

1

Your Blindspots Are Killing You – And Everyone Else

*“Sometimes the hardest battle to win is the one
you don’t know you are fighting.”*

– Mark Sellers

If you are a sales manager looking for ways to be a more effective coach and leader of your salespeople, you’ve come to the right place. I can help you. But I warn you. Don’t expect a book full of tips and techniques to memorize, shortcuts, or a top ten list of surefire ways to drive higher results. You’ll need to uncover your blindspots, ways that you act and behave that are killing your coaching and leadership.

I want to take you beyond the tempting yet incomplete realm of ‘how to’ because this skips over a vital phase - understanding the root cause of your coaching and leadership gaps and the reasons your coaching and leadership has reached a plateau. By understanding the root cause of your blindspots you will grasp the underlying motives and influences that prevent you from becoming more fully the person,

Blindspots: The Hidden Killer of Sales Coaching

coach and sales leader you can be. You may have to go somewhere you may not have been; somewhere that traditional sales coaching has not taken you. You'll need to be vulnerable. You'll need to accept that you routinely get in your own way. You'll need to trust the process and path I'm taking you down. I can't guarantee you'll have the same transformative impact that I've had, but there's a good chance you'll experience growth like you've never realized. It can be that good.

Most of all, you have to learn to confront your blindspots, which is often difficult because sometimes they're hidden in the good stuff, making them hard to recognize. A vice in the virtue. For instance, too much passion can become an unbridled obsession, like a soccer mom or dad who forgets it's just a game. An ambitious drive to succeed, a virtue, can become an unhealthy desire, a vice.

If this is beginning to sound heavy, so be it. There's a lot at stake and there's a good chance you don't realize it.

Before I explain what a blindspot is, let me suggest that there's something generally accepted, fundamental, and even pivotal to your salespeople achieving quota year after year. They're more likely to hit that quota when they are motivated to sell for you, their sales manager. And they're more likely to be motivated if you make emotional connections with them. Let's connect some dots:

- **Motivated salespeople hit quota.**
- **Emotional connections create motivated salespeople.**

As it is with people in general you've probably found it easier to make an emotional connection with some salespeople. Your conversations with them seem to naturally flow. The coaching you give is more easily received. For these people you seem to know what to say and how to say it to get the response you want and the outcome they need.

By contrast, you may have found that making an emotional

Your Blindspots Are Killing You – And Everyone Else

connection with other salespeople doesn't come effortlessly. Maybe these sellers repeat the same behaviors that you're constantly trying to break. This frustrates the hell out of you. It might drive you crazy. Instead of creating an emotional connection you're stressed out.

Salespeople respond favorably to having a sales manager for whom they are motivated to sell. They are eager to sell for a manager who has their back, determined to deliver results for a manager who motivates them. Even those who seem to want to be left alone deep down want more than just the commissions and the thrill of the hunt—they want their managers to stroke, coddle, praise, affirm, and lavish attention on them. They want recognition. Salespeople are willing to accept a tough message from managers like this. Let's connect another dot:

- **Motivated salespeople hit quota.**
- **Emotional connections create motivated salespeople.**
- **Salespeople want to sell for managers they are emotionally connected to.**

The problem is your blindspots are out to sabotage your ability to create emotional connections, build relationships with your salespeople, and motivate them to succeed.

So, what exactly is a blindspot?

Blindspots are behaviors you exhibit that prevent you from making an emotional connection with the people you lead and that negatively impact performance.

Think of blindspots like this: they are things you say that you shouldn't say to your people. They're things that you do that you shouldn't do to your people. They're the things that you should say that you don't say, and things that you should do that you don't do with your people. These behaviors are blindspots because you aren't aware that you do them.

Blindspots: The Hidden Killer of Sales Coaching

I've personally witnessed all kinds of blindspots including:

A vice president barged into a conference room occupied by me and her sales manager and said to the sales manager "You caused me to miss my number this quarter." I know this vice president well enough to know she cares deeply for the manager. But for that brief moment she didn't realize how her approach would not get her what she wanted. There are better ways to discuss the issue of not hitting a number.

Another vice president of another client came into a conference room where I was doing a coaching workshop for his two sales managers, introduced himself to me, but didn't ask me who I was, what we were doing and how it was going. Instead he turned to his managers and said "Have you seen our numbers this month? They're down and we need to get them up." He then walked out. In a way I wasn't surprised. The managers had shared with me earlier their struggles in working with their boss.

During a sales pipeline review I heard a sales rep tell his manager about finally getting in to see a hard to see prospect. The manager, instead of saying something like "that's great news!", paused for at least ten seconds and finally said, "Is it on your funnel?"

In each of these examples the managers committing the blindspot behaviors are good people. They want their salespeople to do well. But their behaviors do not inspire, encourage or motivate. I'm convinced they are blind to how they reacted in these situations. They have blindspots.

Here are some common examples of blindspots:

- Talking over people or cutting them off
- Not paying attention to someone who is talking to you
- Not recognizing or celebrating someone's accomplishment
- Trying to fix someone's behavior that you think is flawed
- Exhibiting know-it-all behavior
- Not saying you're sorry

Your Blindspots Are Killing You – And Everyone Else

- Not admitting a mistake
- Passing judgment on someone
- Being prideful

Blindspots can also be behaviors that you are aware of doing but you just can't stop doing. For example, sometimes when my wife is speaking to me I get distracted. I know this about myself. Sometimes I catch myself immediately after doing it but it's too late - she lets me have it. I think this must run in my family because both my father and brother do this all the time and it drives me crazy. It is rude. It might not be fatal, but over time it sure does annoy people on the receiving end of it. Note to self: work harder on this blindspot.

Think of how annoying and distracting this kind of blindspot could have on a team of salespeople you lead. When one of your salespeople is talking to you he sure hopes you're giving him your undivided attention. How do you think he feels when he senses you're not? Email my wife, she can tell you.

Before the start of the 2018 college football season Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer unwittingly professed to his own blindspot regarding his program. Meyer was heavily criticized for not being 100% transparent with information he knew regarding an assistant coach. Meyer was also heavily criticized for not knowing more about this situation. The PR damage crushed Meyer, the football team and the university. Ohio State president Michael Drake suspended Meyer for the first three games of the season.

Why did coach Meyer think it could be OK to not be fully transparent? Why didn't he know more about the situation? Could it be his blindspots?

In the press conference the day before his first game back following the suspension, Meyer was asked if he thought that members of his staff were reluctant to bring him negative information. "I hope not", he

Blindspots: The Hidden Killer of Sales Coaching

said. People need to feel comfortable coming to me. I always thought I created that atmosphere.” Well, maybe coach was wrong.

If you’re a college football fan - even if you’re not a fan of the Buckeyes! - you know that Urban Meyer strikes a serious and intimidating demeanor. Would you like to bring him bad news? His blindspot was in not seeing that his serious, intimidating demeanor might actually create the opposite of what he wanted - instead of people feeling comfortable coming to him with negative information he encouraged them not to.

I know people who personally know coach Meyer. I have every reason to believe that he is a good man who cares deeply about his players and coaches and his community. The expectations of a public figure like coach are reasonably high, easily matched by the public’s appetite for castigating perceived missteps.

Is it possible that how you think you come across to the people you lead is different from how you actually come across? In fact, how fully aware can you be of how you come across to anyone? There’s really only one way to know. You need a high level of self-awareness. This requires a healthy amount of humility and vulnerability, and you get that mostly by working on it. Most people don’t. Leaders especially have many competing interests to high self-awareness, mostly traceable to ego. So give yourself a break, but also let’s get to work!

Another blindspot involves a person we might call a know-it-all. Have you ever seen an interview with the U.S. Senator Rand Paul? He’s a smart guy, a doctor and he comes across as a know-it-all. This is unflattering and doesn’t endear him to people. Bill Maher is also a smart, entertaining guy who comes across as a know it all. I’ve watched Maher zone off when guests are talking. He looks like he doesn’t have the patience to listen any more. It’s hard to emotionally connect with someone that treats people like this.

The know-it-all’s blindspot is thinking that having all of the answers

Your Blindspots Are Killing You – And Everyone Else

is all that matters. They seem almost allergic to the idea of asking genuine questions, not the type they ask when they already know the answer. These people tell but don't ask. A sales manager know-it-all doesn't realize that her telling isn't coaching, her answers aren't what her salespeople need. To coach and lead better these managers have to have this questioning capability arrow in their quivers.

I told a client of mine about this kind of blindspot. She said she could relate. Earlier in her career when she was promoted she was told that while she was smart, capable, and ambitious and would likely go far she could sometimes come across a bit arrogant, and that she would become a better leader if she learned to dial this back. She had no idea what he was talking about. She was just being herself. It's not easy to change something like this because it's related to how she's wired. Instead of shrinking, however, from the constructive criticism, she devoted herself to changing. I don't know her 'before' but I do know her 'after' and my experience coaching her has been tremendously satisfying. She asks lots of questions. She's curious. She seeks coaching. In my book she's a rock star.

Blindspots between spouses are common. My wife has a habit of creating piles of stuff scattered throughout the house. It could be anything such as mail, a shopping bag whose contents are scattered on the kitchen table, shoes, keys, trinkets, whatever. For years I chose to let this really bother me and made it my project to 'fix her', not an endearing emotion. After 30 years of marriage I've finally chosen to not let this bother me as much and as such my tension and judgment do not drain the oxygen from every room I enter.

Some blindspots can seem somewhat harmless, but they have the same effect that potholes have on cars—hitting one once a year may rattle your teeth but hitting one once a week for years and you're likely headed to the local repair shop.

Blindspots: The Hidden Killer of Sales Coaching

So how do you begin to eliminate or dial back your blindspots? You have to embrace a paradox that is difficult for everyone I've ever worked with. You know about paradoxes. A few of my favorites are 'nothing succeeds like failure', and 'nothing fails like success'. Churchill said "If I had more time I would have written a shorter letter." All of these are counterintuitive. All of these are true.

Most of us can relate to the paradox of something physical like getting in shape or improving a 10K time. We need to feel pain to feel better. But to be a better coach and leader what's the necessary pain and paradox?

Try this exercise to find out:

On a sheet of paper write down three traits or characteristics of yourself that you know have had a big impact on your professional and personal success. Think of not only your present day success, like the job you have but also think of your childhood successes. Maybe you excelled in sports or academics. Maybe you started a business. Maybe you were an eagle scout.

Got your three traits? Here's the paradox.

These traits will someday betray you. It's likely already happened. If you don't think so, you've just discovered a blindspot. To be clear, these traits will cause you pain, struggles, and suffering. No one is immune to it.

This can be confusing. Let me tell you how my three traits betrayed me.

I claim discipline, ambition and ability to sacrifice as three traits instrumental to my success. They helped me jump my mother's car on my bicycle when I was 13 years old. They helped me be a two-time conference champion golfer of the year in high school. They helped me play golf in college. They helped me write two books and start and grow two companies. I taught myself to play the guitar. I ran two marathons,

Your Blindspots Are Killing You – And Everyone Else

one in under three and a half hours. They helped me provide a lot of things like opportunities, material possessions, vacations, experiences, and more for my three kids and my wife. All of this took a lot of discipline, ambition and sacrifice.

So how did they betray me?

My sacrifice came at the cost of having no close friends and actually thinking I didn't need friends, up until several years ago. I convinced myself that friends took too much time and got in the way of what I was trying to achieve. I'm all for sacrifice to achieve things, but when it goes too far the virtue has become a vice.

My ambitions made me destructively selfish. I compared my success to those of others and felt like I was always in competition. I looked at everyone as a target to get what I wanted. I had selfish agendas. I'm sure at times I wasn't much fun to be around.

My discipline misled me. Because I was so capable of starting and finishing things on my own I didn't seek help or guidance. Isolation came easy. I convinced myself I needed it to constantly develop strategies and vision and direction for the business. I relied on no one. Discipline also made me an unloving drill sergeant at home. I thought being a good parent was defining rules, driving expectations, and correcting people when they tripped up.

Fortunately I've changed in dramatic ways. My journey started about seven years ago on a business trip to Singapore that led to discovering a serious blindspot. You will learn about this in the next chapter.

I hope you can begin to see how your blindspots connect directly to leadership and coaching. The inability to embrace the vice in the virtue paradox (eg ambition is healthy but unbridled ambition can be unhealthy) keeps you locked into a comfort zone that deprives you of greater impact on people. We are trapped in that comfort zone because we have a tendency to double down on the traits that made us

Blindspots: The Hidden Killer of Sales Coaching

successful - could we be blamed? We have the track record to show for it. The problem is we don't grow. Your blindspots prevent you from seeing that the people you lead might not have the same success traits as you. And therefore you can't see that how someone with your traits wants to be coached and be led is not the same as how someone with different success traits needs to be coached and be led.

Here's another exercise. Think of someone who is not like you, who doesn't share your top three traits. Is it one of your kids? Is it one of your parents or a sibling? Is it your spouse? Is it a salesperson you manage? Have you ever become totally frustrated with this person's inability to do something you have asked him or her to do, something that you have done hundreds of times? How did you react? Did your blindspot get the best of you?

If it did you probably didn't create an emotional connection, and you probably didn't get what you wanted.

Remember, while your blindspots are things you can't see, they are usually in plain view of everyone else.

To summarize, the challenge of dealing with your blindspots comes down to a paradox. The things that cause your blindspots are also the things that have helped you survive and succeed. It's the vice in the virtue. But the way out is the way through. I've never seen it be easy. You'll have to unravel the meaning in that paradox yourself, but ironically, you'll need the help of others. Including me. Let's connect some more dots.

- **Motivated salespeople hit quota.**
- **Emotional connections create motivated salespeople.**
- **Salespeople want to sell for managers they are emotionally connected to.**

Blindspots prevent emotional connections.

In part 1 you'll learn that you have these blindspots and you get in your own way. You'll learn that blindspots come from how you are wired, fundamentally your personality. This is something you had no control over. But don't think you can't still change even if you can't re-wire yourself. I can tell you from personal experience and that of my clients that if you are intentional about your blindspots not only will you coach better, you'll be a better person with everyone you meet in your life.

In Part 2 you'll learn how blindspots are also due to an obsession for and transparency of sales data. Another paradox. More data is supposed to make you smarter but it doesn't necessarily make you coach and lead better. The incredible amount of data most organizations now have, combined with unprecedented visibility and transparency of all that data creates a blindspot for sales managers.

Finally in Part 3 I suggest that your company's sales processes could actually be an obstacle to creating emotional connections and doing what you intend them to do for you — have better coaching conversations. Another paradox.

I close by suggesting that ongoing coaching can help you deal with blindspots and give you a lifetime of benefits that impact everyone you encounter.

So let's get on with it. Let's learn why you get in your own way.