

Coaching That Drives Sales Performance

The Link Between Focused, High-Quality Coaching and Sales Results



Introduction

For more than a decade, sales and learning professionals have known that effective, high-quality sales coaching has a positive and profound impact on performance. There may have been studies before theirs, but in January 2011, Matthew Dixon and Brent Adamson published an article entitled '[The Dirty Secret of Effective Sales Coaching](#)' in Harvard Business Review.

Dixon and Adamson discovered, among other insights:

1. That coaching, “even world-class coaching — has a marginal impact on either the weakest or the strongest performers in the sales organization,”
2. “The real payoff from good coaching lies among the middle 60% — your core performers. For this group, the best-quality coaching can improve performance up to 19%,” and
3. “Even moderate improvement in coaching quality — simply from below to above average — can mean a six to eight percent increase in performance across 50% of your sales force.”

But questions remained.

In this overview, we answer the four remaining questions:



How do we identify “effective” or high-quality coaching?



What competencies do top managers focus their coaching on?



What else do Top-Performing managers do to drive results?



Can focus and quality be measured and used to inform manager development?

About Echelon

Echelon Performance was founded in 2006 and is dedicated to measurably and sustainably improving coaching.

At the time of this publication, Echelon has reviewed and analyzed nearly 35,000 field coaching reports as well as non-commercial coaching provided by clients through human resource management systems (e.g., PeopleSoft, et. al.)

Traditionally, Echelon reviews and analyzes sample coaching from each member of a client's management team.

Using criteria developed and refined over the past 17 years, Echelon will:

- » Benchmark the client's coaching effectiveness against the broader life sciences industry or therapeutic area.
- » Identify and quantify best practices leveraged by top-performing managers, and
- » Create organizational and/or individual learning pathways that close gaps in effectiveness between high and average-performing managers.



ECHELON



Methodology

For this study, Echelon conducted a meta-analysis of managers identified by their organizations as **top-performers** and compared their coaching with an equal number of managers selected at random.

Our goal was to identify what, if any, measurable differences could be seen between managers identified as top performers and their average-performing peers in terms of two key criteria:

- **Focus, and**
- **Coaching Quality***

In all, Echelon analysts reviewed 288 field coaching reports from the top-performing cohort (n=27 managers) and 260 coaching reports from average performers selected at random (n=28).

All the coaching reports in the study were completed and communicated over the same 20-month period.

* For an overview of coaching quality criteria – [BASICS – Please see slide 12](#)

Findings

Coaching from top-performing managers is significantly different from that of the average managers in four distinct ways. Top-performing managers:

1. Focused significantly more of their coaching on **customer engagement (i.e. selling) skills**
2. Used short- and long-term **skill development goals** to facilitate their coaching
3. Leveraged skill-building exercises to engage sales team members in their own development, post-coaching
4. Leveraged a **multi-modal approach** to coaching – field visits, virtual coaching, email, team calls – to create a coaching “eco-system”

1. Focus on Customer Engagement

Top-performing managers are 64% more likely to coach to customer engagement/selling skills.

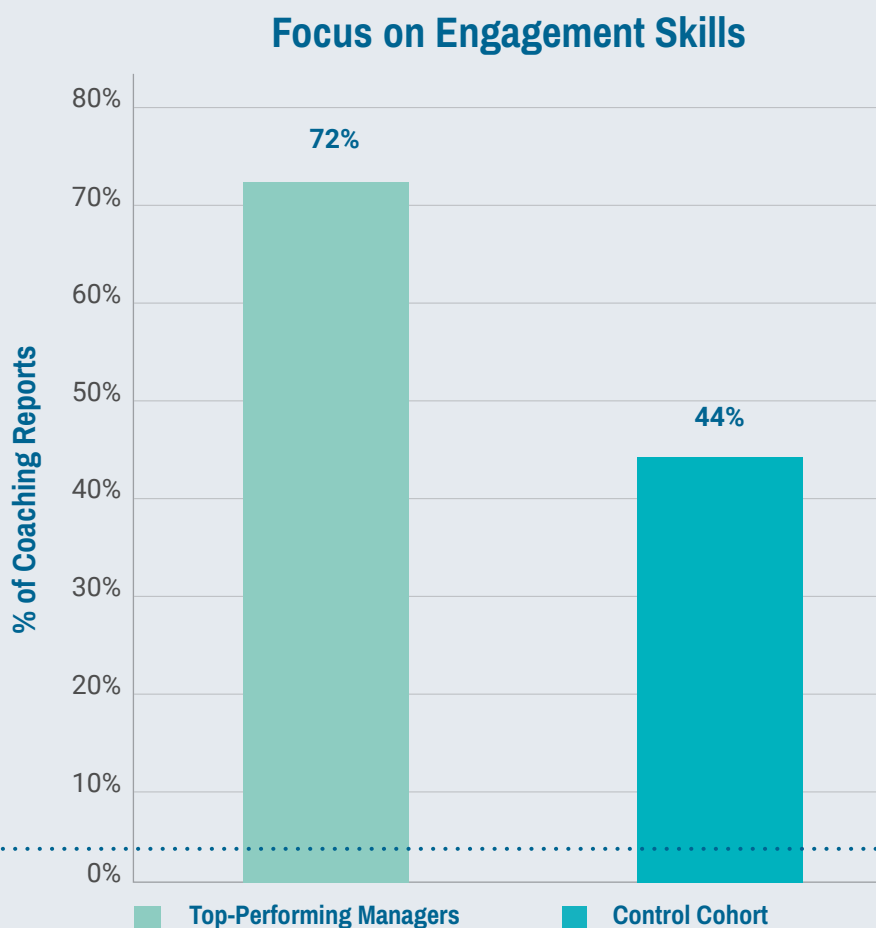
Of the field coaching reports completed by top-performing managers, 72% (n=207) included coaching to **customer engagement skills**.

- Overall, the most common skill coached by top-performing managers was gaining commitment/closing followed by probing/questions, call planning, and use of branded resources.

Coaching from top-performing managers was not limited to customer engagement skills. Top managers also coached more often to non-engagement skills such as business and account planning and collaboration.

In contrast, 44% of coaching reports from the average manager cohort included coaching to customer engagement.

In this group, the most common skills coached were messaging and probing/questions.



2. Skill Development Goals

Many of the field coaching report technologies available in the market today have the capability for managers and/or representatives to articulate development goals for a field visit. (short-term goals)

Many **systems** also have the capability for a manager and their representative to revisit **long-term development goals** (e.g., working on a specific skill for an extended period of time). *

In this analysis, Echelon reviewed these sections for:

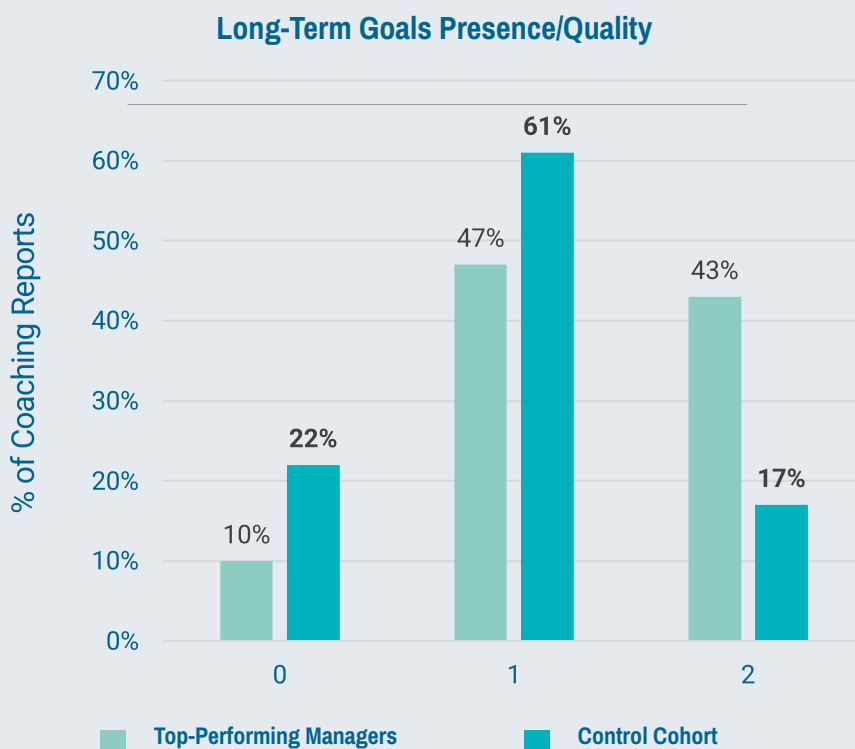
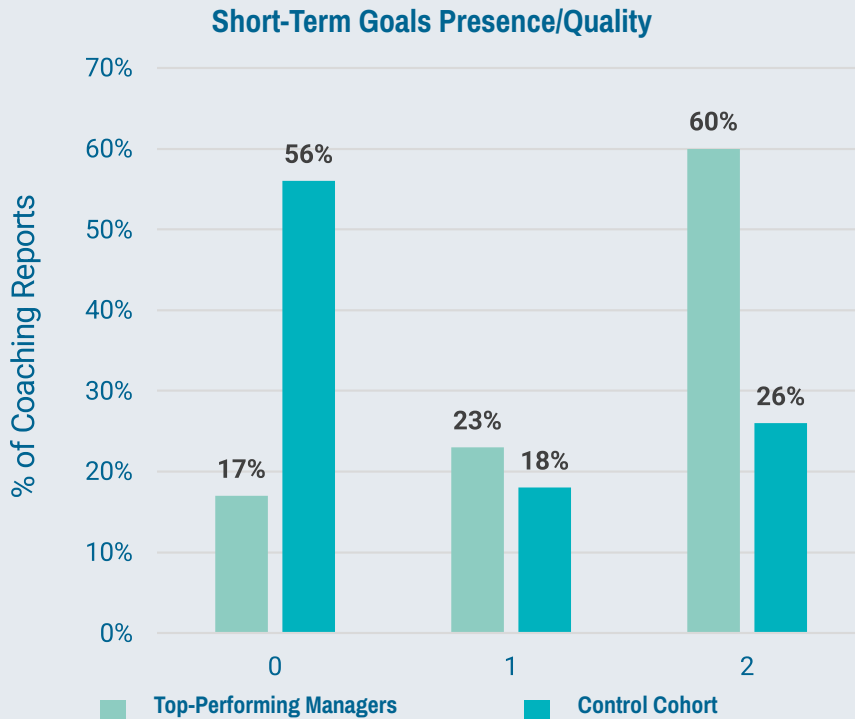
- The presence of long- and short-term goals, as well as
- The strength or quality of those goals.

In terms of strength/quality, we used a three-tier grading system:

- “0” reflected no use of the section
- “1” reflects minimal/incomplete use, and
- “2” is ideal (reflects SMART goal in long- and/or short-term setting).

* Not all coaching report technology/design supports this behaviour.

2. Skill Development Goals, continued



Top-performing managers are significantly more growth-oriented. As seen in the charts above, top performing managers were **more than twice as likely** to reinforce a **long-term development** goal in their coaching plan and more than **three times as likely** to include a skill development goal as part of their plan for their coaching visit.

In contrast, nearly one-quarter of average managers made no reference to a long-term development goal; more than half had no stated development goal for the **coaching visit**.

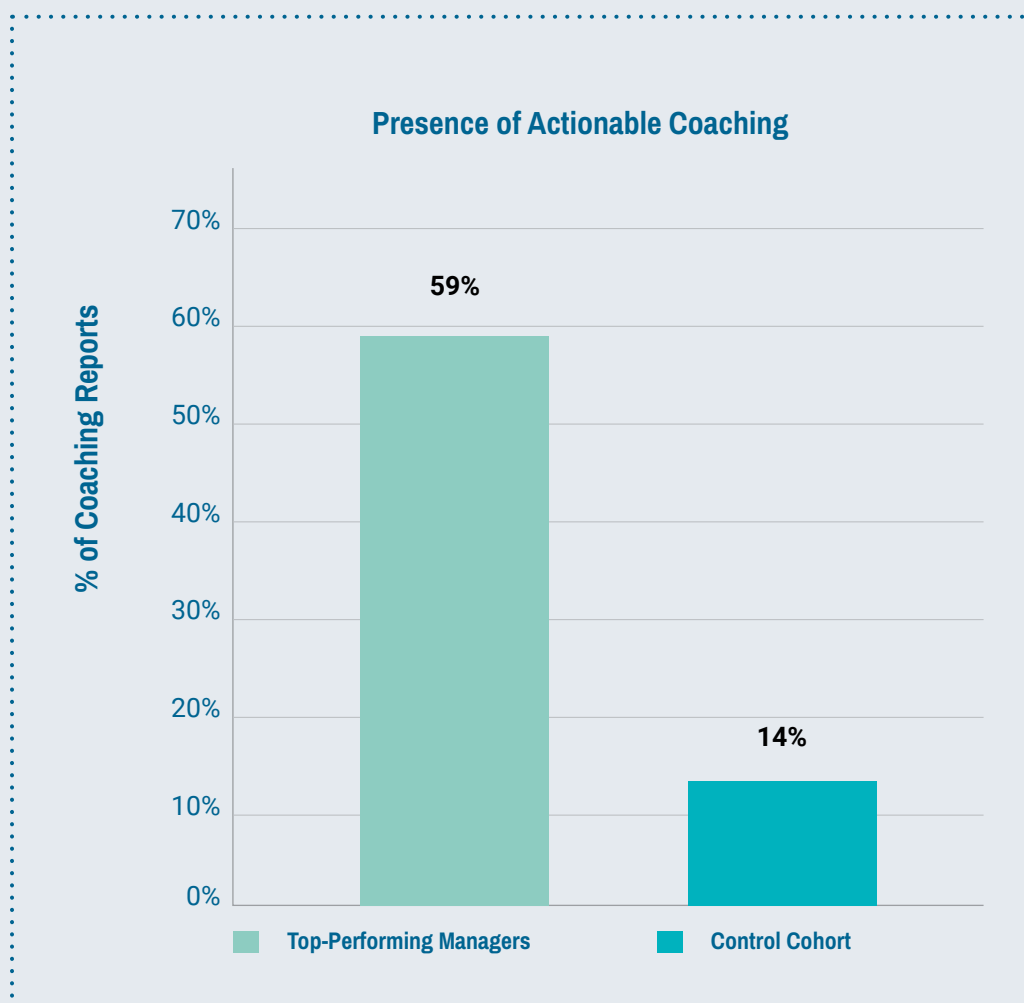
3. Skill-Building, Post-Field Visit

Top-performing managers are more than four (4) times as likely to engage team members in their own development.

Of all the BASICS criteria, the most significant difference between top and average managers was found in the use of **Actionable Coaching**.

- Actionable Coaching, by definition, involves a manager leveraging skill-building exercises to engage sales team members in their own development, **post-coaching**. The result is a sales team member that is more engaged in their own development.

In this analysis, 14% of coaching reports from the average manager cohort contained Actionable Coaching compared with 59% of top manager FCRs.



4. Multi-Modal Coaching

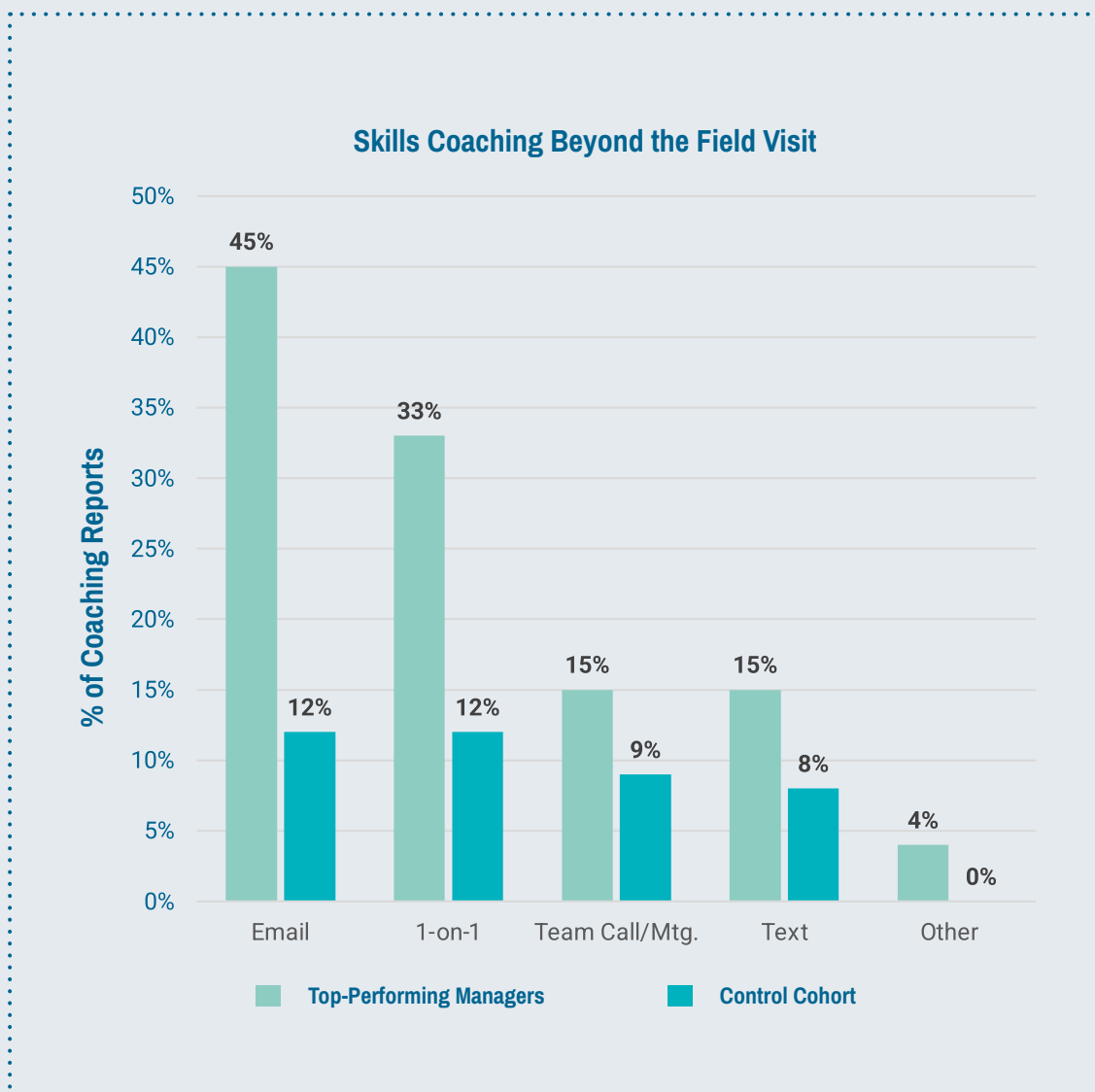
Top managers extend skills coaching beyond the field visit.

- Specifically, high-performing managers were more likely to refer to a wider variety of other resources and settings to support their skills coaching **in addition to the coaching report.**

Nearly half of coaching reports from top managers reference specific follow-up in the form of an email; one-third reference further discussion in an ensuing one-on-one.

The effect is two fold:

- Elevates the importance of skills coaching, and
- Top-performing managers create greater momentum and enthusiasm for professional development amongst their team members.



Summary

Overall, there are measurable differences between coaching provided by top- and average- performing managers in the life sciences industry. These differences fall into two main categories: focus and quality of coaching.

The four primary areas of differentiation:

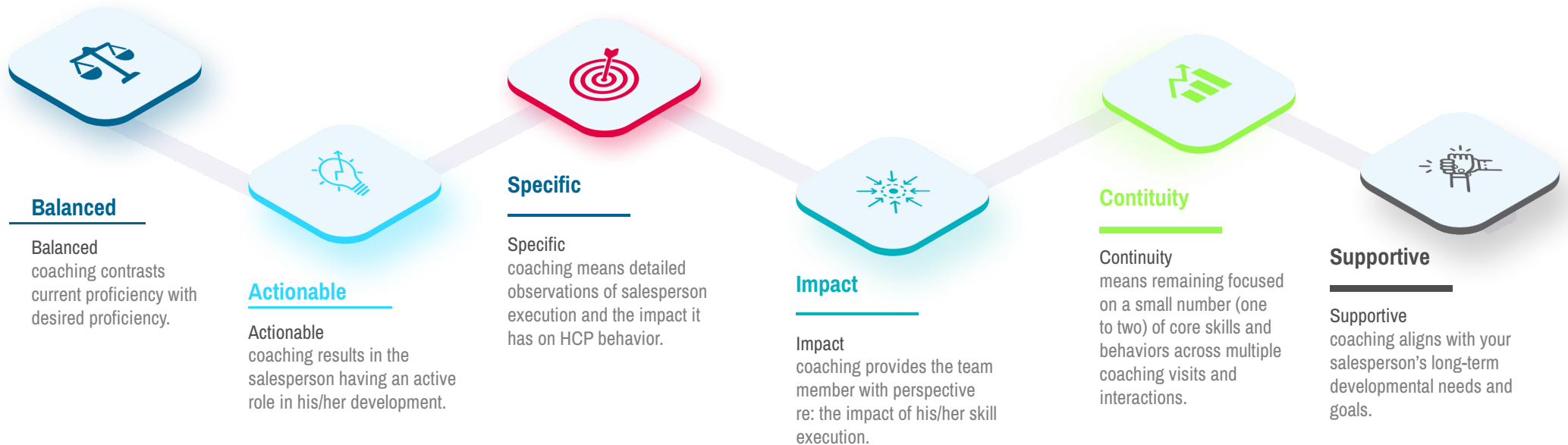
1. Coaching to customer engagement skills.
2. Leveraging short- and long-term skill development goals.
3. Engaging sales team members in their own development.
4. Creating a coaching eco-system are all skills that can and should be included in any coaching or leadership development curriculum.

The encouraging news for sales and training leaders is that each of these four behaviors can and should be included as part of the organization's leadership development and/or coaching curriculum.

In addition, in cases where an organization establishes a baseline in one or more of these four criteria, it should be able to demonstrate measurable growth over time.

BASICS of Coaching Quality

BASICS is an acronym developed by Echelon to represent the six criteria associated with high quality coaching.





Balanced

Balanced coaching contrasts current proficiency in a given skill with opportunities for growth.

Example: “You used excellent check in questions regarding the data. One area of opportunity would be to probe further around their decrease in our market share in the last two quarters feel confident and comfortable to probe further to uncover the true obstacle here and to move forward with a tailored solution.”



Actionable

Actionable coaching results in the salesperson having an active role in their own development.

Example: “Consider the three interactions we had today. How could you have used questions to deepen the conversation? Send me examples of three questions you’ll use next time, and we’ll review review them Friday.”



Specific

Specific coaching means detailed observations of salesperson execution.

Example: “At the sites we visited today, you did a nice job bringing the patient preference data into cost savings and presenting a cohesive message for the doctor to consider. Specifically, this allowed Dr. R. to make a more direct connection to their patients.”



Impact

Impact coaching provides the team member with perspective re: the impact of their skill execution or behavior.

Example: “You did an excellent job of reviewing patient profiles with the team at Allied Medical. Sometimes those group conversations can be difficult, but when you reviewed two profiles in particular – Dotty and Carl – three of the staff dove into a deeper discussion.”



Continuity

Continuity means remaining focused on core skills and behaviors across multiple coaching visits and interactions.

Example: “We’ve been focused on – and making considerable progress with - asking the ‘question behind the question’ in order to get to underlying and possibly unspoken issues or objections...we’ll continue to focus on this skill moving forward. For our one-on-one on Friday, please prepare.”



Supportive

Supportive coaching aligns with your salesperson’s long-term developmental goals.

Example: “We’ve spoken often about you achieving Chairman’s Club this year and what it will take to get there. One area that will continue to help you with that goal is call planning.”

Let's bring these insights to your commercial team. Contact Echelon at **732-305-0205** to start a no obligation preliminary analysis.



For more information on CoachAlytics, visit our web site at www.thinkechelon.com/leadershipdevelopment