers. Pay attention to which reps are having fruitful conversations and ask them to hold 15-minute sessions to share what's working with the rest of the team.

Don't Overload the Rep

Sometimes, as sales leaders we get carried away with giving feedback on a call. It's incredibly important to practice restraint, especially when your team is working remotely. Try to keep it to 5-7 comments for each call. It's even better if you can map those comments to call scorecards if your team uses them.

Be Available

Your reps are going to have questions and need clarification of your feedback. Let them know when you're available to sync up together via phone or web conference. Try to respond to all of their feedback requests and encourage them to ask for help from you, other leaders, and their peers as often as possible as you're all figuring this out.

While we're all trying to keep business as usual, it's more important than ever to have productive coaching conversations. This means that, as a manager, you'll need to modify 1:1s to address your async feedback if this is a new modality or you generally use these meetings for reviewing other things.

Going Beyond the Weekly 1:1

When your team works remotely, it can be tempting to use your 1:1 meetings as a catch-all for reviewing the rep's To-Do list and pipeline. After all, you can't walk over to their desk to make sure they sent that follow up email to so-and-so or ask if they think that call that just ended went well.

You could schedule additional meetings or coaching sessions, but let's face it, your reps' need to spend more time than ever doing outreach to get results, so outside of additional sync-ups, they don't need another meeting on their calendar. To make the most of both your time and the rep's, use asynchronous coaching to fill the gaps between scheduled 1:1 sessions. Then touch on the skills and behaviors you want the rep to really focus on based on your async feedback. Ask if they have questions or need additional resources to help them learn.

It will also be helpful to set some expectations with the team around coaching. Ask them to send you at least two calls a week to be reviewed. Our customers find that coaching one good call and one bad call produces good feedback. Those two calls should be discussed in your 1:1 and serve as a starting point for coaching. Mandate that the rep coaches those calls themselves before you meet so you can see how they view their performance and what they think could improve.

Helpful Tools & Additional Guidelines

If this is your first time implementing async coaching, you're going to need a little help. Lean on your senior leadership and fellow sales leaders to figure this out together. After all, async coaching can be the difference between meeting Q2 goals and playing catch-up the rest of the year. Here are three things you can do as a leadership team to make it work:

1. Work with other sales managers and leaders to identify how you'll deliver feedback. Make sure it's consistent across all of your teams to make it easier to track and alleviate confusion for reps.

2. Communicate what 'good' looks like, no matter how mature your coaching program is. Now is the perfect time to review what constitutes a successful conversation with your reps. This is especially important for those who haven't worked from home often because they are used to hearing their peers all day.

3. Consider your tech stack. While you can't necessarily buy something and implement it tomorrow, this is a good pressure test of your business continuity plan. If you're struggling to coach calls the same way remotely as you did in office, it's time to look at how you access call recordings and how you provide feedback. Conversation intelligence technology like ExecVision can alleviate the pain of surfacing coachable moments and providing contextual feedback for reps. ExecVision also enables sales leaders to keep a pulse on key call events and performance trends so they can address and resolve them faster. Imagine getting an alert if call length drops by 30% or for every solution presentation where the prospect mentions delaying a decision due to COVID-19. That information can help you ensure the team stays on pace for Q2 targets as this delicate situation continues to unfold.

We're here to help. If your team needs coaching or you're curious about async methods, we're offering a risk-free Conversation Assessment so you can see ExecVision in action. All you need to get started is sales conversations.

Find out more here: **execvision.io/conversation-assessment/** or email us at sales@execvision.io.