

# COACHING SALESPEOPLE INTO SALES CHAMPIONS

*Interview with Keith Rosen & Lahat Tzvi*



**Keith - Can you tell us about yourself, your background and the work you do with global sales organizations and managers?**



Over the last 25+ years, I've had the pleasure of coaching thousands of managers and thousands of salespeople in practically every industry so that they can consistently achieve their business objectives faster. Since writing, *Coaching Salespeople Into Sales Champions*, it's been amazing traveling to over 50 countries, working with global sales organizations and their leadership teams. Having delivered my management coach training program on five continents, I can say that coaching is truly a universal language! From our research, we have also found that almost half of the world's top global sales organizations are leveraging the coaching methodology in my book as a way to develop and refine the productive and healthy coaching culture they want to create.



**Your book, *Coaching Salespeople Into Sales Champions*, has been ranked the # 1 best-selling sales management book on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) for the last several years. Can you tell us why this book is becoming so popular?**



When I first started my training and coaching practice, I spent a considerable amount of time working with sales teams and delivering my sales training program. As a consummate salesperson myself, I would follow up with every client about a month after the delivery to see what type of ROI they generated from the training. It was at that time when I would hear the same consistent message from clients, "Great training, but you know how it is. Some people took what you shared with them and they implemented it. Some people adopted a few new ideas but the majority of people reverted to their old ways." This concerned me because I wanted to ensure I delivered value and made the impact I could with everyone I worked with. Well, the more I worked with salespeople and managers, it was evident what was missing from this success equation; effective coaching by the manager to make the sales training stick.

As the global leaders and the first to pioneer management coach training, one thing is for certain; sales training alone isn't enough. The solution to boosting sales isn't more sales training but better coaching from management to make their people more valuable.

The fact is, sales training doesn't develop sales champions – managers do. If you want to make your salespeople more successful, first make your managers great coaches. More and more managers are realizing that there is another way to lead people. There is a better way to maximize the potential of each person on their team. There is an easier way to achieve business objectives. Through coaching, managers finally see how they can make the impact they really want. And once you see how powerful a coaching conversation can be, there's no turning back!



**The book was published in 2008. I believe that one of the goals of the book was to change the way managers work. Today, six years later, can you see the change over time? Do managers really change their whole management approach?**



With the managers I've worked with, you can certainly see the changes in their behavior almost immediately! This is why I will continue my life's work to support as many people as I can throughout the world.

While these managers have clearly changed the way they engage with their direct reports, customers, peers, even their boss, if you really want to positively change people's behavior, then don't focus solely on their behavior! Instead, focus on how people think. After all, beliefs precede experiences. If you really want people to change, it begins with changing their mindset. Part of what I do when working with managers is challenge the assumptions they make about their role, their customers, their company, their direct reports; even the assumptions they make about themselves! When you eliminate toxic and limiting thinking, when you expand your peripheral view of what you think is possible, only then can you truly generate breakthrough results. This, in turn, produces the desired behavioral changes every company wants. Here's a perfect example. This is an email I received from a manager about a month ago; one week after completing my management coach training course. This manager works for one of the top sports teams in the US. So, his salespeople are responsible for ticket sales, as well as selling suites and corporate sponsorships.

*"Hi Keith. Here is an awesome coaching moment that I wanted to share with you. One of my sellers stopped by to tell me what a great appointment he had. The charity prospect he was pitching was super receptive to buying a ton of tickets and holding a fundraiser. The prospect was even interested in buying more than anticipated and suggested himself, that he might want to purchase a suite.*

*Of course, I had to recognize this as a coaching moment and ask some questions. I asked my salesperson what he learned from that appointment. He said, "It's funny you ask that because I was totally caught off guard with the suite request." When I asked him what caught him off guard, he told me that he was so focused on pushing the customer into buying the tickets and doing the fundraising he didn't even think to mention the suites or perform a proper needs analysis. When I asked him why, he then went on to tell me he has pitched charities just like this one on suites in the past and nothing ever came out of it.*

*Here was the coaching moment! I then asked him if he would be open to my feedback based on our conversation. This guy is extremely coachable so his natural response was "Of course." I asked, "When presenting to your prospects, what assumptions might you be making based on your past experiences?" He thought for a moment and said, "I'm making tons of assumptions! I'm even assuming how people like to buy, whether or not they can buy, who the decision makers are and what is most important to them, without even asking!" I then responded with, "What if you approached every customer as a brand new customer, as if this is the very first time you're speaking with them? How would that change your approach?" My salesperson shared several ways that this change in thinking would change how he managed the conversations he had and how he qualifies his prospects. He also observed that he was making a bunch of assumptions that put every customer in the same bucket; assuming they are all the same. He told me this conversation will have a major impact on his sales and the outcome of his appointments! We shook hands, smiled, and went back to our days. I'm pretty proud of this moment and it felt great!"*

This happened **one week** after participating in my leadership program. That's how powerful great coaching can be when leveraging the right coaching framework and recognizing those coaching moments that appear throughout the day. Managers can truly experience an immediate ROI!



**You used to say that traditional management is dead. What does that mean and what exactly is the new management?**



If you were to look up the word “Manager” in the dictionary, it is defined as “The act or skill of controlling and making decisions about a business, department etc. The people who make decisions about a business, department, etc.” Notice how this definition doesn’t reference anything about developing other people, building other leaders or coaching people to self-generate new ideas and solutions on their own. It even references “the act or skill of controlling,” the very thing managers need to give up in order to create new possibilities in every conversation. After all, in every conversation, you are either creating a new possibility or trying to control the outcome.

Said a different way, managers need to realize that in every interaction, they are either building trust or eroding it. Companies today need to redefine what management means, the role of their managers, the competencies they need to further develop and become more inclusive around the primary objective of leadership; to make your people more valuable.



**What are the key challenges sales managers deal with today?**



While there are subtle cultural differences, both regional and organizational, the same challenge remains: *“How do I manage and motivate people to perform like champions and achieve changing business objectives – with less stress and more fun?”* When managers adopt my coaching framework and start coaching consistently, it actually resolves this challenge and enables them to win more sales.

There’s some irony around the problems that managers have to deal with each day. That is, the majority of the challenges that managers are faced with are created by the manager! It’s a paradox. Managers create the very problems that they want to avoid. Here’s what I mean. Managers have a tendency to fall into the role of Chief Problem Solver. Instead of developing people, managers jump in too soon to problem solve or save a deal, sending the wrong – and paradoxical message. Every manager I’ve met wants their people to be more self-driven and accountable. Conversely, because managers are compelled to provide quick answers rather than empower people to create their own solutions, it creates the very dependency managers want to avoid! And you can’t scale dependency.

Additionally, if the answer or solution that the manager shared doesn’t work, then whose fault is it? That’s right, it goes back to the manager! Then, the message from your direct reports will sound like, “Hey boss, I was just doing what you told me to do. It’s not my fault your solution didn’t work.” This robs people of the accountability that managers want to instill.



### What else gets in the way of delivering effective coaching?



I would say that the biggest challenge managers are faced with today and the one thing that's essential to build a strong bench of champions is, in one word, trust. Without it, you can't coach effectively. And the most effective way to build, rebuild or establish trust is by setting and managing clear expectations. Instead of being directive, managers need to take the time with each of their direct reports to set and manage clear expectations around their role as a manager, what coaching is and what's in it for them in order to create authentic buy in around the coaching process.

This is achieved through a specific type of conversation I wrote about in my book called, *The Art of Enrollment*. It's the most effective way to truly create alignment around each individual's personal goals and your business objectives. When done effectively, the quality of output increases exponentially because you've clearly mapped out how each individual can attain their own personal goals and agenda by achieving their business goals and corporate objectives. They're in sync. Now, the manager and each individual on their team are working towards a shared goal and vision that benefits everyone.



### Can every manager be a good coach? Are managers required to take a course in coaching or can they just get up in the morning and decide they are coaches?



While some people have a natural disposition that makes them a good coach or salesperson, coaching is a learned and developed skill. Think of any world class athlete. There might be people you know who have certain abilities and talents that other people aren't born with. However, every great athlete still needs a coach to help them refine their skills so they can continually achieve peak performance. To refine your leadership and coaching skills in a way that actually impacts performance, every manager needs to develop the coaching foundation and best practices which they can then build upon. Think about when you learned how to play a sport. Take golf for example. You need to learn the basics, how to play the game, how to swing a club. But then the best athletes make the swing their own. This holds true for coaching. Every manager needs to work off a solid foundation which they can build from. That's the core coaching competencies and best practices. Once this happens, you can weave in your own style, talents and personality.

Said a different way, the very best leaders I know coach from their heart not from their head. But you need to start somewhere! You start with being mindful of how to go about coaching in a way that engages people and delivers value. You think about the steps in the coaching framework, and the precision based questions you need to ask to facilitate every conversation. You have to consciously focus on keeping your assumptions at bay. It takes effort for managers not to immediately jump into problem solving mode! You need to temper your inclination to spit out a problem or be directive. Once managers are able to do this on a more frequent basis, it becomes woven into their DNA and becomes second nature. Only then you can then start coaching intuitively, from your heart.



### **Are there any managers out there that are coaching effectively?**



Of course! There are so many great managers who are doing a fantastic job coaching and couldn't imagine doing it any other way. Why? Because coaching generates better results on so many levels. Unfortunately, after talking with many other manager's direct reports, there's only a small population who actually deliver world class coaching and do so consistently for everyone on their team. I find more managers think they're coaching but they're really not. I know this to be true because after they participate in my two-day management coach training program, they wind up admitting, "Before I started this course, I thought I was coaching but now I realize that what I was doing was something totally different!"

When it comes to delivering powerful and effective coaching, you can't give what you don't get yourself. So, as a manager, have you had a positive experience being coached, a negative experience or no experience at all? And if you don't receive good coaching, never had a positive coaching experience or know what good coaching feels like and how it can benefit you, then it's more challenging to be able to give it.

This leads to a fundamental breakdown of what coaching is through the eyes of your direct reports as well. After all, if your direct reports had a great experience being coached, they'll want more. Conversely, if they did not, they'll be more apt to shy away and resist coaching based upon past experiences. The solution? Set and manage new expectations with each person on your team around what good coaching really is, your role as a coach and the coaching process. It's an amazing opportunity and a gift for me to observe these managers go through this powerful transformation from sales manager to sales coach.



### **What are some key principles that managers can focus on in order to be more successful?**



First, give up assumptions. The assumptions we make around what we perceive are the facts are the number one cause of the majority of communication breakdowns, poor performance and inefficiencies. Assumptions are also the number one cause of a weak, unhealthy pipeline, forecast inaccuracy and lost sales. Both managers and salespeople make tons of assumptions about their prospects, customers and partners. Then, there are those assumptions made by the manager about their salespeople around their capabilities, knowledge base, abilities, execution, commitment, activity and skill set. And of course, the greatest assumptions of them all, the cultural assumptions people make around what can and cannot work based upon their company, country or the geographic location they live in. If you want to improve the health of your pipeline and your forecast accuracy by shattering these costly assumptions, then the most important question both sellers and managers need to ask in every situation is, "Do I have the evidence and facts that support my assumptions in this situation or are my assumptions of the facts based on a previous experience without the evidence to support them?"

Aside from consistent coaching and challenging these assumptions, managers must engage in more observation and refine how they deliver feedback so that it results in positive behavioral change. Why is this so critical? Because people can't change what they don't see. Think about sports and where the coach is during the game; on the sidelines, because players can't self-diagnose in the middle of the game. They're playing to win, and so are your salespeople. While many try, you can't manage from a spreadsheet. Data only provides activity and results, not insight into the quality of output, which makes the difference between the "A" and "C" player. While so much of our activities and decisions are driven by data, to truly build a strong bench of champions, managers must shift from being a data manager to being a people manager.



**Can you tell us the secret? What is it that really motivates salespeople? What do people want most in their job?**



If you do an online search for what motivates people in the workplace, you will see the top responses from practically every study out there are; recognition, acknowledgment, being part of something, wanting to contribute, wanting to be heard. The belief that most salespeople are 'coin operated' is a myth. Sure, while many salespeople are motivated by money, it's not the money that's getting them out of bed every day. It is typically what the money represents to them.

For example, with money, I can take a family vacation, save for my retirement, save for my children's education, buy a new house or new car, have peace of mind or achieve financial security. The bottom line is, if you want to uncover what truly inspires people, just ask them! And if you haven't asked them, then you're making assumptions around what drives them. Typically, those assumptions are based on what motivates YOU! The real cost here is, the manager is now coaching and managing people in their own image, instead of respecting and tapping into each person's individuality, natural talents and their personal values.



**Let's talk about your coaching program. What is the difference between the "market management" courses and the course you deliver for sales managers? Will they get strategies, tools, frameworks and resources that they will not get into other leadership courses?**



Our course is exclusive and unique. We know that it is unlike any other program offered in the marketplace because that's what our clients tell us! We purposely do not deliver any public courses. All of the courses we deliver are for internal leadership teams. Managers report that other management/leadership programs talk about coaching without teaching HOW to coach. They don't provide a tactical coaching system specifically for sales leaders that's proven to drive more sales. We provide our proprietary L.E.A.D.S. Coaching Framework that's leveraged to facilitate any conversation, including deal reviews, performance reviews, even turning around underperformers.

Additionally, while you can have a great program, the experience that people walk away with has much to do with the person delivering the course! That's why we only hire world class trainers who have deep experience in management, coaching and leading teams with great success. Anyone can follow a facilitator guide. The facilitators we have walk their talk and are truly experts in coaching. This all adds up to creating a world class experience for every manager who participates.

We also share a proven model that creates buy-in around change or new initiatives by aligning each individual's personal goals with corporate objectives. Our research shows there's no other program that delivers all of this – and we welcome the challenge!

Most important, instead of the training just being a time consuming event that pulls managers away from their desk, it's the concrete results that follow which makes us the company of choice to partner with when considering such an important initiative like this; the development of your most valuable asset; your people.



**You have a lot of experience over the years and have worked with thousands of managers. Can you share the type of results companies experience and what to expect from your program?**



Our clients report that they've improved forecast accuracy, increased sales and profitability, turned around underperformers within 30 days, retained top performers, accelerated their sales cycle, created a positive environment and reduced problems. When managers coach effectively, they reduce their workload, make their job easier, have more time and most important – build trust.



**Bonus Question for the readers. Can you let us know a little about your next book on coaching?**



My next book on coaching is going to have more of an international focus. Having had the privilege of traveling the world, the one thing I have that most authors or trainers can't claim is the rich experience of immersing myself within so many different cultures. It goes beyond just work, this is a true passion of mine. The more I travel and make myself part of each culture, the easier I find it is to make an authentic human connection with people wherever I go.



**Last question. I remember you said you wanted to visit Israel. Is it going to happen?**



I certainly hope so! Actually, I know so. It's just a matter of when the opportunity presents itself; and when I'm invited!



**Keith, I want to thank you for taking the time to respond to these questions. Personally, you are an inspiration for me. I would like to say thank you on my behalf and on behalf of the readers and managers in Israel. We look forward to see you visiting Israel. Thank you, Keith!**



It truly is my pleasure! I look forward to continuing to make the positive impact I can; one person at a time! For every people leader, remember; you CAN change a culture, one person and one conversation at a time. In its most simplistic form, coaching is a language; it's a more powerful way of communicating in order to make the positive impact we all want to make. So, remember the new ABC's of leadership: Always Be Coaching!

**I wish you and your readers extreme success!**

**Keith  
Rosen**

A globally recognized authority on sales and leadership and the pioneer of executive sales coaching and management coach training, Keith Rosen is the CEO of Profit Builders, named one of the Best Sales Training and Coaching Company Worldwide. Keith has delivered his programs to hundreds of thousands of salespeople and managers in practically every industry worldwide; on five continents and in over 50 countries. Keith has written several best-selling books, including the globally acclaimed *Coaching Salespeople into Sales Champions*, winner of Five International Best Book Awards and rated the #1 book on sales coaching. As a leader in the coaching profession, Keith was inducted in the inaugural group of the Top Sales Hall of Fame in recognition for his outstanding contributions in sales and leadership development. *Inc.* magazine and *Fast Company* named Keith one of the five most influential executive coaches. He's been featured in *Entrepreneur*, *Inc.*, *Fortune*, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Keith was also featured on the award winning television show, *Mad Men* and was one of the first out of only a handful of coaches who earned the distinguished Master Certified Coach designation credentialed through the International Coach Federation. Access Keith's ebooks, articles and videos at [www.KeithRosen.com](http://www.KeithRosen.com).

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