

# Creating a Coachable Culture



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# Creating a Coachable Culture

BY PAUL NOLAN

What is a coaching culture and why is it important? The [Forbes Coaches Council](#) states, “a coaching culture simply means supporting your employees so they learn new skills and become greater assets to the company.”

The common theme behind instilling a coaching culture, as stated by the [Hudson Institute of Coaching](#), is “coaching improves performance, increases retention, creates higher levels of engagement and provides tools and proven processes for developing leaders both in the moment and in the longer-term coaching engagement.”

Study after study shows that top performers choose to work at companies in large part because of their culture, including a commitment to developing employees at all levels.

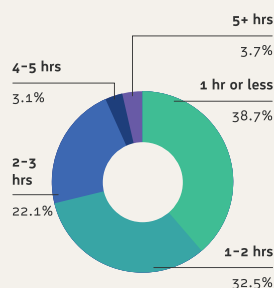
Many companies profess to make coaching and skills training a priority, but how many actually do? A recent State of Sales Coaching report by ringDNA, developers of revenue acceleration software for Salesforce CRM users, indicates there is more preaching than teaching occurring in B2B sales environments.

The State of Sales Coaching study shows that approximately half of sales leaders report spending less than one hour per

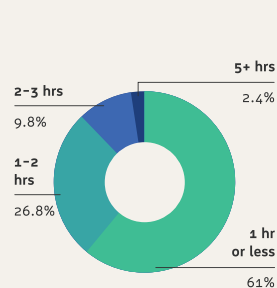
week per rep on coaching. This despite evidence that 61.4% of companies with effective coaching programs in place spend more than an hour per rep per week compared to only 38.7% among companies where coaching is ineffective.

How much time do you currently spend coaching each rep per week?

Coaching is effective



Coaching is not effective



## FEATURE STORY

Other key discoveries about coaching culled from the ringDNA study include:

### Coaching Ownership Matters

Nearly half (49.5%) of the companies surveyed said the responsibility of coaching fell on sales managers. However, digging deeper into effectiveness, organizations that have dedicated coaches are more successful with their coaching programs. This could be for a number of reasons:

- Sales managers have to juggle coaching with other priorities whereas coaches do not.
- The hiring of a coach could signal greater institutional buy-in for coaching programs.
- Coaches may be part of a greater coaching curriculum.

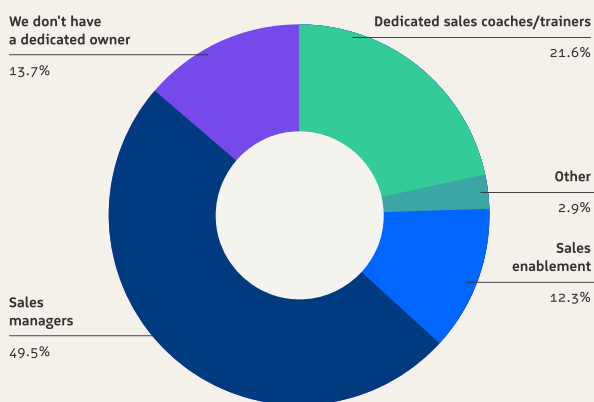
Regardless of the reason, the correlation is clear. More companies are contracting for regular coaching, Tyree said.

### The Number of Reps Per Coach Matters

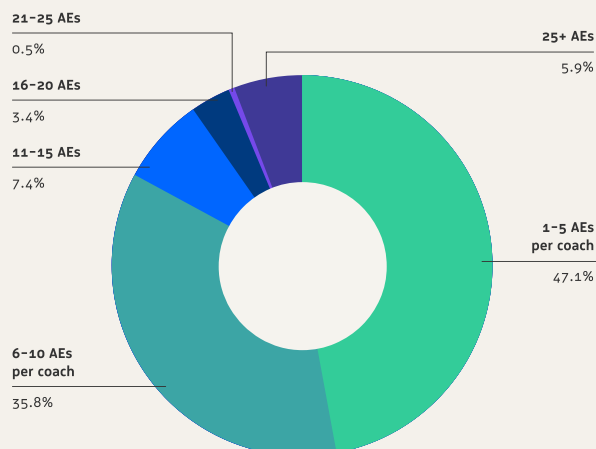
Most companies (47.1%) have one to five AEs per coach, with the next most common ratio being 6 to 10 AEs per coach. Companies with effective coaching programs are more likely to have few reps per coach. It stands to reason when you have fewer reps per coach, they are able to spend more time with each rep and receive more personalized feedback.

It's also worth noting that external evidence suggests AI-powered coaching tools can actually decrease the number of sales managers needed. The ringDNA report states the number of reps sales managers can comfortably manage as much as doubles when leveraging the right tools. (See page 6.)

Who is responsible for leading sales coaching at your company?

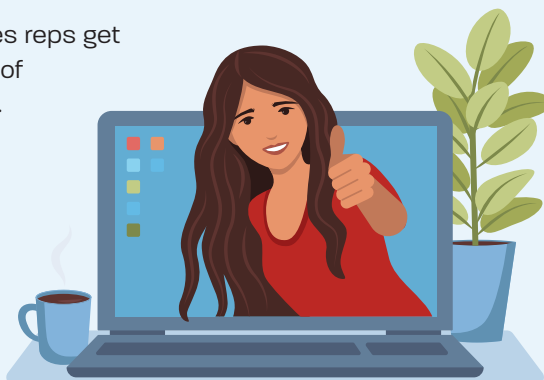


How many AEs per sales coach do you have?



## Key Findings from ringDNA “State of Sales Coaching” Study

- Scaling coaching is the No. 1 priority among sales teams.
- The majority of sales reps get less than one hour of coaching per week.
- Remote sales reps get less coaching from managers.
- At least 70% of all sales coaching is not data-driven.
- Having regularly scheduled coaching sessions leads to both better coaching effectiveness and rep satisfaction.
- Effective coaching programs focus on how to ask better discovery questions, while ineffective programs focus on how to handle common sales objections.
- Companies that choose which calls to coach at random are more likely to have ineffective coaching.



## FEATURE STORY

### The Pandemic Added to the Problem

The transition to virtual selling during the pandemic seems to have exacerbated the preexisting problem of lack of coaching. According to the report, nearly half of sales development reps and account executives report receiving less coaching while working remotely.

The remote work world happened almost instantly for most companies in 2020. If there wasn't much sales coaching happening when workers were in the office, it wasn't likely to happen once the pandemic forced teams to work remotely. Some sales teams are transitioning to in-office work again, but for those maintaining an aspect of working remotely, Steli Efti, CEO of Close, a provider of inside sales CRM, says sales leaders must structure a detailed sales coaching plan and stick to it.

Writing for [Forbes.com](https://www.forbes.com), Efti's tips include setting a clear agenda for each one-on-one (with both parties taking responsibility for the meeting), scheduling time to listen to sales calls, developing peer learning sessions, and scheduling virtual sales huddles to share wins and commiserate on losses.

Time together as a group is important, whether it's remotely or in person. However, Marianna Tu and Michael Li, writing for [Harvard Business Review](https://hbr.org), emphasize that one-on-one time is where true mentoring occurs.

"Investing time in meaningful, deep connections with individuals one-on-one can be a refreshing change and a chance for more authentic connection. Guided dialogue and discussion questions will help mentoring pairs uncover their

common humanity — no matter how different they may seem on the surface," they state.

### Proven ROI

"A coaching culture enables a radical organizational transformation by building coaching skills and fostering coaching conversations on a daily basis," writes Frederic Funck, the [Center for Creative Leadership's](https://www.creativeleadership.com) director of executive coaching programs. He adds that a coaching culture creates an environment where people can freely give and receive feedback, stretch each other's thinking and engage in development conversations that may be short, but have lasting impact.

Funck says his organization saw firsthand the impact of coaching when it worked with a client in the banking sector that introduced structured coaching throughout its organization in response to feedback that revealed issues around engagement and motivation stemming from a transition in leadership.

Approximately 500 managers spent two hours (in increments of 30 minutes) addressing their particular needs with a coach over the phone. In a follow-up survey, the managers reported collectively that simple coaching conversations were worth the equivalent of 3 million euros based on an aggregate value of time spared, decisions made, actions taken, proposals won and conflicts managed.

States Funck, "A coaching culture improves not only the way employees interact with each other, but also the interactions they have with customers and potential clients." **SMM**

## Receiving Coaching Reinforces Its Importance

One argument for bringing workers back into offices when it is safe to do so is the notion that an organization's culture is established a great deal by in-person interactions. Companies strive for strong organizational cultures, but those can't exist without a coaching culture being a constant component, says John Mattone, an executive coach.

"A coaching culture helps people at all levels improve employee engagement, empowers people to excel at their tasks, emphasizes the importance of personal and professional development, rewards creativity, and helps people take pride in their responsibilities," states in a [blog post](#).



"When top leadership only focuses on profit and loss statements, they may think they're looking at 'the big picture,' but in fact they're missing quite a bit. Employees must often make quick decisions based on changing conditions, and to do this effectively, they must be empowered and motivated. You don't do that by putting them through a dry training initiative and turning them loose, but by training and coaching, and helping them learn about themselves, processes and how to self-correct."

Mattone says one of the best ways company leaders can instill a coaching culture is to engage a coach (or coaches) for themselves.



Another critical component of a coachable culture is one that doesn't get mentioned as much — recognition. "Another major area of a positive company culture involves both positive and constructive feedback for employees.

If an employee does an exceptional job on a specific project or task, acknowledgment and rewards encourage that employee to keep up the good work," he says. "Whereas, if an employee is struggling with a project or task, it is important for their superiors to provide constructive feedback and proper training so that the employee can continue to improve in the respective area they may be lacking in.



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# Scale Your Coaching Capabilities With AI

With research showing that B2B buyers are spending less and less time with sales reps while considering a purchase, every interaction becomes that much more important, says William Tyree, chief marketing officer at ringDNA.

“Everything that’s being sold is getting more complex. Reps have to digest and understand incredibly complex information. Marketplaces are getting more niche, and the days of sales apprenticeships are long gone. There has been a two decades-long push to shorten the ramp cycles for reps and get them selling faster. How can you make it work across a team of reps?” Tyree asks.

His answer: technology.

The pandemic increased reliance on technology, but ringDNA research shows that sales leaders are not taking advantage of data-driven teaching tools that can improve sales performance.

Nearly four in 10 companies (38%) that coach reps on sales call performance do so “at random,” while another 32% coach reps only on their most recent calls. “This means that 70% of coaching is not driven by data. Consequently, companies that coach this way report having low effectiveness in their coaching programs,” the report states.

Software can automate some coaching tasks, giving back time to busy coaches. According to RingDNA’s “State of Sales” report, companies where coaching is effective are much more likely to have a real-time coaching solution in place. “We are not advocating

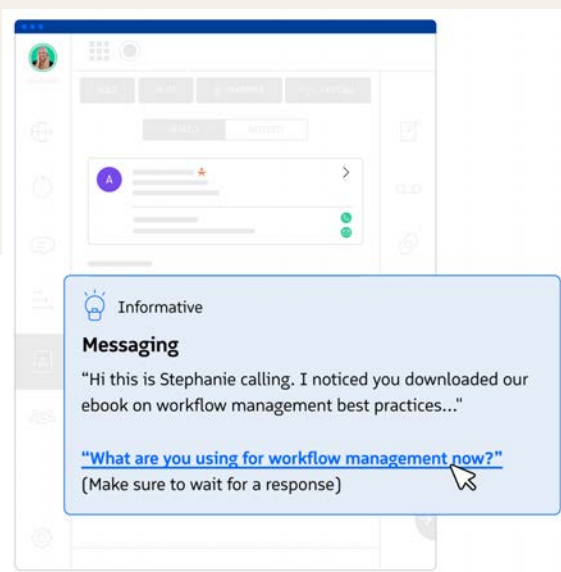
for software to replace coaching – nothing can replace a good coach,” the report states. “However, technology can increase the effectiveness of all coaching.”

Artificial intelligence tools such as ringDNA’s Yoda AI provides reps real-time guidance on sales and support calls, providing contextual information that can help them respond to objections or present the right messaging when a prospect brings up a competitor or discusses pricing. Gong.io and Chorus from ZoomInfo provide similar real-time feedback for sales reps.

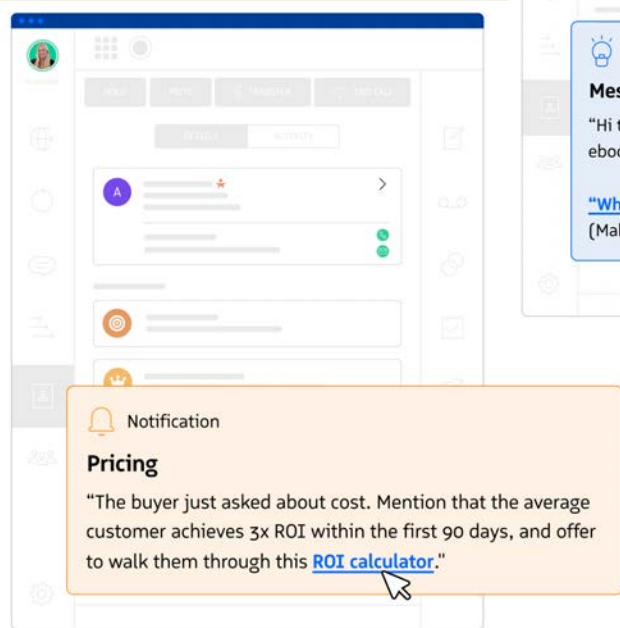
“The blend of empowering coaches and the reps with these

tools is incredibly powerful,” Tyree said. “These tools allow sales leaders to be as effective as sports coaches. If you were a basketball coach a couple decades ago, you didn’t have the analytics that you have today. You might watch game tape to help coach players. Today, it’s about using analytics to determine how

successful you are taking shots from different points on the court, and using data analysis from a number of games to hone in on specific things to help a player’s game. AI-powered sales training applies that same concept.”



*RingDNA's Yoda AI provides reps real-time guidance on calls.*



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# How to Manage Remote Sales Teams in 2021

BY DAVID FLETCHER

Remote work went mainstream in 2020, and the forced experiment showed us that working from home doesn't have to derail productivity. In fact, a 2020 survey from FlexJobs shows that [51% of respondents said they feel more productive in their home office](#) than at a traditional workplace. Because of distancing requirements, employee sentiment and the efficiency gains associated with well-managed remote work, I expect less than half of companies to shift entirely back to the office in 2021.

However, managing remote employees — especially a remote sales team — isn't easy. It requires changes in technology, managerial mindset and culture to succeed. Because our company's employees are distributed internationally, 60% of our sales teams operated remotely even before the pandemic.

Here's how we drew on our remote team-management experience to take the rest of our sales staffers remote and set them up for long-term success.

## Choose the Right Communication Tools

When your sales team is remote, good technology is what holds you together. I'm on the East Coast, but I have staff on the West Coast and in Australia, so I have to manage conversations across a broad range of time zones. A reliable time zone app or world clock is helpful for scheduling team meetings that work for everyone.

Another challenge is that most people use multiple apps for communication and collaboration. To keep everyone in the loop, set expectations and meet deadlines you need to find and implement the technology that works best to support your entire team. Whatever you choose must

- Allow collaboration
- Operate reliably
- Work for everyone on your team, not just one or two people

Finding the right tools can take time as well as trial and error, but it's critical to helping your team stay connected.

## Set Clear Expectations and Make Them Visible

Managing sales data remotely requires clear expectations. In an office, you might check in with your team frequently and have a leaderboard on the wall. When you're remote, you should still have those check-in discussions about your goals, but your leaderboard will be virtual.

To keep everyone on the same page and motivated, you can keep your most current data in your CRM, in your communication channels, in spreadsheets

or wherever it's easiest for your team to see it. Regardless of how you share your sales data, the dashboards and the CRM platform you use should always be up to date.



## Model Work/Life Balance to Avoid Burnout

As productive as working from home can be, the setting creates some challenges. One is the distraction that comes from sharing space with family members who are also working or learning from home. It's important to be understanding about the interruptions and tasks your team members have to deal with while they're working remotely.

Another big challenge is the need to unplug and recharge. It's hard to get away from your work at home. It's especially hard to decide you're not going to respond to an email from your boss after hours, which is how some people end up working almost around the clock.

This can lead to burnout, and it's on leaders to promote and model work-life balance. Reach out to team members who've been working long hours and tell them to take a break. Set boundaries, too.

For example, I don't email my people after hours even if that's when I'm working, because I don't want them to feel obligated to respond right away. Instead, I write the email and schedule it to be delivered during their normal work hours. I'm able to write the message and I don't have to remember to do it the next morning, but I'm also respecting my team's work-life balance and boundaries.



## Collaborate Consistently

Supporting your team requires one-to-one coaching, pipeline meetings, strategy calls and other modes of collaboration. The key is having these interactions consistently, which is hard to do in an office and even harder when you're remote. However, this consistency helps us feel more connected and motivated. For example, a Monday morning sales meeting and Friday morning pipeline review help everyone stay prepared and excited about work.

You can also set up what we call virtual ride-alongs. In an old-school ride-along, a sales leader would "ride along" with a sales rep on their calls to see how they're doing and offer feedback. You can do the same thing over Zoom or Teams, joining calls as an observer or maybe as a participant. However, the ride-along is most effective if you let your team lead while you take notes instead of taking over the call.



## Offer Remote Training and Events

The best teams work well together as colleagues and as people and getting to know each other well requires time. To help our remote teams bond, we alternate monthly webinars and what we call "lunch and learns." These events are optional, and typically a few hundred folks have their lunch during the session while they get training on a topic like sales strategy, methodology or case studies.

At these events, allow the team to interact instead of just controlling the mic yourself. That way your team has a chance to learn more about each other, like their families or their interests outside of work. It's important for companies to embrace that kind of conversation in an era where teams can't meet up for a coffee or a drink.

Another way to strengthen your teams is to livestream any on-site events so they can participate. For example, if you have a guest speaker in to the office, off-site employees need to be able to join in remotely. Treating all your employees the same goes a long way toward maintaining morale.



## Remote Sales Team Success

If we've learned anything from our remote teams during this pandemic, it's that work can be completed at home as long as employees have the right technology, up-to-date information and opportunities to connect and share ideas. As long as your employees feel connected and have a level of trust, they'll feel like part of the business no matter where they are, which means they can do great work from just about anywhere. **smm**

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**Incorporate Zoom "ride-alongs" into your remote training, but let your reps lead the call and save your coaching for afterward.**

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David Fletcher serves as senior vice president at [ClearSale](#), a card-not-present fraud prevention operation that helps retailers increase sales and eliminate chargebacks before they happen. At ClearSale, he spearheads business development, sales, partnerships and alliances with top e-commerce organizations. Follow on [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), Twitter [@ClearSaleUS](#).

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# Coaching for Stronger Virtual Teams

BY WILLIAM J. ROTHWELL & CHO HYUN PARK

COVID-19 has been a gamechanger in how and where we work. That is no less true for sales and marketing professionals as it is for most other workers. A potential 56% of U.S. workers could work from home. About 39% of workers have indicated a willingness to take a pay cut if their employers will permit them to continue working from home full or part time after the pandemic is vanquished.

Working in virtual settings creates new challenges for sales and marketing managers. Those wishing to create coaching cultures with virtual workers may find that effort complicated. It's one thing to work together face-to-face; it's another thing to work together from home — or from other venues.

Virtual coaching focuses on helping teams interact more effectively. Virtual coaches understand that working together in virtual settings differs from working together in traditional settings. Albert Mehrabian, a professor of psychology and expert on verbal and nonverbal communication, found that only 7% of communication is carried out by spoken word, while 93% is done through nonverbal actions such as facial expression, tone of voice and body language. In virtual meetings, most body language is lost when so-called talking heads come together in meetings. Add to that the difficulties of communicating with the technology, which introduces issues working on a new technological platform. (Research indicates the most common phrase used on Zoom is the gentle scolding phrase, “You are on mute.”)

## The Specialty of Virtual Coaching

Virtual coaching can be carried out by sales managers, workers, HR professionals and anyone else who has received proper training. Facilitating a group and staying on task and on the agenda is one thing; watching a group to offer advice on how to improve group dynamics is another. While a sales manager typically focuses on getting through the agenda, the virtual coach focuses on (among many other things):

- Who talks
- What people talk about
- How people talk to each other
- How often people participate



- When people participate
- What feelings and facts are communicated in the group

Virtual coaches focus attention on improving human interaction over electronic platforms such as video conference or audio conference. An important assumption of virtual coaches is that the channel of communication — that is, the virtual environment — affects human interactions differently than traditional residential interactions. How people work together to achieve results is simply different when carried out over electronic channels.

A virtual coach also helps create a virtual coaching culture. A coaching culture is a work environment where coaching is valued and demonstrated regularly. A virtual coaching culture is a work environment where people who work from home are encouraged to feel more closely aligned to the corporate culture and will coach each other.

Much has been written on coaching cultures generally. Culture is important because it can affect the reputation of your organization as an employer of choice, the willingness of top talent to apply to your organization, the rates of absenteeism and turnover in your organization, and even engagement levels. When people feel more aligned to the organization in which they work, they feel greater pride in their employer and more engaged in what they do and who they serve. Given that the typical issues in a virtual workplace are a lack of a sense of

belonging, engagement, and motivation, as well as limited opportunities to build a trust relationship among members, the importance of creating a virtual coaching culture becomes great.

There are two approaches to building a virtual coaching culture. One is to focus on issues in a virtual organization. People pinpoint issues that should be resolved or areas that could be improved, develop solutions together, and implement them to enhance a virtual coaching culture. Many useful tips can help to build a virtual coaching culture in sales and marketing organizations. How well is your organization building a virtual coaching culture and what areas could be improved? Here's what you should focus on:

- Talk about coaching to others.
- Discuss the differences between working in face-to-face and virtual settings.
- Take the time for small talk, which is often neglected in virtual settings.
- Devote as much attention to how people feel about the meetings as you do about the work tasks to be accomplished.
- Have managers set the example by showing what coaching looks like.
- Reward workers who set a positive example by contacting others in virtual settings to make sure they are all right and have what they need to work.
- Ask questions about how the group is working together—and try to facilitate ways to improve group dynamics.
- Make sure that technology is not a barrier to human interaction but is taken advantage of as a tool to bring people closer.
- Open a virtual meeting by asking how people are feeling about their relationships—and to say one thing to compliment one or more people in the group.
- Close a virtual meeting by asking how the group can work together more effectively.

The other approach to establishing a virtual coaching culture is to intensify positivity. A positive approach focuses on:

- Identifying what strengths a virtual sales and marketing organization has based on what it has done.
- Imagining what a virtual sales and marketing organization can do based on its strengths identified.
- Creating strategies for a virtual sales and marketing organization to enhance its coaching culture based on what it did and what it can do in the future.
- Implementing the strategies to build a coaching culture of a virtual sales and marketing organization.

To make this positive approach to creating a virtual coaching culture more effective, trust, affection, communication, aspiration and accountability are the important elements that need to be shared by people. At the same time, these are also what virtual group coaching focuses on to enhance group process and dynamics. As mentioned earlier, due to the use of different communication channels, communication in virtual settings loses much of nonverbal communication that is critical in forming trust relationships and amicable feelings among members. This is why virtual group coaching emphasizes building trust and helping relationships in enhancing group dynamics. The positive approach is useful not only in establishing a virtual coaching culture but also in helping virtual group coaching be more effective and successful. **SMM**

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## 3 Steps to More Effective Virtual Coaching

The COVID-19 pandemic was in its early stages when Scott Cassidy, vice president of marketing for ASLAN Training and Development, posted some [tips for virtual coaching](#). Even back in May 2020, Cassidy realized that remote teams would likely outlast the pandemic. His recommendations:

**Observe Remotely** – Use the technology at your disposal and have your reps record their meetings,

and then use the recording of the video conference or phone call to break down the interaction and coach. Note: Be sure to get your customer's permission, but most won't have a problem with it. If it helps the rep improve or helps them serve the client better, both sides win.

**Remote Role Play** – If you can't capture a real video conference or phone call, you can role play with

your sales rep. Be the customer and record the role play interaction. Listen together and coach from there.

**Self-Evaluation** – Another coaching tactic, and an important skill for all reps to have in general, is self-evaluation. Give your rep an outline of questions to go over and answer after each sales call in order for them to evaluate their own capabilities.

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