THE

1-2-1 COACHING PLAYBOOK

A practical toolkit for sales leaders who want to build people, not just chase numbers.

THE OPENING TRUTH

Sales teams coached every week hit quota 76% of the time. Teams coached quarterly or less hit quota 47% of the time.

A 29-point gap. From one habit. And most sales leaders have fallen into a trap that is hiding in plain sight — they believe they are coaching, when they are actually just inspecting deals.

Built from the Sales Geek Leadership & Management Programme.
Produced by Sales Geek | salesgeek.co.uk
Mastery Podcast, Episode 10 | James Denny, COO

HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

Start with honesty

This playbook is built to be used, not read. It sits next to your laptop on a Monday morning and guides you through a better conversation with your sales team.

It is organised into five parts:

1. **DIAGNOSE.** Audit your current 1-2-1s. Compare to the Managing vs Coaching framework. Understand the Johari Window. Check yourself against the Five Symptoms.
2. **STRUCTURE.** Adopt the two-meeting rhythm. Run your coaching sessions using FOCUS. Deliver specific feedback inside them using SBI(A). Measure against the eight principles of good feedback.
3. **ADAPT.** Plot your team on the Skill/Will Matrix. Coach each quadrant differently. Teach your team the 1-3-1 Model so they come to coaching prepared.
4. **ASK.** Use the Coaching Question Bank. Pick three questions you would never normally ask. Try them this week.
5. **COMMIT.** Fill in the Weekly Cadence Planner, per salesperson. Use the STOP/START/KEEP/MORE/LESS reflection to review yourself every quarter.

A note on provenance.

Much of what follows is drawn directly from the Sales Geek Leadership & Management programme — the two-day course we deliver to leaders and managers in the businesses we work in. The frameworks on these pages — FOCUS, SBI(A), the Skill/Will Matrix, the Johari Window, the 1-3-1 Model — are battle-tested across hundreds of sales organisations. This is not theory. It is field-tested practice.

PART 1 — DIAGNOSE

Where you really are

The 1-2-1 Audit

Score yourself on each of the nine statements below. Think about your last four 1-2-1s with one member of your team. Not the 1-2-1 you wish you had. The one you actually had.

1 = Strongly disagree *5 = Strongly agree*

1. My last four 1-2-1s included at least one question about the person, not the deals.	1 2 3 4 5
2. My salesperson talks more than I do in our 1-2-1s.	1 2 3 4 5
3. My 1-2-1s do not begin with me opening the CRM.	1 2 3 4 5
4. My 1-2-1s end with a behaviour or skill commitment, not a task list.	1 2 3 4 5
5. This week's 1-2-1 with this person would not look identical to the one three months ago.	1 2 3 4 5
6. I know what skill each of my salespeople is currently trying to develop.	1 2 3 4 5
7. I have asked each of my salespeople what they want to be better at — in the last month.	1 2 3 4 5
8. My 1-2-1s happen weekly, protected and not rescheduled casually.	1 2 3 4 5
9. I run separate meetings for deal review and coaching.	1 2 3 4 5

SCORING

36–45: You are genuinely coaching. Keep going. Use Parts 2–5 to sharpen further.

25–35: Mixed. Some coaching, too much deal inspection. Focus on Part 2 — split the meetings and adopt FOCUS.

9–24: You are in the Coaching Trap. Your 1-2-1s are deal reviews dressed up as coaching. This is where most sales leaders sit. Work through the whole playbook.

Managing vs Coaching — the core distinction

The foundation of everything else. Both are part of your job. Neither replaces the other. But they should never happen in the same meeting.

BEING A MANAGER *Managing the deal*	**BEING A LEADER** *Coaching the person*
Direction: in the now	Direction: in the future
Reason: instructive	Reason: intuitive
Tools: policy	Tools: strategy
Focus: the deal	Focus: the person
Builds: the number	Builds: the capability
Asks: Where? When? Have you?	Asks: What? How? What did you notice?
You do most of the talking	They do most of the talking (70%+)
CRM is open	CRM is closed
Outcome: a task list	Outcome: a committed behaviour or skill
Repeats weekly with same structure	Evolves week on week — builds on itself
Measures: pipeline, forecast, activity	Measures: skill progression, confidence, habits
Tone: accountability	Tone: curiosity
Core competency: control and oversight	Core competency: inspiration and team development
Influence: authority-based	Influence: inspiration-based
Horizon: 12 months	Horizon: 12–36 months

THE CORE RULE

Managing builds the number. Coaching builds the person who builds the number. You need both. But in different meetings, with different energies, and different rules of engagement.

The Johari Window — why coaching works

The Johari Window explains what coaching is actually doing underneath the conversation. It maps the space between what a person knows about themselves and what others can see.

KNOWN TO SELF	UNKNOWN TO SELF
OPEN *Known to self • Known to others* The public self. Shared ground. Both of you see it. Expand this through honest dialogue.	**BLIND SPOT** *Unknown to self • Known to others* What you see in them that they cannot see in themselves. This is where coaching earns its keep.
HIDDEN *Known to self • Unknown to others* What they know but haven't shared. Reduced by trust, psychological safety, a good coaching relationship.	**UNKNOWN** *Unknown to self • Unknown to others* Potential and latent capability neither of you has yet seen. Uncovered through challenge and stretch.

THE COACH'S JOB

Coaching exists to shrink the Blind Spot.

Every good coaching question is an invitation for the salesperson to see something about themselves they cannot see on their own. Your role is to be their mirror — accurately, kindly, and without judgement. You are also building trust that shrinks the Hidden Spot, and creating the stretch that uncovers the Unknown. None of that happens in a deal review.

The Five Symptoms of a Coaching Trap 1-2-1

Tick every symptom you genuinely recognise. Two or more — you are almost certainly in the Coaching Trap.

- ☐ You walk in with the CRM open. The pipeline frames the meeting as deals, not development, before it even begins.
- ☐ Your questions all start with ‘where’ or ‘when.’ Forecast questions, not coaching questions. They reveal the deal, not the person.
- ☐ You do most of the talking. You fill silences, jump in with answers, finish sentences, turn questions into lectures.
- ☐ The meeting ends with a task list. That’s managing output. A coaching conversation ends with a committed behaviour or skill.
- ☐ Your 1-2-1s look the same every week. Same agenda. Same questions. If nothing evolves, nothing is being built.

PART 2 — STRUCTURE

How to actually run it

The Mastery 1-2-1 Rhythm

Two meetings, not one. The single change that transforms everything that follows.

MEETING 1 | THE DEAL REVIEW

30 minutes | Weekly | CRM open

Purpose: to manage deals, check the pipeline, confirm next actions, sharpen forecast accuracy.

Agenda:

- Pipeline walk-through — stage by stage (15 mins)
- Forecast confirmation — committed, probable, at risk (8 mins)
- Activity review — are the inputs supporting the forecast? (4 mins)
- Action close — deal-level next steps for the week (3 mins)

MEETING 2 | THE COACHING SESSION

30 minutes | Weekly | CRM closed

Purpose: to develop the person. Build skill, confidence, reflection, and forward momentum.

Structure — the FOCUS framework:

- F — Feel. How are you? What's on your mind? (4 mins)
- O — Outcomes. What did you work on? What did you learn? (6 mins)
- C — Challenge. What was hardest? Where are you stuck? (6 mins)
- U — Understand. Dig into the skill beneath. Ask, don't tell. (10 mins)
- S — Step. The one behaviour or skill they commit to. (4 mins)

THE RULE

Never run both meetings back-to-back. Separate them by at least a day. Different mindset, different preparation. Collapse them and you collapse the whole point.

The FOCUS Coaching Template

Your coaching session, step by step. Print this. Keep it in front of you.

F

FEEL

Start with the human, not the pipeline. Give them permission to answer honestly.

"How are you this week — really?"

"What's on your mind that we should talk about before anything else?"

"On a scale of 1–10, where's your energy this week?"

O

OUTCOMES

Ask what they worked on — and what they learned. Not what they closed.

"What did you work on this week that stretched you?"

"What did you learn — about yourself, a buyer, the deal?"

"What's one conversation this week you're most proud of?"

C

CHALLENGE

Find the edge of their skill. Growth lives where it's uncomfortable.

"What did you find hardest this week?"

"Where are you stuck right now?"

"What's a conversation you've been avoiding?"

U

UNDERSTAND

Ask, don't tell. Help them see it. Pause. Use silence as a tool.

"Talk me through what happened — step by step."

"What do you think was really going on there?"

"If you played that conversation again, what would you do differently?"

S

STEP

One commitment. Specific. Observable. Owned by them, not imposed by you.

"What's the one thing you're going to try this week?"

“How will you know if it worked?”

“What will you bring back to me next week?”

SBI(A) — delivering specific feedback

FOCUS structures the whole coaching conversation. But there will be moments inside it where you need to give feedback on a specific observed behaviour. For that, use SBI(A).

Situation. Behaviour. Impact. Accountability. Four steps. Deliver feedback that lands without being harsh, specific without being personal, useful without being dictatorial.

S

SITUATION

Give context. Anchor the feedback in a specific moment. Not 'sometimes on calls.' Exactly when, exactly where.

Example: *"On Tuesday's call with the CFO at Smith Limited, fifteen minutes in…"*

B

BEHAVIOUR

State what you observed. Factually. No interpretation. Describe, don't judge. Specific and concrete.

Example: *"I noticed you dropped the price from fifty thousand to forty-two thousand in about ninety seconds, without them asking."*

I

IMPACT

Explain the effects — both factual and emotional. What happened as a result? What might happen next because of it?

Example: *"The effect was that the CFO stopped pushing back and accepted. But we've lost fifteen percent of margin we could have held, and we've trained that buyer to expect a discount from us at the first sign of friction."*

A

ACCOUNTABILITY

Hand the ownership back. This is the step most feedback frameworks miss. Do not prescribe. Invite them to own the change.

Example: *"Now you're aware of that — what do you FEEL you will do differently next time?"*

WHY THIS WORKS

> SBI(A) works because it removes judgement and puts observation, effect, and ownership in its place. The salesperson hears what happened, understands why it matters, and decides — themselves — what they're going to change. That is why it lands. That is why it sticks.

The Eight Principles of Good Feedback

Whatever framework you use, feedback must meet these eight standards. Benchmarked from our Leadership & Management programme. If your feedback does not meet all eight, it is not feedback — it is something else, and potentially something harmful.

TIMELY	Delivered close to the event, while both of you still remember the specifics.
REGULAR	Part of a consistent rhythm, not a once-a-year review.
BALANCED	Covers what's working as well as what isn't. Neither purely positive nor purely corrective.
ACTIONABLE	The person can do something different as a result. If they can't change anything, it's noise.
SPECIFIC	Anchored in observed behaviour, not vague impressions. No 'sometimes you...'
EMPATHETIC	Delivered with awareness of how it feels to receive. Warm, not cold. Direct, not harsh.
PERSONABLE	A two-way conversation. Not a monologue. Space for response, challenge, clarification.
NON-JUDGEMENTAL	Focused on the behaviour, not the person. 'You did X' not 'You are X.'

Good feedback vs poor feedback — a final check:

GOOD FEEDBACK IS...	POOR FEEDBACK IS...
Constructive guidance	Personal criticism
Specific and actionable	Vague or general
Timely and consistent	Delayed or sporadic
Balanced	One-sided

GOOD FEEDBACK IS…	POOR FEEDBACK IS…
Objective and fact-based	Biased or emotional
Supportive	Demoralising
Collaborative	Dictatorial
Goal-oriented	Unrelated to goals
Empowering	Final or absolute

Coach different people differently

The Skill/Will Matrix

Most coaching frameworks treat salespeople as if they were all the same. They aren't. The fairest thing you can do for every member of your team is meet them where they actually are — not where your framework wishes they were.

Plot every salesperson against two axes: Skill (the capability to do the job) and Will (the motivation to do it). That gives you four quadrants. Each needs a completely different coaching approach.

High Will, Low Skill — GUIDE

Skill: Low — still learning • Will: High — keen, motivated

Your Contributors. New joiners, juniors, enthusiastic learners. They want it, they just don't know how yet. Coaching here is about building capability through structured input.

Coaching actions:

- Training and development plan, built with them
- Mentoring — formal or informal
- Selective empowerment — more responsibility as skill grows
- Lots of use of the FOCUS framework; they soak it up
- Frequent, specific, behaviour-based feedback via SBI(A)

High Will, High Skill — CHALLENGE

Skill: High — capable, proven • Will: High — motivated, engaged

Your High Performers. Your stars. They can do it, they want to do it. The biggest coaching mistake with this group is coaching them like juniors. They switch off. They feel patronised.

Coaching actions:

- Delegate more responsibility — genuine autonomy
- Full empowerment — get out of their way
- Leadership opportunities — mentor juniors, lead projects
- Stretch the coaching question: 'Where do you want to be in three years and what's stopping you?'
- Discuss promotion paths openly

Low Will, High Skill — MOTIVATE

Skill: High — capable, has proved it • Will: Low — disengaged, flat

Your Potential Detractors. The hardest quadrant. They CAN do the job — they've done it before. But something has gone. Burnout. Feeling overlooked. Role drift. Something personal. Or they've already decided to leave and haven't told you.

Coaching actions:

- Hard, honest conversations — what's really going on?
- Fresh incentives or challenges aligned to what motivates them
- Consider a role change, not just more of the same
- Use SBI(A) carefully — more listening, less prescribing
- Performance plan if needed, but start with understanding

Low Will, Low Skill — DIRECT

Skill: Low — not yet capable • Will: Low — not engaged either

Your Low Performers. This is where coaching ends and performance management begins. These people need clarity, close oversight, and a structured path forward — or out.

Coaching actions:

- Micromanage in the short term — close supervision
- Formal Performance Improvement Plan with clear milestones
- Reduce accountabilities while the PIP runs
- Decide honestly: is there a route back? If not, manage out with dignity
- Treating them like High Performers is not fairness. It's a failure to lead.

Plot your team

Before your next week starts, take five minutes. Plot every salesperson. Then write their coaching approach for the next quarter alongside each name.

NAME	SKILL (L/H)	WILL (L/H)	COACHING APPROACH THIS QUARTER

The 1-3-1 Pre-Session Model

Teach this to your team. Apply it to coaching sessions. It transforms the conversation from ‘fix my problem’ to ‘help me fix my own problem.’ Which is the entire point of coaching.

Before your salesperson comes to their coaching session, they prepare using this simple structure:

1	**One problem.** One specific challenge they want to work on. Not five. Not ‘everything is hard.’ One named problem, clearly described.
3	**Three proposed solutions.** Three things they’ve thought about trying. This forces them to think before they arrive. To explore more than one option. To stretch their own problem-solving before asking for help.
1	**One recommendation.** Of the three, which one do they think is best — and why? They come ready to act, not just ready to ask.

WHY IT WORKS

The 1-3-1 model shifts the coaching dynamic completely. Your salespeople stop bringing you problems to solve. They bring you thinking to refine. You stop being the answer factory. They start being the problem-solvers. And over time, they need you less — which is the single greatest measure of coaching success.

The Coaching Question Bank

A ready-to-use library of great coaching questions, organised by theme. The rule: pick three you wouldn't normally ask. Use them this week. See what surfaces.

To open the conversation (the warm-up)

- How are you really?
- What do you want to get out of this conversation today?
- What's been the highlight of your week?
- What's been the hardest part of your week?
- What's one thing I could help you with today that would make the biggest difference?

To explore skill and behaviour

- What skill are you trying to develop at the moment?
- What's a conversation type you find yourself avoiding?
- Where do you feel most confident in the sales process — and where least?
- What's one habit you know you need to change?
- If you could be known for one sales strength, what would it be?

To unpack a difficult moment

- Talk me through what happened, from the start.
- What was going through your mind in that moment?
- What do you think the buyer was thinking?
- What would you do differently if you could replay it?
- What got in the way of the outcome you wanted?

To build self-awareness (shrinking the Blind Spot)

- What do you think is your biggest strength — and how does it sometimes work against you?
- What feedback have you had recently that's stayed with you — and why?
- What's a pattern you notice in the deals you win — versus the ones you lose?
- When do you feel at your best in a sales conversation?
- When do you feel out of your depth?

To drive commitment and action

- What's one thing you're going to try this week?

- How will you know if it worked?
- What's the smallest step you could take in the next 24 hours?
- What might get in the way — and how will you handle that?
- What do you want me to ask you about next week?

To shift perspective

- If the buyer was sitting here, what would they say about this deal?
- If you were coaching a friend through this, what advice would you give them?
- What would a more experienced seller do here?
- What would you tell yourself six months from now about this situation?
- If the outcome didn't matter — what would you actually say?

For your High Performers (stretch questions)

- Where do you want to be in three years — and what's stopping you?
- What would you change about how we run sales here if you could?
- Who are you quietly mentoring right now? Should it be more formal?
- What's the next skill you want to build — and what would 'world class' look like in it?
- What part of my job could you take over next quarter?

Lock the rhythm in

Weekly Cadence Planner

A template for locking the rhythm in. Use it once, per salesperson. Put the meetings in the diary. Protect them.

ITEM	COMMITMENT
Salesperson name	
Skill/Will quadrant	
Deal Review — day & time	
Coaching Session — day & time	
Current skill focus	
This week's commitment (S)	
Review date for commitment	
Notes / themes to revisit	

Self-Reflection — STOP | START | KEEP | MORE | LESS

The reflection tool we use at the end of every module on the Sales Geek Leadership & Management programme. Use it yourself, every quarter, as a leader. What are you doing in your coaching practice that you want to:

STOP	*What is not working? What behaviour or habit is getting in the way of you coaching properly?*
START	*What is missing that you need to begin doing? New habit, new discipline, new framework?*
KEEP	*What is working well that you need to protect and continue?*
MORE	*What do you already do that you need to do more of? Where is the leverage?*
LESS	*What do you do too much of? What's the diminishing return?*

The Leadership Commitment

I COMMIT TO…

Running a 30-minute coaching session, separate from deal review, with every member of my sales team, every week.

Plotting my team on the Skill/Will Matrix every quarter, and adapting my coaching accordingly — guide, challenge, motivate, direct.

Delivering feedback to the eight principles — timely, regular, balanced, actionable, specific, empathetic, personable, non-judgemental.

Measuring my own coaching frequency as a leadership KPI. Tracking my talk-time ratio. Working to bring it under 40%.

Not cancelling coaching sessions to make room for other work.

Signed: ____ Date: ________________

CLOSE

The real job

Your job, as a sales leader, is not to close the deal. The salesperson's job is to close the deal.

Your job is to build the person who closes the deal.

When you get that right — when you genuinely develop the people around you, week after week, quietly, consistently — every deal gets better. Every forecast gets sharper. Every quarter gets easier, not harder.

Your best people stay. Your middle performers lift. Your weaker performers either grow into the job or quietly remove themselves from it.

That is what a coached team looks like. And it starts not with a new strategy, not with a new tool, not with a new hire — but with a thirty-minute conversation on a Tuesday morning, where you put the CRM away, pull up FOCUS, and ask a better question.

> *"Management is about persuading people to do things they do not want to do, while leadership is about inspiring people to do things they never thought they could."*
>
> — Steve Jobs

The 1-2-1 Coaching Playbook
Companion to Mastery Podcast, Episode 10 — The Coaching Trap
Built from the Sales Geek Leadership & Management Programme.

Sales Geek | salesgeek.co.uk
The world's largest provider of part-time sales directors.