

If you're my coach – Don't confront me with my failures

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It's been nearly a month since my last post – and that's really a long gap for me. Ok, I was on vacation in Languedoc in France (isn't that a wonderful name – translates literally to the 'language of yes'), but I've also been traveling extensively meeting customers. Then, earlier this week I receive an email from an avid reader of the blog (yes, there are some) who said "You know you've not posted forever! What's up?" Well, of course I know that. I really don't need to be reminded – even if the motivation behind the email was good. The email did serve a purpose though – well two actually. Firstly, it prompted me to revisit a post I did about two years ago called "Don't confront me with my failures" which as you will see below considers the dynamics between salesperson and manager when coaching, and secondly it prompted me to highlight once again the key benefits of sales coaching, something that's very much to the fore in the minds of the customers I've been visiting with. I wrote about that in June in a post [3 Golden Rules for Effective Sales Coaching](#), and it struck a chord with many. It might be worth a look.

There's a [Jackson Browne](#) song called *These Days* which he wrote at the tender age of sixteen. One of the lines in the song goes "*Don't confront me with my failures, I have not forgotten them.*" A sixteen year-old wise beyond his years. For those of you not old enough to remember Jackson Browne, he was a seminal influence in the 60's and 70's music movement that came out of Sunset Boulevard/Laurel Canyon, LA; where at a time you'd have found Frank Zappa, Crosby, Stills & Nash, Joni Mitchell, The Byrds, Jim Morrison, Eric Burdon, Neil Young, Orson Welles, The Rolling Stones ... and in more recent times Slash, Red Hot Chilli Peppers, and so on. But I get off track.

Back to the line in the song: "*Don't confront me with my failures, I have not forgotten them.*" I heard this song on the radio today and it reminded me of a conversation I heard about recently between a Sales Manager and his Salesperson. It went something like this.

- Manager: "You lost the deal!"
- Salesperson: "Yes, I know."
- Manager: "You're behind quota!"
- Salesperson: "Yes, I know."
- Manager: "I can't believe you lost the deal!"
- Salesperson: "Suspending belief doesn't help."
- Manager: "You're a failure!"
- Salesperson: "I quit."



Not a lot of progress there. Unfortunately, this conversation, or something similar, happens too frequently; and, – notwithstanding the personalities involved, and the obvious absence of any semblance of mutual respect – it’s for one main reason. The only data the sales manager has is historical. He lives every day trying to predict the future based solely on lagging indicators, so the only conversation he can have with the sales person is a conversation too late. The deal was won, or it was lost – in which case the sales manager can only confront the salesperson with his failures – and as we see from the conversation above, that’s not much good.

But what if the sales manager had access to leading indicators and not just lagging indicators? What if he could look inside the salesperson’s pipeline and understand the true pipeline velocity, not just the number or size, or the deals? What if he had intelligent insight into the health of each deal? Would it help if he could gain foresight from automated analysis of past trends, usual sales cycles, ‘typical’ deal-blockers, and areas of risk? Of course it would.

But wait – wouldn’t it be better if the salesperson could do that for themselves? Imagine if the tools existed whereby the salesperson could self-manage, in a world where a system provided true benefit for him, and transcended the ‘I’ve got to enter this data for management’ paradigm. Then you would see uncommon productivity. The end of weekly sales calls as we know them. No more “Can you tell me what you did this week on the ACME opportunity?”; no more confronting the salesperson with his failures; but instead a conversation that’s productive, that goes “I can see we’re running in to a possible problem with that deal – here’s how I think I might be able to help, based on what I’ve seen work in other deals.” That’s when a sales manager can become a sales leader.

While there is no technological prosthetic for broken a relationship between a sales manager and his team, the latter scenario I described is absolutely possible today, and is being deployed in many of the world’s leading sales organizations, using Sales 2.0 technology. Tools exist to intelligently analyze deals, evaluate pipeline velocity, examine sales process progress, and automatically predict deal close probability and sales cycle, and all without onerous data entry or unreasonable additional work.

Now, I’m totally biased on this topic - [The TAS Group](#) provides Sales 2.0 tools – but there’s very little that’s more demotivating than being confronted with your failures, particularly when no assistance or advice is offered. Sales velocity is fueled by confidence, and anything that undermines that confidence is destructive. The tools, methodologies, and systems are available today to increase that velocity, and unless you consider how to apply them in your business, you will lag behind.



Incidentally, Jackson Browne, along with James Taylor, Crosby, Stills & Nash, Bob Dylan, Tom Waits and The Eagles, was managed by [David Geffen](#), who founded Asylum Records, Geffen subsequently joined Steven Spielberg and Jeffrey Katzenberg to form [Dreamworks SKG](#) (remember Shrek?). Geffen never signed a contract with any of his acts, and according to him, none of them ever left him. He said his role was to be a buffer between his artists and the maelstrom of the music industry, and to help the musicians in every way he could, so that the artist could perform. Sounds like a good model for a sales leader to me.

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