

# So You're Missing Your Sales Target...Blame the Sales Coaching You Didn't Invest In

White Paper



## Executive Summary

Chief Commercial Officers face a growing performance gap that has little to do with market conditions, product competitiveness, or technology investment. The most overlooked driver of commercial underperformance is the **absence of a disciplined, capability-driven coaching culture**. Korn Ferry Sales Performance Research studies show that organizations with strong coaching processes achieve **14% higher quota attainment, 15% higher win rates, and nearly 20% lower voluntary turnover**—yet most organizations still treat coaching as optional, inconsistent, or purely tactical.

Frontline managers—your most critical performance lever—are spending too little time coaching, and when they do, it is often reactive, unstructured, or overly focused on deal triage versus capability building. The result: stalled pipeline, inconsistent execution, and seller performance that plateaus far earlier than it should.

This narrative outlines the core reasons coaching remains underleveraged, the commercial cost of inaction, and the immediate and long-term steps leaders can take to unlock the full potential of their sales teams.

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## A Commercial Leadership Wake-Up Call

Every year, organizations leave millions in revenue on the table—not because of poor products, weak markets, or insufficient tools, but because they fail to capitalize on the biggest untapped performance lever in the commercial engine: effective sales coaching.

Yet despite the evidence, coaching remains one of the most underdeveloped muscles in sales organizations.

Quarter after quarter, commercial leaders obsess over pipeline coverage, forecast accuracy, win rates, and attainment. Yet behind every red metric sits a truth few Chief Commercial Officers say out loud: frontline sales managers are not coaching effectively or consistently—not because they refuse to, but because the organization has never built a true coaching culture or developed coaching capability.

Most revenue organizations treat coaching like something optional—important, yes, but squeezed in between forecast calls and firefighting. Then we're surprised when reps plateau, deals stall, and targets slip. Coaching is one of the highest-leverage activities in sales; inconsistent coaching is one of its costliest hidden leaks.

## The Real Reason You're Missing the Number

When targets are missed, the reaction is typically the same: buy new tech, refine messaging, add enablement, and schedule more forecast calls. But one of the biggest performance unlocks is hiding in plain sight: **the effectiveness of frontline sales managers**, the people responsible for elevating seller capability and pipeline quality.

**High-performing sales organizations share a consistent trait:** frontline managers spend significant time—intentionally and systematically—coaching. Not ad-hoc deal triage, but structured, methodology-aligned coaching that improves judgment, account strategy, and execution.

If coaching is reactive or inconsistent, your revenue performance will be, too.

## Your Managers Aren't Avoiding Coaching—They Were Never Equipped

You can't hold managers accountable for a behavior they were never trained to perform.

Most were promoted because they were exceptional sellers—not because they were skilled at developing others. Great sellers jump in, solve problems, and win deals. Great coaches do the opposite: they redirect, they question, and they build capability instead of dependency.

Without investment, managers default to what they know—fixing deals rather than developing people. The result is frustrated leaders, stagnant sellers, and stalled pipeline.

Coaching capability is entirely solvable—but only when revenue leadership treats it as a **non-negotiable operating rhythm**, not a “nice to have.”

## Coaching Is Not a Soft Skill —It's a revenue multiplier and impacts the value you provide your customers

A strong coaching system does more than support reps. It boosts performance. Organizations that invest in coaching capability and embed a dynamic coaching process see:

- **14% higher quota attainment**
- **15% higher win rates**
- **3x more likely to reach “Trusted Partner” level with customers**

When managers coach well, they stop acting as super-closers and instead enable teams to operate at a higher level on every deal.

## If You Want Better Numbers, Start with Better Coaching

Missing your target is rarely due to one bad quarter. It's the cumulative effect of:

- uncoached conversations,
- unchallenged assumptions, and
- undeveloped sellers.

If you want seller behavior to improve, start by changing manager behavior. And to change manager behavior, you must **invest in the coaching capability that drives it.**

**Revenue grows where coaching grows.** If you're missing the number, begin your diagnosis with the capability most overlooked: the effectiveness of frontline managers as coaches.

Because in today's selling environment, the organizations that win are the ones with the best coaches.

## CCO Diagnostic: Are You Underinvesting in Sales Coaching?

Use this quick diagnostic to assess whether coaching is an overlooked growth lever in your commercial organization. If you answer “no” or “not consistently” to three or more, you have a coaching gap that is likely suppressing sales performance.

### 1. Coaching Culture & Expectations

- Do your frontline managers have **clear, measurable expectations** for weekly or bi-weekly coaching?
- Is coaching treated as a **non-negotiable leadership responsibility**, not a discretionary activity?

### 2. Coaching Capability

- Have your managers been **formally trained** in modern, discovery-driven coaching—not just deal inspection?
- Do managers consistently **build capability**, or do they default to fixing deals themselves?

### 3. Coaching Cadence & Execution

- Do managers run **structured 1:1 coaching sessions** that focus on skill, behavior, and pipeline quality?
- Are **team coaching forums** and **peer reviews** part of the operating rhythm?

### 4. Use of Methodology & Coaching Tools

- Are managers coaching to a **consistent sales methodology** (e.g., Strategic Selling® with Perspective)?
- Do they use **standardized coaching templates or frameworks** to ensure quality and consistency?

### 5. Data & Measurement

- Do you have a way to **measure coaching effectiveness**, not just coaching activity?
- Can you directly correlate coaching with improvements in **win rates, opportunity progress, skills, or engagement**?

### 6. Talent & Pipeline Strength

- Do you assess reps based on **competencies, traits, and drivers** to understand who needs what type of coaching?
- Do managers tailor coaching to individual **growth needs and performance profiles**?

**If coaching is not disciplined, measured, or embedded, it is not driving performance—no matter how often it’s happening.**

## Three Immediate Coaching Moves to Improve Performance

### 1. Establish a consistent 1:1 and team coaching cadence

Focus coaching conversations on alignment, clarity of business outcomes, trust, and honest dialogue. Strengthen business acumen and define critical behavior shifts.

### 2. Use collaborative and discovery-based coaching

There’s a place for directive coaching, but high-impact coaching is collaborative. Prepare your coaching conversations, frame expectations clearly, and focus on forward-looking actions rather than backward-looking critiques.

### 3. Run focused opportunity reviews with peer coaching

Select the few opportunities that materially impact revenue. Use small-group coaching sessions to improve strategy and execution, and examine the behaviors required to win.

## Three Longer-Term Strategies for Sustainable Revenue Growth

### 1. Build a sales talent strategy

Forty-three percent of sales organizations cite talent gaps as their #1 challenge. Define what “great” looks like, assess your team against those standards, and use competency-, trait-, and driver-based tools to build a stronger talent pipeline.

### 2. Implement a sales methodology and coaching process

Organizations using a consistent methodology with data-driven insights experience **28% higher win rates**. Adopt a methodology such as Strategic Selling® with Perspective and pair it with a coaching system that improves performance, retention, and engagement.

### 3. Measure coaching effectiveness

Most organizations have no mechanism to evaluate coaching impact. While difficult, measuring coaching can start simply—by asking for feedback and assessing how managers influence culture, trust, engagement, and performance. A coaching effectiveness framework can materially increase revenue and strengthen culture.



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## Bottom Line: Coaching Is Your Most Underutilized Growth Lever

The fastest path to better numbers isn't more dashboards, more tools, or more forecast meetings. It's better coaching.

When you invest in your managers as coaches, you build a commercial engine that is more predictable, more capable, and more resilient.

**Coaching is the operating system of a high-performing commercial organization.**

## ABOUT KORN FERRY

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