



# Meeting the Quota Challenge: Critical Skills Every Sales Manager Needs to Excel

A Blanchard Point of View

Ken<sup>THE</sup>Blanchard<sup>®</sup>  
COMPANIES

***I always exceed quota. That's why they made me a sales manager. But taking the job was the worst decision I ever made.***

It's a common lament of sales managers, which won't come as a surprise when you understand the dynamics of the situation.

### **Here's the typical backstory.**

A star salesperson gets rewarded with a promotion because of her stellar sales numbers. Managers mistakenly believe the same skills that made her the top salesperson will make her a great manager. But selling and leading have little in common. They are worlds apart and require different skill sets. Naturally, she was woefully unprepared for the new role.

### **What happened next?**

Sales declined. People quit. The former star performer became a struggling manager. And a reliable revenue generator for the company went dark.

This story isn't a bit of fiction. It's being repeated countless times at companies around the world. And the cost to people and their companies is staggering.

### **Why Sales Managers Struggle**

Sales managers typically flounder in their new roles. We know this because most new managers struggle.

### **Here's the reason:**

58% of managers said they didn't receive any management training when they were promoted.



Not surprisingly, 50% of managers are rated as ineffective by their people.<sup>1</sup> Another factor is that new sales managers tend to keep doing what they know best (selling) instead of teaching their team how to be successful.

A struggling manager pulls down her team. Gallup found that managers account for at least 70% of variance in employee engagement scores across business units.<sup>2</sup>

A sales manager's struggles are even more costly. When their team fails, it has a ripple effect that directly affects the bottom line.

This isn't an exaggeration. An article in *Harvard Business Review* quantified the cost of sales managers who can't lead.

High-performing sales leaders reported an overall average annual quota attainment of 105% compared to 54% for underperforming sales managers.<sup>3</sup>

The same article also reported that when salespeople rate their manager as being excellent or above average, 69% of them exceed quota.<sup>3</sup> So there is a pronounced link between an excellent sales manager and high-performing salespeople.

**Put simply, a sales manager has the power to lift or derail her team.**

## Essential Skills for Sales Managers to Cultivate

Our thought leaders have long analyzed why sales managers struggle and what they need to do to succeed. Developing leadership skills is the short answer.

We take a look at skills sales managers must have if their people are to soar.

**Coaching:** In the aptly titled article “You Can’t Be a Great Manager If You’re Not a Good Coach” in *Harvard Business Review*, Monique Valcour said: “The single most important managerial competency that separates highly effective managers from average ones is coaching.”<sup>4</sup> But 73% of frontline sales managers receive little to no training on coaching.<sup>5</sup>

Coaching is the defining skill of effective sales managers. They help salespeople deliver compelling presentations. Build the confidence of the unsure. Lend moral support after setbacks. Ensure their team has the necessary support. And on and on.

The inability to coach their people is one of the chief reasons sales managers struggle. But teach sales managers how to coach, and their teams’ performance will dramatically improve.

**Leading Situationally:** While being able to coach is mandatory, it’s critical to know which type of coaching to offer based on the situation. When does a salesperson need direction? Support? Both? For example, a salesperson may be superb at presenting but struggles with prospecting. Another might be unparalleled in their product knowledge but stumble at the close. A one-size-fits-all approach won’t work in such a dynamic environment.

An effective sales manager will know this and lead situationally.

**Having Constructive Conversations:** A meaningful exchange between a sales manager and a salesperson depends on their communication skills.

The challenge is that most of us lack the skills to have constructive conversations. But show people how to be candid and curious—the two essential ingredients for an honest conversation—and they’ll have discussions that produce meaningful results.

The ability to have productive conversations also includes giving feedback—an unpleasant task for most sales managers. Giving feedback, though, is one of the best ways a sales manager can help a salesperson.

**Building Trust:** Trust is the foundation upon which all relationships are built. But trust between people and their managers is shockingly poor. Some 58% of employees trust strangers more than they trust their boss. A more distressing statistic: 64% of employees say they trust a robot more than they trust their boss.<sup>6</sup>

Managers can’t lead if their employees don’t trust them. Their people won’t excel. They may even actively undermine the manager. Work is nothing but struggle and strife.

Conversely, good managers know how to create trusting relationships and repair them when they are damaged.

**Helping People Navigate Change:** Changes come fast and furious in sales organizations. Common examples are launching new products or services, using a new CRM system, changing sales processes, and undergoing reorganizations. But because most leaders don’t know the predictable ways people react to change, they make the same mistakes again and again. The result is salespeople don’t adopt the new mindsets and behaviors needed to make change work. The statistics showing this are grim: Organizational changes fail 70% of the time. This hurts the bottom line.





## Transforming Sales Managers into Leaders

### What happens when you teach sales managers how to lead?

We've been doing this for 40 years and know first-hand the changes that take place when you teach the essentials of leadership. We share two case studies that describe our work for clients who had sales managers who were struggling.

### Coaching and SLII® at Global Industrial



Global Industrial sells more than one million products to help businesses run smoothly, from supplies for janitorial, plumbing, and electrical to material handling, office furniture, storage, and foodservice needs. A major company initiative included giving sales leaders the skills to coach their direct reports to learn a new selling process.

"We couldn't just roll out the sales training and hope that the sales leaders would be good coaches. We had to give them the skills," said Mike Haskins, Global Industrial's vice president of business development.

Global Industrial used Blanchard's SLII®, the most widely used leadership training program in the world, to accomplish this. SLII teaches leaders how to build meaningful connections with coworkers that create exponential impact. It does this by showing how to match the leadership style to a person's development level on a specific task.

Global Industrial delivered SLII training a few months prior to sales training, which gave leaders a chance to put their new skills into practice. Master tools include articles, videos, and worksheets to help prepare for goal-setting meetings, conversation starters for planning one-on-one meetings, and checklists for assessing the effectiveness of communications.

A development level dashboard was also created for leaders to use when monitoring the progress of each of their team members on a specific goal or task. The dashboard is a powerful tool for understanding which leadership style is needed in each situation and an easy-to-use visual representation of performance for everyone. Haskins also created a Leadership Development Council for people who had been through the SLII training.

Haskins shared the results of the work: "This initiative has been a priority at every level. From the aggressive training schedule and comprehensive sustainment plan to the visual reminders of the SLII Model represented on monitors around our facilities, this is now part of our business process."



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## SLII® at Takeda Pharmaceuticals



Takeda is a global pharmaceutical company that is dedicated to bringing better health and a brighter future to people around the world. The company launched a comprehensive sales approach that requires salespeople to have a firm grasp on their customers' needs. This included using critical thinking skills, conducting research, and putting a large amount of time into the preparation for each sales call.

A few months after the launch of the new selling approach, Takeda's L&D professionals realized that sales leaders needed more support as they coached their teams through this change in process.

"Our sales leaders needed to lead their teams through the steps of learning and applying the elements or key skills of the new sales approach. They were clear on the process itself, but they needed to be able to share examples of what a good job looked like for each of the elements," said Tim Funk, specialty training manager.

The sales force was already using SLII. Using it as the foundation, Funk and his teams mapped out the exact behaviors they wanted the salespeople to display at each development level for each of the skills of the sales approach. To round out the training, Funk had participants rehearse conversations with custom scenarios that were scripted for the development levels.

Funk worked with the Blanchard team to create a dashboard-type spreadsheet so that leaders could keep track of behavior changes in their direct reports. Leaders can view at a glance the development level of each member.

Funk had this to say about the initiative: "Regardless of the sales model you are using, SLII can help drive it deeper into your organization by improving the performance of your sales staff. You will increase the ROI on both products, improve revenue, and help people flourish in their roles."



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## Meeting the Quota Challenge: Critical Skills Every Sales Manager Needs to Excel

Most sales managers struggle to lead. This has significant costs that drag down the entire enterprise. Leadership development is a proven remedy. The right solution creates lasting changes that benefit sales managers, their teams, and the business.

Contact your Blanchard Sales Associate or call 760.233.6725 to get started.

### About The Ken Blanchard Companies®

The Ken Blanchard Companies is a global leader in management training, consulting, and coaching. For more than 40 years, Blanchard® has been helping organizations develop inspired leaders at all levels and create cultures of connection that unleash talent and deliver extraordinary results. Blanchard's SLII® powers inspired leaders and is the leadership model of choice for more than 10,000 organizations worldwide. Blanchard also offers a suite of other award-winning leadership development solutions through flexible delivery modalities to meet the specific needs of its clients. Learn more at [www.kenblanchard.com](http://www.kenblanchard.com).

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Leadership is something you  
do *with* people, not *to* people.

—Ken Blanchard  
Cofounder, The Ken Blanchard Companies



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