

# Blindspots: The Hidden Killer of Sales Coaching and Leadership

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Sometimes the hardest battle to win is the one you don't know you are fighting.

I say the battle you're fighting is a battle with your blindspots, behaviors that are killing your coaching and leadership and preventing you from getting what you want and need from the people you lead.

Blindspots is a universal problem facing all sales leaders – no one is immune. Front line sales managers have them. So do CEOs, owners and presidents. And everyone in between.

Because you are unaware of them, your blindspots are easily getting the upper hand in your efforts to motivate and inspire top performance. I know this for two reasons. One, I've lived through my own blindspots and experienced first-hand how they damaged all types of relationships in my life and prevented me from getting what I wanted. Two, since discovering my blindspots and doing the necessary work to learn from them, I've helped executives become aware of their blindspots and make transformational change to become better coaches and leaders.

In this white paper you'll learn about your blindspots, why they're killing your coaching and leadership, where they come from and what you can do to deal with them.

## BLINDSPOTS

I know something about you that you don't. You have blindspots. They're preventing you from getting what you want and what you need. If you lead a sales team you probably want more sales from your salespeople. If you're a VP of Sales you want your sales managers leading their teams to quota and achieving good margins. If you run a business you want to achieve sales and margin objectives and you probably want alignment across your functional leaders. Your blindspots are preventing these things, or at a minimum making it harder to get them.

Let me tell you about a blindspot of mine that I discovered on a business trip to Singapore.

## SINGAPORE

In 2012 I was doing sales training and coaching in Singapore. I returned to the hotel after a dinner with the client, pulled the drapes back and gazed at the stunning Marina Bay skyline. As a sales trainer, coach and consultant I was at the top of my game. Five years earlier I had published a sales book called *The Funnel Principle*. It was named by *Selling Power* magazine a Top 10 Best Book to Read, and the publisher called the book 'revolutionary'. I was a thought leader. I had the recognition of peers. I had marquis clients. I was traveling all over the world. I was a master of my universe.

I shut the drapes, walked to the edge of the bed, sat down and cried like a baby.

In reality I was a wreck inside and didn't know it. My success felt empty; my accomplishments felt insignificant. Yet I was doing exactly what I envisioned and worked so hard for. Needless to say I was desperately confused.

While I tried to forget and deny what happened it wouldn't go away. After a year or so of feeling lost I made the courageous decision to stop fighting it and learn what the lesson was trying to teach me.

In short, I accepted the painful reality that the vision I created of myself didn't match who I really was. That's not to say I shouldn't be a sales trainer, or shouldn't write books, or shouldn't have clients all over the world. I am good at the work and it fulfills me. Rather, I had let my ego take control of defining who I was. The truth was I was overly impressed with myself and my accomplishments. I had become a self-absorbed, selfish person who was singularly driven to serve my needs, mainly to grow a business and a brand. But I didn't see it this way for a long time. This was a blindspot. It was the source of my torment.

At the root of my confession and discovery was the key to pulling me out of this tailspin – a paradox that would cause more confusion first before it created clarity. But that's how this blindspots thing works.

Before I explain that paradox further let's learn more about blindspots and hear some examples that you might relate to.

## **WHAT EXACTLY IS A BLINDSPOT?**

Blindspots are behaviors you exhibit that prevent you from making an emotional connection with people. When you don't emotionally connect with them they won't give you everything they have to give. You won't get what you want. Performance suffers.

These are repeated, consistent behaviors. Blindspots usually appear as things you say or do to people that you shouldn't say or do, or things you don't say or don't do to people that you should say or do.

For example, I was meeting a sales manager client in a conference room and her vice president barged in, looked at the manager, and said “You caused me to miss my number this quarter.” I wanted to crawl under the table. Here's the thing: I know the vice president who barged in cares deeply about her manager. But for that brief moment she didn't realize how ineffective and inappropriate her actions were. There are better ways to have a conversation about missing a number. How do you think the manager felt? Supported? Motivated to work hard for his person? Not likely.

Weeks later I was in another conference room with another client coaching some sales managers and their vice president saw us and came in. I introduced myself because I hadn't met him before. We shook hands but he didn't ask what we were doing or how it was going. He immediately 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 left. I was not surprised because the managers had shared with me their struggles to work with their boss.

I'm convinced these two vice presidents meant well. They want their people to succeed. I'm convinced they had no idea that treating employees this way fails to create an emotional connection with them and fails to motivate them to work hard for their boss. These are blindspots.

It's also possible that their actions were carefully calculated. If so then what's the blindspot? The blindspot is in not realizing that this style of leadership is not necessary to drive employee behaviors that achieve results. This isn't the 1950s where if you had a job you were grateful and blindly obedient. People today want and need more in order to give more back. People have breaking points, limits to what they will tolerate before they decide they can't take it anymore.

Let me give you an example of how personal blindspots can be.

A while back I spent a half day coaching a high performing sales manager. Over the course of the session he volunteered that his dad was tough on him and his brother growing up. His dad told the sons they'd never amount to anything. My client went on to do well in life. He's held good jobs, put 3 kids through college and has a solid marriage. The manager then told me his brother wasn't as fortunate. The brother got into drugs and alcohol growing up. He couldn't keep a job. The manager said his brother's lived a hard life.

I've not met the father but I choose to give him the benefit of this doubt that he meant no harm to either son. That he wanted only the best for them. That he had no idea how devastating his words could be. He had a serious blindspot. The family has paid a heavy price for it.

## **WHAT BLINDSPOT BEHAVIOR LOOKS LIKE.**

If you've experienced any of the following, there's a good chance you've experienced someone's blindspot. When someone should say sorry to you and he doesn't. When someone makes a mistake and should admit it but doesn't. When someone you're talking to cuts you off and talks over you. When someone comes across as judgmental to you. When you're talking to someone and you see that person lose attention and ignores you.

Of course, you may have behaved this way to others too.

The funny thing about your blindspots is while you can't see them they're usually in plain view of everyone else. You see other peoples' blindspots all the time. I've seen a remote based national accounts guy who fails to create any kind of relationship with the key home office staff that he needs to make him look good. I've seen the prima donna salesperson who treats people in the marketing department like crap. I've seen the arrogant CEO who struts like a know-it-all. I've seen the senior executive that routinely interrupts people without any clue or concern with how disrupting it is. I've seen the

department head whose routine passive-aggressive behavior creates storms of chaos and tension throughout the office. I think blindspots are at the root of this kind of behavior and thus these people have no clue that there's anything wrong with behaving the way they are.

## THE GIFT OF THE PARADOX

The key to understanding your blindspots is to embrace a paradox.

You know what a paradox is. It's a self-contradictory statement that when looked into further proves to be true.

Some of my favorite paradoxes are:

- Nothing fails like success.
- Nothing succeeds like failure.
- To speed up, sometimes you have to slow down.

While many paradoxes befuddle us, most of us can relate to the paradox of enduring necessary physical pain that's associated with getting in shape. We have to feel pain to feel better. But to be a better leader and coach, what's the necessary pain? What's the paradox? Let's do an exercise to find out.

## THE PARADOX EXERCISE

Think about your successes and what you have achieved. Think of your current job, other jobs, and even experiences. Especially think of your childhood achievements. Maybe you started a business as a kid. Maybe you excelled in sports or academics or painting or dance. Maybe you were an eagle scout.

Now on a sheet of paper write three traits or characteristics that you would say have been instrumental in all of your successes. It shouldn't be hard to find common threads.

Are you finished?

Ok, here's the paradox. These traits that made you successful will someday betray you. It's likely to have already happened. Let me be clear - these traits, unbeknownst to you will cause you pain, struggles and suffering. But if you embrace this paradox your coaching and leadership will be transformed.

### **HOW MY SUCCESS TRAITS BETRAYED ME**

My three success traits betrayed me - remember I ended up an emotional wreck in a hotel in Singapore. My three traits are discipline, ambition, and willingness to sacrifice.

First, this is how these traits helped me to succeed:

1. I jumped my mother's car with a bicycle. (I idolized Evel Knievel).
2. I raced motorcycles.
3. In high school I was a conference champion golfer in two different years.
4. I played golf in college.
5. I have a successful career in sales.
6. Before starting my sales training business I was promoted to management positions more than once.
7. I wrote two books (so far).
8. I started and grew two businesses.
9. I have provided a lot of things for my family like education, activities, nice homes, vacations etc.

Please know I'm not boasting, but rather just stating facts. All of this took a lot of discipline, ambition, and sacrifice.

So how did these traits betray me?

1. I sacrificed friendship to accomplish things. I convinced myself I didn't really need friends. I didn't have time for them. They got in the way. I thought I didn't need anyone. Now I realize how much I need friends and deep relationships to have a more fulfilling life.
2. My ambitions made me selfish. I was always looking for an angle to get better than everyone around me but I went further - I thought someone else's success came at my expense. Ambition is surely a virtue but when it goes too far, unbridled ambition turns negatively self-serving and is unhealthy.
3. My discipline misled me. Because I was so capable of starting and finishing things on my own I didn't seek help or guidance. I isolated myself. I now realize now how much others can give me to make me a better person, to help me get what I want and need.

When I finally confronted myself and took inventory of my life I saw how discipline, ambition and sacrifice were negatively contributing to the person I had become. My virtues had become my vices.

It shouldn't surprise anyone that I struggled to see clarity for so many years. I kept thinking I was just being me, leveraging my God-given talents, doing what I should do.

I've since made some pretty big changes in my life that I won't bore you with here. I will tell you that my relationships have healed, my business is booming, and I have more of an impact on people than I could ever have imagined. The pain, the struggles, and suffering were all necessary. They are the gift of the paradox of the vice in the virtue.

## **THE CONNECTION OF BLINDSPOTS TO COACHING AND LEADERSHIP**

How does knowing that your success traits will someday work against you help you become a more effective leader and coach?



Your tendency is to double down on your success traits. No one can blame you because you have a track record to prove it. By doubling down you're staying within your comfort zone because it feels safe. But you're not growing as a coach and leader when you stay in your comfort zone. You grow not by getting better at the things you're already highly competent at; you grow by getting better at things you're not competent at.

Your blindspots prevent you from seeing how someone that you lead is wired differently from how you are wired. When you don't see that you'll likely coach and lead everyone the same, and it'll be based on what's familiar and comfortable to you. You won't make emotional connections with some people on your team. Or worse, your blindspots might make you not give a shit that someone is wired different from you. You march on to the tune that is familiar in your head, mystified and frustrated that others can't follow the melody.

When you discover that you have blindspots you realize that the people you lead and the people you interact with all have blindspots too. You are now in a position to coach and lead people more effectively. You'll have greater empathy and compassion for them. You'll have more patience. You'll be creating an emotional connection with them. This generates 'attraction influence'. People respond positively to you. They'll seek you out. They'll feel something positive as much as hear it in what you say. Your words will have more meaning to them. You'll create more trust and build more credibility.

What I'm suggesting might seem nearly impossible. I'm suggesting that you distinguish between the times when your natural, God given success traits are helping you from the times when they are hurting you. Most people cannot make that distinction, so they live their life with blindspots and leave trails of pain, struggles and suffering.

## SO HOW DO YOU BEGIN

First, understand that your blindspots are wired into you from birth. And you can't re-wire yourself.

Second, as the author Jordan Peterson said "The you that you think is you is not you. It's your ego." Get to know you better. That means accepting that your virtues have vices. Increase your self-awareness. A study by Cornell of 72 CEOs found that a key predictor of success for CEOs is having high self-awareness.

Three, though you can't re-wire yourself you have the means to change your behaviors if you're committed to changing. You can't fake this to yourself. There are tools and coaches and books that can help you change, but if you aren't committed it won't work.

Four, accept that you don't have all of the answers and the abilities on your own to become a better leader and coach. The columnist and author David Brooks, who fell hard and is finding his true self lately, said it's an illusion that you can make yourself happy. You'll become better through and by the people that you invite into your world to help you become a better version of yourself. You need others.

Five, consider hiring a qualified coach who will hold you accountable to becoming better.

Finally, consider taking a test like the Enneagram to increase your self-awareness. Be sure to engage with a professional who can help you understand it and learn from it.

The key to becoming a better coach and leader is to embrace the paradox of your blindspots. Your ability to see and relate will be off the charts – and so will your ability to coach and lead people.

I wish you great success on your journey!



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Sellers is a sales trainer and author of two books on selling, *The Funnel Principle* and *Blindspots: The Hidden Killer of Sales Coaching*. He founded Breakthrough Sales Performance 23 years ago. The company provides sales training, executive coaching and consulting services to small to medium sized businesses ranging from \$20M to \$500M in revenue. His Funnel Principle selling system has been implemented by 120 global sales teams including ITW, Whirlpool, Danaher, West Pharmaceutical Services, Arkema, Microchip Technology, Hunton Services (a Trane franchise), Goodyear, Bemis, IMG, Parker Hannifin, and others. Mark created the BuyCycle Funnel™ customer buying journey sales model in 2000 and is considered a thought leader in selling to the customer buying journey. The BuyCycle Funnel™ customer buying journey model has more years of experience than any customer buying journey model in the world.

If you are interested in learning more about Blindspots and The Funnel Principle services you have three options to contact us:

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