



**Vantage Point Performance**  
BUILDING WORLD-CLASS SALES MANAGEMENT

**WHY SALES COACHING FAILS...**  
*AND A RESEARCH-BASED MODEL*  
*THAT WORKS*

Vantage Point Performance  
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## Coaching

As you read the word 'coaching' above, one of several thoughts might have come to mind. Perhaps you recalled the coaching model that your company wants you to use with your reps. Perhaps you were reminded that you haven't been doing enough of it recently. Or maybe you thought, "Oh boy. Here we go again with that coaching thing." Maybe all three. Maybe even more.

But we'd bet you didn't think about all the conversations that you had last week with your reps. All those interactions in the hallway, on the phone, and in the car. I bet the word 'coaching' took you to some place separated from your day-to-day reality... Some place that you visit now and again, but only as needed. A mystical world where the important things in life that you need to do (i.e., coaching) actually take precedence over the urgent things you *must* do (i.e., forecasting). If that's where your mind went, don't feel bad. The term 'coaching' used to take us there, too.

That is, until we conducted extensive research that revealed the new coaching frameworks in the best-selling book, *Cracking the Sales Management Code* (McGraw-Hill 2012). And until we deployed those frameworks in several Fortune 500 sales forces and witnessed the extraordinary impact of real-time coaching. Until we discovered that 'coaching,' as it has traditionally been defined, is inadequate to accomplish what it's intended to do – Directly affect a salesperson's performance. Each and every day. Consistently.

## The Problems with Traditional Coaching Models

There is nothing inherently wrong with the coaching models that we've been taught to date. And we should note that there are many such models – dozens if not hundreds. A recent Internet search turned up some examples below.

Whatever acronym you choose to use, these coaching frameworks all follow a somewhat similar formula:

1. Assess current performance
2. Identify gaps or areas for improvement
3. Develop a plan to close those gaps or capture that improvement
4. Act on that plan

There's nothing inherently wrong with these models – In fact they're quite useful. They are all intended to help a manager and rep step back, assess the big picture, create a plan for improvement, execute that plan, and assess the resulting outcomes. Really, the logic is unassailable. However, there are a couple of critical issues that keep these models from being sufficient to drive consistently improved sales performance in today's world.

*Issue #1: These models are not sales-specific*

The first issue with these traditional coaching models is that they aren't tailored to the sales force. Any manager in any organizational function could use these models to coach their direct reports. Financial managers and their analysts? Sure thing... GROW it. HR managers and their specialists? Absolutely... Go for the GAINS. Factory manager and their machinists? Why not... Share a CIGAR.

But the sales force is unique in many ways, and we deserve

### Examples of Traditional Coaching Models

**G:** Goals  
**R:** Reality  
**O:** Options  
**W:** Will

**C:** Current Reality  
**I:** Ideal  
**G:** Gaps  
**A:** Action  
**R:** Review

**C:** Contracting  
**L:** Listening  
**E:** Exploring  
**A:** Action  
**R:** Review

**A:** Assess Situation  
**C:** Creative Brainstorming  
**H:** Hone Goals  
**I:** Initiate Option Generation  
**E:** Evaluate Options  
**V:** Valid Action Plan  
**E:** Encourage Momentum

**O:** Outcome  
**S:** Situation  
**C:** Choices/Consequences  
**A:** Actions  
**R:** Review

**G:** Goal  
**A:** Assessment  
**I:** Ideas  
**N:** Next Steps  
**S:** Support

**P:** Preparation and Discovery  
**A:** Action  
**R:** Reflection and Insight  
**T:** Transformation  
**N:** New Possibilities  
**E:** Empowering Energy  
**R:** Results

**S:** Subject  
**T:** Target Identification  
**E:** Emotion  
**P:** Perception and Choice  
**P:** Plan  
**P:** Pace  
**A:** Adapt or Act

**S:** Spot the Opportunity  
**T:** Tailor the Intervention  
**E:** Explain the Task  
**E:** Encourage  
**R:** Review

**C:** Clarify the Issue  
**O:** Open Up Resources  
**A:** Agree the Preferred Future  
**C:** Create the Journey  
**H:** Head for Success

something a little better. Something that uses our own sales terminology and addresses our actual selling tasks. We couldn't just sit down and use finance's accounting systems, nor could they use our CRM application. So why should we both be using the same coaching model?

*Issue #2: These models are designed for periodic intervention and planning*

A bigger issue with traditional coaching models, though, is that they are designed as point-in-time interventions. They are used to press 'pause' on the salesperson's daily activities of making calls, chasing deals, and growing accounts. They are intended to force deliberation so the salesperson can objectively re-evaluate their path to success. This is why the term 'coaching' takes you to a faraway place – Such discussions must take place outside of the fray, and they are only needed periodically.

However, that pause button limits the usefulness of those models in driving sales performance. Coaching should actually take place *within* the context of those calls, deals, and accounts – Not high above them. Sales coaching needs to be a daily occurrence that improves the quality of a sales rep's activities, so the impact can be felt in real-time. Only then can coaching make the quantifiable impact that we all expect from it.

## Get Aligned

So why do these coaching models continue to be used by sales forces around the world? Well, frankly, because they *do* serve a purpose. Coaching frameworks like GROW, GAINS, and ACHIEVE are used to coach for *alignment*. They help sales managers and reps assess their current performance and align their future activities with desired performance. In essence these frameworks provide a venue for the coaching conversation, "Here's where you are, here's where you want to go, and here's how you can get there. Go do it, and the next time we meet, we'll see how it worked."

Make no mistake, periodic alignment is a necessary activity. Without it, workers churn their feet with their heads down and travel along their current path that might be leading them to failure. Our only gripe with 'alignment' coaching models is that they are not designed specifically for the sales force. When it's time for managers and their sellers to reconsider the right path to success, they need more than a generic acronym. They need something that defines an explicit path to quota.

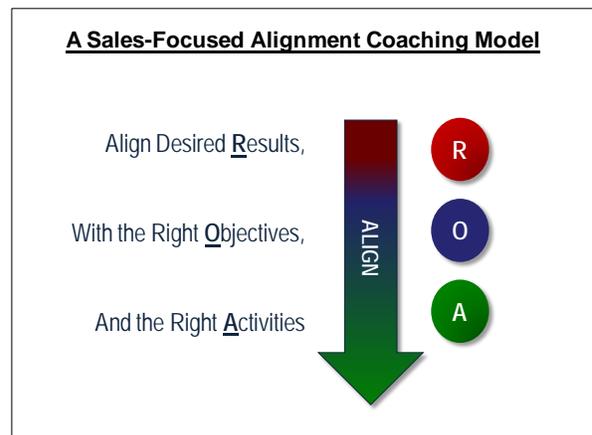
Our research revealed such a model that is actually quite simple. It contains only three discrete components that must be aligned: *Business Results*, *Sales Objectives*, and *Sales Activities*. These components also provide an intuitive path of

cause and effect... Simply stated, *Sales Activities* lead to the accomplishment of *Sales Objectives*, and *Sales Objectives* lead to attainment of *Business Results*.

For example, if a rep chooses to increase their volume of prospecting for new customers (an Activity), then it's reasonable to believe that they would acquire more new customers (an Objective). And if they capture more new customers, we would expect them to generate greater revenue (a Result).



Therefore the 'alignment' strategy in this model is to reverse-engineer the desired Result. That is, begin with a desired Result, select an Objective that will get you there, and identify the Activities that will help you accomplish that Objective. For example, if the seller needs a certain amount of additional revenue to make their quota (Result), you need to decide how many new customers they need to acquire to get there (an Objective). And given that number of new customers, you need to determine how much more prospecting they need to do to win those customers (Activity).



So how is the acronym AOR an improvement over GROW? Well, we believe in two critical ways. First, because the framework of Sales Activity → Sales Objective → Business Result puts the coaching conversation in terms that will

resonate with a sales force. As a salesperson, would you rather discuss Goals, Reality, Options, and Will, or Business Results, Sales Objectives, and Sales Activities? The more tactical and familiar you can make the alignment discussion, the more likely it is to become a reality.

Second, despite having only three components, the AOR framework is actually more robust than other models with longer acronyms. Traditional coaching frameworks tend to move straight from Results to Activities, skipping the critical step of Sales Objectives. The most classic example would be to plan to increase salesperson revenue by increasing their volume of sales calls.... Desired **Result** → Planned Activity.

However, it would be quite useful to know where those calls should be targeted. At prospects in order to gain new customers? At existing customers to grow those accounts? Understanding the Objective is an important stepping stone to identifying productive Activities.

## Now Execute

But our real issue with traditional coaching models is that they are designed solely for occasional intervention. And while periodic alignment is absolutely necessary, those models don't follow the salespeople into the field. Those models don't address the most critical determinant of sales performance and the thing that senior executives most want: Consistent execution.

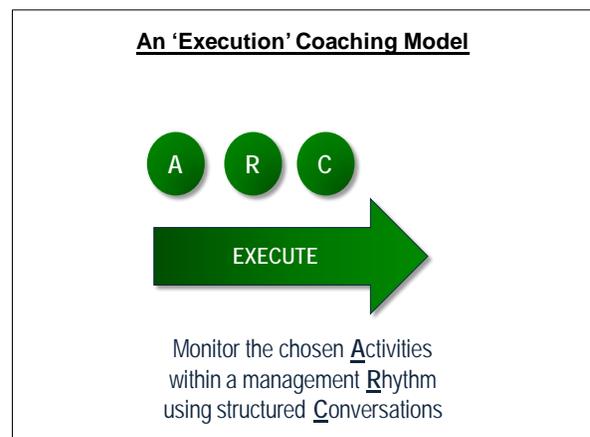
Sales managers and their reps leave alignment coaching discussions with action plans filled with activities that will lead to success. However, how does management ensure that those activities are taking place as predicted? Who is the seller actually visiting? Which deals are they actually pursuing? What kinds of conversations are they actually having? What is happening (or not) in their strategic major accounts?

What we need, then, is an 'execution' coaching model to complement the traditional alignment models. One that will bring the aligned activities to life to ensure that the results are attained. Without it, sales forces will periodically align and consistently fail to execute. Which happens every day. So what does execution coaching look like?

Our study of management best practices discovered that there is no magic to integrating periodic alignment into a daily execution – You just have to do it. The best coaches we've observed are very deliberate in setting aside time in their schedules to have conversations on execution. Sacred time. They realize that if they don't institute a formal management process (or rhythm), they will quickly fall into a reactive world where all the important stuff is pushed aside for the urgent.

Furthermore, within these 'execution coaching' meetings, there is even more rigor. The best coaches keep the conversation laser-focused on the activities that came from the alignment discussion. For example, if their sellers agreed to acquire new customers through increased prospecting activity, then the manager sets aside time to plan upcoming prospecting calls and qualify new opportunities. If the sellers agreed to grow their existing accounts through better account planning, then the manager sets aside time to review and discuss account plans. It's not rocket science, but it does take discipline.

Therefore, a new model emerged for execution coaching – embed the key Sales Activities in a formal Management Rhythm with Structured Conversations. We (very cleverly) call this the A-R-C model of coaching, which ensures that the A's of the Activities-Objectives- Results alignment conversations do follow the reps to the field in a deliberate and predictable fashion.

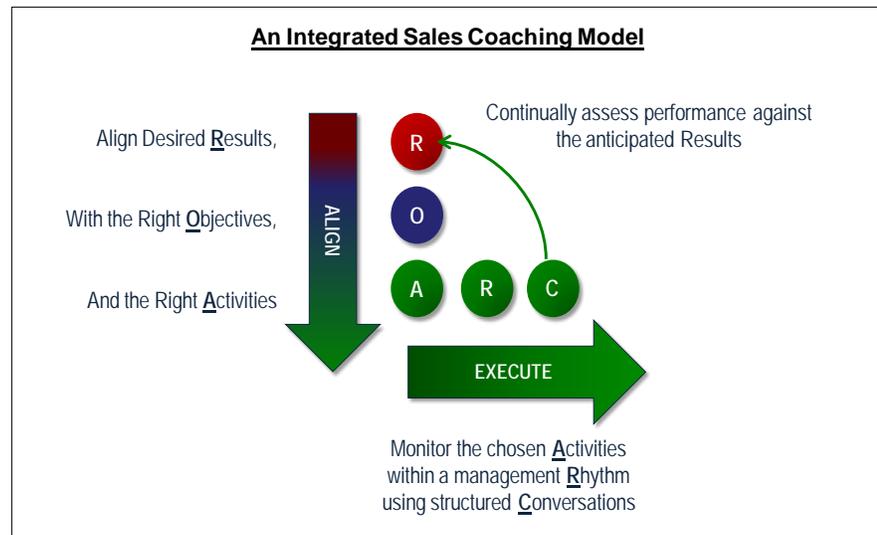


## And Dreams Become Reality

When we combine that AOR alignment model with the ARC execution model, we form a comprehensive coaching framework that ensures both alignment *and* execution. The acronyms might not be as catchy as GROW and CIGAR, but they are specific to the sales force and integrated into the day-to-day doings of sellers.

So this is what we hope 'coaching' will look like in the near future. Gone are the inspirational images of coaching where the urgent things suddenly give way to the important, and intermittent conversations somehow find their way into daily activities. Instead, intermittent conversations actually *do* find their way into daily activities in a structured and predictable way.

Link your desired Results to reasonable Objectives and then to Activities. Discuss those Activities in a regular Rhythm with structured Conversations. Then your coaching will finally have a direct affect on sales rep performance. And isn't that exactly what coaching is supposed do?



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