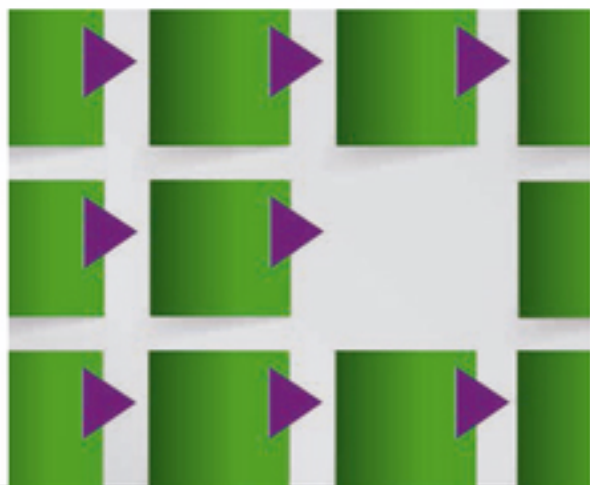


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Sales Coaching by Benedict

Sales Success with Clear
Structures and with Heart



Chapter 1: The Starting Point

Sales: an exciting challenge

Work in sales is one of the most exciting challenges in professional life. In no other sector can earnings be so strongly self-determined through hard work and good work as in sales. You are confronted with new challenges daily, meet many people and can make progress on a daily basis.

Salespeople in the field these days usually work as independent entrepreneurs, but using the know-how, the products and the infrastructure of a company. For this they pledge to work exclusively for that company.

In the last few years and decades many people in this sector have built up a stable existence, they have advised many customers in all possible walks of life and found ways to make people buy. Business has sometimes been better, sometimes worse, but in general a hard-working salesperson could achieve a good income.

Large sales structures emerged and offered salespeople a home. It still happens these days that salespeople work their whole life for the same firm and therefore feel a strong emotional attachment to it. So sales businesses can mostly count on a large number of reliable employees and organise their planning accordingly.

Up until a few years ago businesses made a big effort to bind employees. There were numerous incentives and rewards for exceptional performance, competitions and large events at which the entire sales power of the business could be felt.

Leadership was mostly by motivation. Anyone who was particularly good made it up onto the stage, and whoever didn't make it aimed to be up there next time. Executives were close to the people, things were done together and it was important to produce a good atmosphere within the team.

This all went well for years. With the economic crisis in 2008, however, the general conditions changed quite dramatically. Successful salespeople

suddenly realised that they were now in a completely new situation. And the companies weren't exactly sure either, initially, how they should cope with the changes. However, the economic crisis was only a torch that shone a light on a problem that had been there for years, but up until then had been covered up by dedication and hard work: *disorganised working practices*.

A salesperson's job was basically always a job that "one could just do". A good approach to the job and a basic sales technique were enough for success. "Flexible time management" presented a major challenge to a salesperson's discipline and often tempted them to spend a day without any definite plans. However, business was good, and there was neither need for action nor a reason to think about structure in sales. Most salespersons would probably not have liked it if a business manager had got too involved in their daily routine. After all, they were independent or had chosen sales because they wanted to be a bit more independent, and knew themselves how it worked best.

Of course, there were the managers too. The salespeople were assigned to them, and they worked together as a team. "Real" leadership with clearly defined processes didn't, however, take place. Fear of conflict with independent salespeople was too high. They restricted themselves to accompanying and supporting and to professional input. To be fair it has to be said that the managers we are talking about were rarely trained for a managerial position. Often the best salesperson was given the position of manager, and it was assumed that their example would reflect on the others. That was true in some places but in general, specific "support and challenge" managerial work was in short supply.

When the economy started to destabilise, the sales structures also started to spin. Suddenly something had to be done. Production stagnated and profits shrank. Now action had to be taken. And this is exactly where we find ourselves today. In many businesses we can see (re-)action, which can change the course to a greater or lesser degree. In any event, something is going on in sales and managers are desperately looking for solutions. This actual situation gives businesses a big chance to start afresh and to establish some structure in the managerial and sales routines. Well set-up sales will be successful in difficult times too, because the answer to structural changes can grow from a

solid foundation. It is, however, necessary before we take action, to thoroughly analyse the situation, so that the right steps can be taken. And we have to think that we have to take the employees with us, in whichever direction we go.

How things stand

Cologne, July 2012

Three of us were sitting together: the manager Mr F., the sales partner Mr M. and myself as external coach. It was the second of three planned meetings in this coaching course. In the first round of talks we had gone through Mr M.'s daily routine and determined some areas for improvement. I had the feeling that he was very enthusiastic about this approach. He contributed a lot to the development and was open to specific questions. Up until this meeting I had expected a noticeable development and I was a bit disappointed that it had not yet taken place. Mr F. was as surprised as I was that the employee's results had not yet improved and conceded that the managerial roadmap had not been followed as thoroughly as we had arranged in our first meeting.

Mr M. asked whether he could talk about something personal in our meeting, and of course I said yes as I am always happy when people in managerial positions open up. He then began to describe his circumstances.

He told me that after our last talk he was determined to implement the measures as arranged. Using the guidelines learnt in training, he wanted to ring the customers and arrange appointments, but couldn't find the energy to apply himself enough. Alarm bells started ringing for me. When employees don't implement agreements arranged in management talks, I am normally confronted with excuses. But when someone says they "couldn't find the energy", it usually implies a crisis in their life.

And that's the way it was. We found out that Mr M. had been very stressed in his life for some time. Earlier he had been an excellent salesman and was always at the top of rankings in his company. Everything came easily to him. Mr M. was earning very well and living accordingly. He had a big house built and went on holiday with his wife and two children many times a year. The holidays were, however, his only free time in the year. At all other times he

was always there for his job. His wife worked part-time, and the rest of the time she took care of household and family. Everything was going well.

Suddenly his performance began to tank. At first he thought it was just a phase, and wasn't really worried. The situation carried on, however, and got worse. He could feel that his inner drive was getting weaker and weaker. Mr M. only organised half as many customer appointments per day and felt that this reduced effort was more demanding than what he had been doing before. At first there were no financial consequences because he had savings he could fall back on. But now, he said, these savings were mostly used up, and he didn't know how much longer he could make his payments to the bank. Apart from that there were problems in his marriage that he mentioned, but didn't go into detail. His children were still in full-time education and needed his financial support. In short, he had got to the point where he didn't know what to do.

I had the feeling that it did Mr M. good to talk. Mr F. seemed very concerned, because he realised that in this case he had rather neglected his duties. The coaching process with this employee changed direction. It was now primarily about recovery. His opening up was the order for the manager and me to start to help. We developed the cornerstones of a close managerial concept with specific practical steps to bring Mr M. slowly back on track, and I discovered these had already started to work when I came back for the third round of talks four weeks later. Mr M. was on his way to recovery, but still not healthy by a long way.

In my seminars and coaching sessions over the last years I have experienced a whole row of similar situations. Many salespersons are stuck at a certain point in their development, or at least that was the impression I got. Usually this situation was also reflected in the sales figures, but was only hesitantly confirmed by the salesperson, probably because they find it very difficult to be honest with themselves and to assess their situation objectively. Sometimes there were emotional outpourings and clear cries for help. Together with colleagues and managers I tried to analyse the reasons behind the issues. In these talks we kept coming to the conclusion that the technical and organisational conditions in sales have changed dramatically. It was apparent that it used to be a lot easier to get an appointment with a customer. If someone had enough

appointments, they usually also did enough business. The sales meetings were not always perfect, the chances to talk about more products with the customer were not always taken, and recommendations were also often overlooked. The bottom line was, however, that a busy salesperson could still earn very good money, and those who decided to work less were still able to earn enough in the time they invested.

Lack of Organisation becomes a problem

The economic crisis in 2008 changed this situation abruptly. Many customers were personally affected by the crisis and thought twice before they spent their money. Suddenly the salespeople were confronted by indecisive customers who had objections and were evasive when they tried to make appointments or have sales meetings, and they were not prepared for this. Also the phrasing of the correct questions for customer meetings and practising of the content was not planned by most sales organisations. There were fewer appointments, and as a consequence also fewer contracts and lower earnings. The cost structures that the people had built up stayed the same, so increasing pressure became accompanied by personal stress and even burnout syndrome.

Similar things were happening to the managers. Friendly support was something of the past, because it could not solve the employees' new problems. Managers found themselves faced by new challenges: management issues which actually needed bold management. The managers had, however, not been prepared for this. They were on their own. They were allowed to manage but not told specifically how to make target-based talks to get the employees to open up, how to encourage them and to show them ways to improve. "Whoever inquires, guides" was a well-known and well-used slogan in sales. However, no-one thought of preparing the managers with the correct questions or of training them for talks.

Now the sales managers were also feeling that they had not reached their targets and they were feeling pressure from above. And because nobody had any idea how they could solve the problem, the only thing left to do was to work harder, in the hope of getting a grip on the results. In this way more

and more people got into situations where they were overstrained and were exceeding the boundaries of their physical and mental capabilities. People became ill, on the one hand due to overworking, and on the other hand due to the fact that they were being asked to produce results that they were not capable of producing at that time. The lack of Organisation placed many people in practically unsolvable conflict situations.

Searching for Order and Organisation

So we need Order and Organisation if we want to make sales routines successful. But where should we get this Order and Organisation from? The history of sales is of little help, as sales were always something like the natural enemy of Order. How about if we simply use the Order that we are surrounded by every day? That Order which we have been used to since we were children and which has become a part of us? What surrounds us is in every case well thought out and organised. The sun comes up in the morning and goes down again in the evening. Spring comes after winter and autumn after summer. Nature is a clever role model for Organisation, in which the chains of process have been intertwined for thousands of years. Can we profit from this reliable pattern of Order, or do we really have to reinvent sales every day?

In my seminars I have been working for years with the terms “Order and Organisation”. In this context, some very interesting dialogues have developed. I would like to use one of these dialogues here:

- Coach:* Mr F., what is your personal organisation in sales like?
- Mr F.:* I'm afraid you've chosen the wrong person here. I am a naturally disorganised person. If you could see my desk, you would know what I mean.
- Coach:* Did you say you are a naturally disorganised person?
- Mr F.:* Yes, but at least I know where to find everything!
- Coach:* May I ask how old you are?
- Mr F.:* Of course, I will soon be 50 years old.
- Coach:* (Takes his calculator) 50 years.
That means you have witnessed over 18,000 times that it gets light in the morning and dark again in the evening. You have witnessed 50

times that autumn comes after summer and spring after winter. So being a naturally disorganised person seems to be quite a bold statement.

Mr F.: (Smiles) I know what you are getting at. You mean that **Order is natural**, not the opposite!

I was delighted. I was fascinated by the participant's statement, because at that time I could not have formulated this core message so succinctly. *Being organised is natural, not the opposite!*

So if Order is a natural thing, how can it be that in sales we don't use it as orientation from the beginning? The answer is actually quite simple. *People do not organise themselves*, they need a management process. A management process that can take place within a framework in which goals and rules are defined and roles assigned. In sales especially, that doesn't seem to apply, because salespersons do not spontaneously demand management processes and vice versa, management processes are implemented too timidly. Candidates who come from other companies bring the disorder from their previous company with them. New employees bring the disorder from society and family (and there is enough of that these days, sadly).

The breakdown of society is reflected in sales

Not so long ago there was much on which we could depend. Children grew up in organised families and were prepared for life's ups and downs there. The role requirements of men and women for society to function were clearly designated and were followed. Then, everything that had once been good and had proven to work began to lose its meaning. Order more or less ran through our fingers and was replaced by the increased popularity of social trends and concentration on the state of the individual. Ego trips were suddenly "in" and everything was questioned. Subordination, obedience, humility and modesty became terms which the "modern" person knew nothing about. Instead, egoism and narcissism prevailed. The core of everything that up until then had proven to work and had formed the basis of our society was questioned. Some parents don't know what more they can do and back out of leadership decisions. The children feel that, of course, and establish a

way of living their own comfortable lives with as little conflict as possible with the parents.

Leadership is barely visible in our society these days. There is no more guidance. Leadership needs role models, who have, however, vanished from the public eye. In politics we are presented with a homogenous mass, who have been pushed into a role and the behaviour that goes with it by media trainers, without having to ever show their true selves. The next election is always more important than honest answers. In businesses the management processes are discussed, and sometimes even acted upon, but rarely set out or practised in enough detail for anyone to trust them. In families no-one really knows which tools to use in a crisis with the children. In extreme disputes with the children, the mothers tend to call on the father to finally show who “rules the roost”. At this point a show of strength is required, which doesn’t particularly impress the youth in this day and age. *If we really want to get a grip on the social crisis, then we have to begin to lead again!*

Young people who come into sales these days naturally bring their own ongoing development issues with them. Where Order has never been experienced, Order will not be looked for. And anyone who has not been closely guided as a child and youth will find it hard at first to recognise any values set out in a company. In addition, there is the fact that there is no visible organisation system in sales that they can use to structure themselves, if they want to be successful. In other occupational fields it is different. Without strict structures which everyone respects, a hospital wouldn’t function, a school system wouldn’t work, a flight wouldn’t take off, and a factory would come to a standstill. The list is endless. In such organised systems no-one would think of challenging the reason for Order and Organisation. When new people are taken on, it is necessary to ensure that the applicant is willing to accept Order and a management and development plan, for their own good. The caveat being, of course, that there is some kind of Order in the company, which is defined and documented, so that it can be passed on to the applicant. And managers are needed who are ready to go through the process with salespersons, as well as salespersons who want more than just an easy life. The main responsibility, however, lies with the managers. You cannot expect salespeople to guide

themselves. If that were the case, we wouldn't need managers. The basis for a successful management process should be already laid out in the job interview, to ascertain whether the applicant is open to be part of a management process.

Attempted solutions that come to nothing

How do you handle this situation in a company? The managers' attempts at supervision often lead in a well-meaning but not really helpful direction. If the figures do not meet expectations, endless meetings and telephone conferences are the result. One project quickly replaces another, the results are presented to the senior managers, and it looks like there has been an improvement. Asking people how they feel and "picking them up" is often completely ignored in these situations.

The origin of such campaigns is the massive pressure that managers are under these days. The top management, the owners and the members of the supervisory board in a company only see the figures, and when these do not meet expectations, they want to see action, fast. A business plan is announced, and instant results are expected. The projects that are set up to attain a rapid increase in sales make meetings and workshops necessary within a short period of time. These in turn take up an enormous amount of management time, which could have been more efficiently used for specific management processes. You can pull people together at a meeting at a central location, tell them how they should be managing, but at the same time take away the important basics they need for doing so: *the time for management in the region and with employees*. The demand to increase sales quickly can only ever reach temporary heights that quickly drop again. Speed is the natural enemy of long-term growth, which needs one thing more than anything else: *time to mature*.

Sales managers look for the right lever to steer things back on course, and think that the solutions are *more sales meetings* and *more people* to do them.

More sales meetings

A given number of sales meetings is then stipulated from above – a target that in the view of the regional sales managers and especially the salespeople is