SecondNature | Ebook

Sales Coaching Survey 2021

Salespeople Don't Get Enough Coaching

More Coaching = Greater Sales Impact

We recently surveyed 100 people to understand the role of sales coaching in their organizations. The mostly B2B companies covered a range of sales team sizes, from those with fewer than 50 salespeople to enterprises with more than 1,000 sales professionals, and job roles among respondents were primarily sales, marketing, and sales enablement. We've included a complete breakdown of the respondents in the appendix at the end of the document.

The responses were fascinating, and they point towards one overwhelming conclusion; sales, product, marketing and sales enablement executives are fully aware of both the importance of sales coaching for their organizations, and the challenges in their path.

Sales Coaching is Crucial, Give Salespeople More!

A whopping 96% of respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement that "the right sales coaching can make a significant difference in performance," rating it 4 or 5 out of 5.

Although the respondents are so united about the value of sales coaching, most aren't achieving their goals. 64% of the respondents feel that salespeople need more coaching time than they are receiving today.

96%

agree or strongly agree with "the right sales coaching can make a significant difference in performance"

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The right sales coaching can make a significant difference in performance

1	2	3	4	5

3%
Strongly
Disagree

1%

0%
Neither

26%

70%
Strongly Agree

64%

feel that salespeople need more coaching time than they are receiving today

Do you think salespeople in your company need more or less coaching time?

64% Need more coaching time

29% Getting the right amount of coaching today

7% Need less coaching time

We had to wonder why, if sales coaching is universally esteemed, companies aren't delivering sufficient coaching practice. It seems that there are some major challenges in the way of providing effective sales coaching.

Coaching increases salespeople's confidence, improves the quality of sales conversations, increases deals on pipeline, and increases deal size.
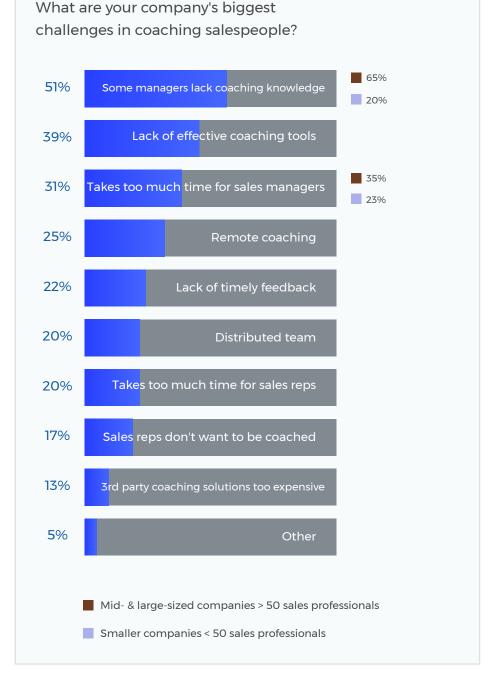
Lack of Time, Knowledge & Tools Are Key Obstacles to Coaching

Respondents to our survey revealed that the primary challenge hampering successful sales coaching is the lack of managerial time and experience. Just over half of all respondents identified insufficient coaching knowledge among managers as their single biggest obstacle, and that rose to close to two-thirds among companies with over 50 salespeople.

It's understandable. Many sales professionals rise to managerial positions due to the excellence of their selling ability, but they are rarely trained in how to teach someone else the same skills. The larger the organization, the more sales managers there are, and the harder it is to ensure that every sales manager is also an effective sales coach.

Lack of time goes hand in hand with lack of experience. 31% of respondents said that sales coaching takes too much time for sales managers, and 22% said that timely feedback was an issue.

Lack of managerial time and coaching knowledge is a bigger deal for bigger companies

What are your company's biggest challenges in coaching salespeople?

51%	Some managers lack coaching knowledge
39%	Lack of effective coaching tools
31%	Takes too much time for sales managers
25%	Remote coaching
22%	Lack of timely feedback
20%	Distributed team
20%	Takes too much time for sales reps
17%	Sales reps don't want to be coached
13%	3rd party coaching solutions too expensive
5%	Other

■ 65%
■ 20%

■ 35%
■ 23%

■ Mid- & large-sized companies > 50 sales professionals

■ Smaller companies < 50 sales professionals

Having sales professionals record their pitches and send them to managers for review is a common "solution" to sales coaching challenges, but our survey shows that it doesn't help managers find more time.

It's interesting to note that significantly more respondents from mid- and large-sized companies (35%) reported a lack of managerial time than from companies with under 50 sales professionals (23%). It seems that as sales departments scale up, the ratio of managers to sales teams changes, leaving managers with more sales representatives and less time to spare.

Having sales professionals record their pitches and send them to managers for review doesn't help managers find more time.

As one respondent wrote, sales coaching is "mostly about patience. Sales people would rather be selling than learning and they get impatient. Need a serious value prop (carrot or stick) to focus on things other than quota."

Remote, Distributed Teams

25% of respondents highlighted the recently-exacerbated challenge of training sales teams remotely, and 20% that they have to train distributed teams. It appears that the majority of companies have already dealt with the challenge of distributed teams, which is nothing new, and many are coming to terms with remote working too. It will be interesting to see how these numbers change as employees grow more accustomed to remote or hybrid working. Another of the top three challenges is the lack of effective tools for sales coaching. Close to 40% of respondents view this as a missing piece in the tech stack, which makes sense since the right solution would resolve both the lack of experience and the lack of time among managers. Alongside this, we noticed that only 13% of respondents felt that the cost of sales coaching solutions is an issue. Clearly, price would not be a barrier for the right solution that helps sales and marketing executives overcome their major challenges.

Top 3 Topics: Full Value Prop, Discovery & Objection Handling
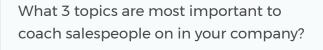
Investigating which topics are the most important for coaching sales professionals also revealed a number of insights. 78% of sales and marketing managers and executives highlighted the difficulty of coaching salespeople to present the full value proposition instead of individual product features, making this by far the biggest issue. Many companies struggle to teach sales representatives a broad narrative rather than a list of features.
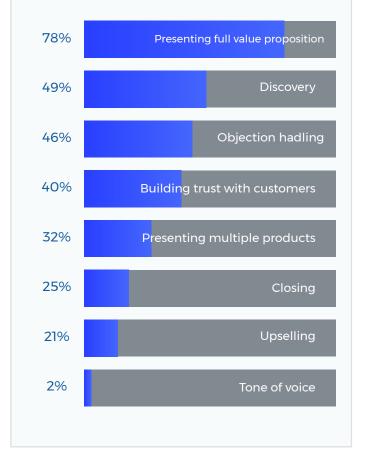
In the words of one survey participant, "Evolving the coaching areas as market situations change" is a key issue. Companies change their messages or add new products or features regularly, and it's important to be agile enough to coach the sales team with each major shift in messaging.

The next two main topics, discovery and handling objections, were cited by 49% and 46% of respondents respectively, followed by building trust with leads at 40%. These issues are particularly tough to coach for, because they rely on skill development, rather than on depth of knowledge or product information. Sales reps need plenty of practice to become proficient in these areas, and increasing their review time or sending them more model examples isn't sufficient.
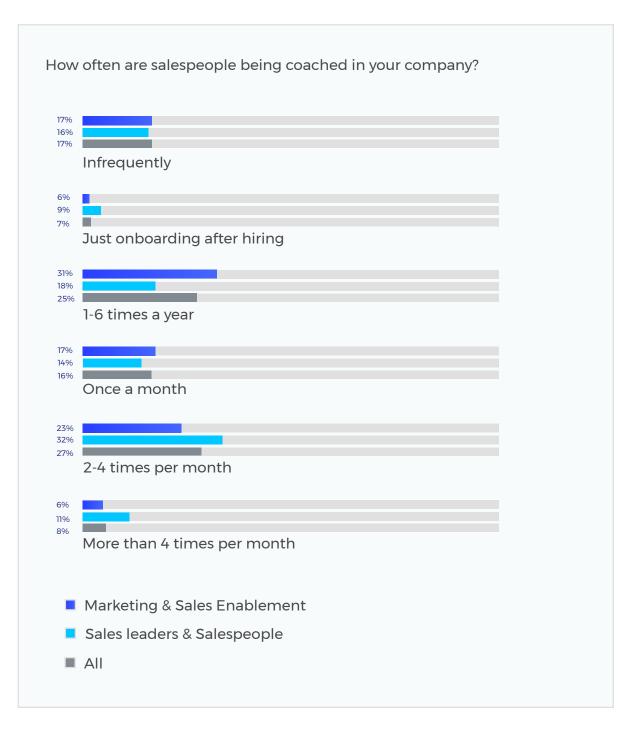
What 3 topics are most important to coach salespeople on in your company?

78%	Presenting full value proposition
49%	Discovery
46%	Objection hadling
40%	Building trust with customers
32%	Presenting multiple products
25%	Closing
21%	Upselling
2%	Tone of voice

Topics like discovery and objection handling require skill development, rather than simply gaining in-depth knowledge or product information.

How Often Are Salespeople Being Coached?

Our survey found a wide spread in terms of time spent in sales coaching, with 27% saying that sales professionals receive coaching 2-4 times per month, but almost the same number - 25% - claiming it takes place up to 6 times a year, or every other month. 17% gave the vague answer of "infrequently," but 16%, or only slightly fewer, said sales coaching happens once a month.

How often are salespeople being coached in your company?

	Marketing & Sales Enablement	Sales leaders & Salespeople	All
Infrequently	17%	16%	17%
Just onboarding after hiring	6%	9%	7%
1-6 times a year	31%	18%	25%
Once a month	17%	14%	16%
2-4 times per month	23%	32%	27%
More than 4 times per month	6%	11%	8%

- ■ Marketing & Sales Enablement
- ■ Sales leaders & Salespeople
- ■ All

Salespeople & Sales Enablement Disagree On How Much Coaching Is Actually Happening

We also discovered a noticeable gap between the responses from sales leaders and salespeople, and those from marketing and sales enablement personnel. Sales were more likely to say they received coaching 2-4 times a month (32% of sales employees vs. 23% of marketing and sales enablement personnel), while more of marketing/sales enablement said coaching took place only 1-6 times per year (31% vs. 18%). Sales employees were also far more likely to say they were coached more than once a week, with 11% agreeing with this statement but only 6% of marketing and sales enablement employees choosing it.

It's likely that the difference in responses between the two groups of employees, as well as the wide range of results from all the participants, comes down to how you define "coaching." If short bursts of feedback after a sales call is considered coaching, you'll feel it happens more often than if your definition of coaching means a formal training session. Sales employees may be more likely to resent the amount of time it takes for them to complete

sales coaching, so they feel like it happens more often, but sales enablement teams wish they could carry out more coaching, so they perceive it as taking place less often.

We didn't see the same role-fueled split in the length of each training session, but there's still a broad range of replies. The lack of uniformity around session length seems to parallel the variety of replies around session frequency.

It seems that businesses in general haven't settled on a preferred length of time for sales coaching, and they're still trying to work out which would be best, or else provide a range of options. 38% said that sessions are usually between 15 and 30 minutes long, but almost the same number - 33% - said they were 30-60 minutes, or double the length. Very short sessions of under 15 minutes were reported by 17% respondents, while 13% referred to sessions of over 60 minutes. We saw no significant differences in responses by people in different sized companies or job roles.

What did stand out was that regardless of their answers regarding the length and frequency of training sessions, 64% of respondents believe that salespeople need more sales coaching time.
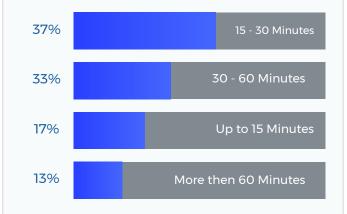
Coaching Impacts Confidence, Conversation Quality, Deals On Pipeline

When you see the results that participants attribute to increased sales coaching, it's easy to understand why they want to increase it. The replies to our question show that sales coaching improves both the quality and the quantity of sales conversations.

Quantitative improvements like the number of deals in the pipeline and the size of the deals are easier to track than qualitative improvements like seller confidence and the quality of sales conversations.

Increasing the number of deals in the pipeline and raising the size of each deal are two important but different ways to drive more sales. When your sales representatives have more deals in the pipeline, it helps ensure a steadier run of completed deals that drives more revenue. It also means that more sales calls are succeeding, because the percentage of completed sales has risen.

Expanding the size of each deal shows that your sales professionals are aiming higher with their sales pitches. Instead of limiting themselves to small deals that are easier to close, your sales professionals feel the

What is the typical length of a coaching session in your company?

37%	15 - 30 Minutes
33%	30 - 60 Minutes
17%	Up to 15 Minutes
13%	More then 60 Minutes

confidence to target larger companies and/or bigger deals which might take more time and effort to complete, but deliver bigger payoffs. This metric means that your sales reps might not be closing more deals, but each deal they close brings in more income.
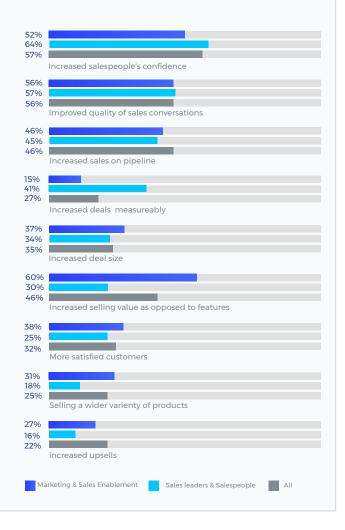
Both of the leading effects of sales coaching are qualitative, with 57% of respondents saying they saw a rise in their sales employees' confidence, and 56% reporting a jump in the quality of sales conversations. It's understandable that these results are mentioned far more than a measurable increase in sales (27%), or increased upsells (22%), because it's difficult to connect your final sales figures with your sales coaching. Many different elements can affect sales, so it's tough to be certain that sales coaching made a significant contribution.

That said, 41% of sales people and sales leaders said sales coaching increased sales measurably, as opposed to just 15% of marketing & sales enablement roles.

Survey participants also noted that sales professionals who'd enjoyed more sales coaching showed an improved ability to sell solutions according to the broad value they can bring to the lead, rather than merely by selling specific features, with 46%, or just under half, mentioning this result.

This is particularly noteworthy because, as already mentioned, participants felt that training employees to sell a wider value proposition was one of the hardest challenges for sales coaching programs.

Approximately a third saw that they had more satisfied customers after sales coaching, and one-quarter noticed that their sales teams were selling a wider range of products. Raising the number of satisfied customers is likely to lead to better retention levels and increased repeat sales. Meanwhile, selling a broader range of products points to a significant expansion of the sales pipeline which can drive more revenue for the company.

Interestingly, when we filtered the responses by job title, we saw a slightly different breakdown in the results.

What impact has sales coaching had on your company's sales results?

	Marketing & Sales Enablement	Sales leaders & Salespeople	All
Increased salespeople's confidence	52%	64%	57%
Improved quality of sales conversations	56%	57%	56%
Increased sales on pipeline	46%	45%	46%
Increased deals measureably	15%	41%	27%
Increased deal size	37%	34%	35%
Increased selling value as opposed to features	60%	30%	46%
More satisfied customers	38%	25%	32%
Selling a wider varienty of products	31%	18%	25%
increased upsells	27%	16%	22%

41%
of salespeople & sales leaders say coaching increased sales measurably

Slightly more salespeople and sales leaders pointed to qualitative effects like confidence and the improved quality of conversation, probably because they felt those benefits more personally. However, twice as many marketing and sales enablement employees said that selling a value proposition rather than features was a key result, which makes sense given that they are the ones striving to achieve this change.

Company's Sales Enablement Tools Do Not Meet Their Needs

Although a lack of effective sales coaching tools was the second challenge mentioned by our participants, our survey revealed that most participants already have plenty of tools that apparently don't meet all of their needs.
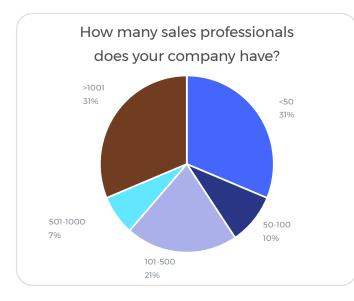
62% of respondents told us that they used a learning management system (LMS), and almost as many, 60%, that they applied content sharing tools. Far fewer, only 2 in 5, use webcam recording tools, and 35% use a content experience platform and sales call recording software respectively.

What sales enablement tools are used in your company?

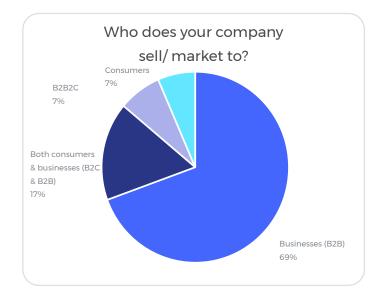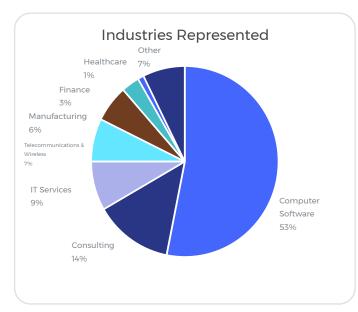|	
62%	Learning management system (LMS)
60%	Content sharing tools
41%	Webcam recording tools
35%	Content experience platforms
35%	Sales call recording software
8%	AI-based coaching software

In Conclusion, More Sales Coaching, Please

Despite the broad range of replies to some of our questions, a few trends stood out loud and clear. Sales leaders, sales professionals, marketers, and sales enablement teams all agree that sales coaching needs to increase in their organizations. Sales coaching helps organizations to raise the size and number of deals in their pipeline and improves the ability of sales professionals to cope with various situations that arise in the course of a call, boosting their confidence and customer satisfaction.
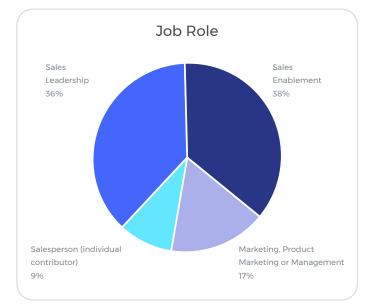
Second Nature AI is an ideal way for companies to scale sales coaching across teams of any size, for any kind of customer-facing conversation, and for employees in every sales position, including sales engineers, SDRs, and account enablement personnel. Learn more about Second Nature.

APPENDIX: Who We Surveyed

How many sales professionals does your company have?

- >1001 31%
- <50 31%
- 50-100 10%
- 101-500 21%
- 501-1000 7%

Who does your company sell/ market to?

- Consumers 7%
- B2B2C 7%
- Both consumers & businesses (B2C & B2B) 17%
- Businesses (B2B) 69%

Industries Represented

- Other 7%
- Healthcare 1%
- Finance 3%
- Manufacturing 6%
- Telecommunications & Wireless 7%
- IT Services 9%
- Consulting 14%
- Computer Software 53%

Job Role

- Sales Leadership 36%
- Sales Enablement 38%
- Marketing, Product Marketing or Management 17%
- Salesperson (individual contributor) 9%

About Second Nature

Second Nature is innovative sales coaching software that lets you scale up your sales coaching. The SaaS solution provides a "virtual role play partner" that uses conversational AI to have actual discussions with sales reps, score them, and help them improve on their own, so they can ace every sales call. Learn more about Second Nature.