**The Dreaded “Got a Minute?” Meeting**

A person sitting at a table in front of a window

Description generated with high confidence

"Got a minute?” meetings give you the opportunity to tell your people what to do or coach them to solve and own the problem. Great sales managers coach because they are looking for commitment rather than compliance.

*Management is a series of interruptions which are constantly being interrupted by more interruptions.*

Maybe you’ve already noticed.

The most common interruption is the “Got-a-minute? meeting.” When you take that meeting, you’d better have at least fifteen minutes.

When you’re a new manager, you look forward to these meetings, so you can fix the problems your people bring you and send them on their way. You think this is what managers are supposed to do.

It feels good at first. Your people need you. Plus, it makes you feel smart.

The downside of fixing problems and giving answers is you are training your people to bring you more and more problems to fix. So that’s exactly what they do. This chews up big chunks of your day. You gradually start to resent the fact that everyone on your team gets to leave at 5:00 PM while you’re still there working on your “other job”; the rest of your manager job.

The alternative to fixing people’s problems is helping them come up with their own fixes. This is also called “coaching.” The best definition of coaching I’ve come across comes from the Leaders’ Guide to the training video *The Helping Hand* by Myles Downey:

“Coaching is a system of staff development that allows the subordinate to learn by a process of discovery through guided discussion and hands-on experience.”

Now, the way you go about launching employees on their own personal voyage of discovery is simple, but not easy. You must ask them questions instead of giving answers. And you must do this even when the answer is obvious to you. That’s why it’s so hard. You could give them the answer and send them on their way. I’m asking you to invest extra time to coach them today, so they won’t keep coming back to you with more fires for you to put out.

**Chris Lytle’s First Rule of Coaching**: **Ask at least seven questions before giving the answer.**

I can almost hear you protesting that you don’t have time to ask seven questions because people are lined up at the door to drink in your wisdom. However, l would admonish you that your real job is developing your people, so they can do their jobs at least as well as *you* can do their jobs. Nowhere in your job description does it state that you should be doing their jobs for them. Management is getting results *through* the people who report to you, not *for* them.

Telling isn’t coaching. Asking is.

For example:

1. How would you start to solve this problem?
2. What is the best outcome you can visualize?
3. What else have you thought of?
4. If I weren’t here what would you do?
5. What would be the consequences of your current choice?
6. What is your first step?
7. When will you take it?

Those aren’t necessarily the seven questions you will ask. The fact that you must ask seven questions (That’s the rule!) means that you must listen to the people with the problems. Ask a question about the problem and listen some more. Ask another question based on the answer they give you. Repeat.

By the time you’ve asked the seventh question, the person being coached usually has figured out how to proceed without being told what to do. An added benefit to this process is that people who come up with their own answers are more motivated to implement them. People rarely resist their own ideas. If you want more buy-in, then coaching is the best way to get it.

There’s an added benefit to taking the time to coach. You make people feel their opinions count. Coaching makes people feel they matter and are important to you and the company. These are things for which you should *always* make time. Sitting down with your people to find out who they are, what they want, how they think and what they are thinking is mission-critical management “stuff.”

James Thurber said, “It is better to have some of the questions than all of the answers.” That’s worth memorizing.

Every single “Got-a-minute?” meeting presents an opportunity for you to do one-on-one questioning or one-on-one telling. By asking the right questions enough times your people gradually quit lining up at your door. You see, they’ve learned to ask themselves the same questions they know you would ask them, if they came to you with another problem.

This is a critical part to developing the people who develop your profits.

That’s what top sales managers do.

So, when will you start?

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