

Book Review: Level Five Coaching System: How Sales Leaders Are Developing Preeminent Sales Teams

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ABSTRACT

This book review assesses John Hoskins' Level Five Coaching System: How Sales Leaders Are Developing Preeminent Sales Teams. Targeting sales leaders, the book provides a concise yet comprehensive framework for developing successful sales teams, emphasizing consultative selling. Hoskins guides readers through five progressive levels of selling, emphasizing the mindset's pivotal role in sales success. The book stands out for its unique framework, offering a clear and consistent approach to implementing and measuring sales coaching. While not introductory, the book benefits new sales leaders, addressing a literature gap in sales coaching processes. Despite being released pre-pandemic, the book's content remains relevant, aligning with the urgency of developing seller capabilities in an evolving buyer landscape. It advocates for upskilling, resonating with McKinsey's research on salesforce development. Beyond professional applications, the Level Five Coaching System is also useful in higher education, offering practical application, real-world relevance, skill development, adaptability, and improved learning outcomes. Its versatility makes it a valuable resource for both practical and academic contexts.

Subject Areas: HRM and Organizational Behavior, Marketing

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***Level Five Coaching System: How Sales Leaders Are Developing Preeminent Sales Teams* by John Hoskins. Scottsdale, AZ. The First Advantage, LLC. 2019. 126 pages, paperback.**

As a former salesperson and a non-fiction book buyer, the review authors regularly survey business literature in search of texts to enhance their sales curriculum. This review examines John Hoskins' (2019) *Level Five Coaching System: How Sales Leaders Are Developing Preeminent Sales Teams*, hereafter referred to as the *Level Five Coaching System*. Delving into the realms of sales management, this guide expands upon theoretical discussions related to sales team dialogues (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013), the use of experimentation to enhance performance (Rapp et al., 2014), and practicing reflexivity for examining, questioning, and developing insights (Cunliffe, 2004; Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009). The primary target audience for the book is "sales leaders who want to dramatically increase their odds of exceeding their quota year after year" (Hoskins, 2019: xii).

The book is a follow-up to Hoskins (2016) book *Level Five Selling: The Anatomy of a Quality Sales Call Revealed*, both books emphasize the value of the consultative selling approach. However, the *Level Five Coaching System*, presented in a concise 126 pages, offers a more comprehensive framework for developing and leading successful sales teams. Highly readable, the book serves as a valuable resource for extracting insights or for an in-depth exploration aimed at revitalizing an organization's sales process.

The book serves as an educational guide in sales management, furnishing a coaching framework for sales leaders to construct and lead successful sales teams. While the primary purpose is to advocate for Hoskins' sales training and development practices through Level Five Selling, it also offers actionable strategies and tools for sales coaches to guide individuals toward reaching their full potential and meeting sales goals.

Emphasizing implementing a structured coaching program that integrates ongoing training, feedback, and reinforcement, the book underscores the need for sales representatives to enhance their skills, performance, and processes continually. This approach is geared toward cultivating a culture of excellence within sales teams. Hoskins contends that achieving such excellence requires sales leaders to adopt a coaching approach to develop their team members' skills and mindsets. Despite being released before the pandemic, the book's content remains evergreen and warrants consideration by both sales practitioners and academics.

Given the evolving landscape of buyer expectations (Ahearne et al., 2022; Handfield, 2019), the investment in developing seller capabilities is now more critical than ever. These capabilities are indispensable for sales teams navigating an ever-changing environment. Recent shifts in buyer expectations accentuate the urgency of seller capability development, a sentiment echoed by McKinsey's (2022) research on salesforce upskilling, with 97% of sales leaders prioritizing upskilling the sales force. McKinsey's findings align with the book's concepts, emphasizing that businesses can flourish by investing in their salesforce. Hoskins' approach is rooted in his assertion that 60% of all sales calls are wasted and that sales managers often focus on the wrong sales metrics (Hoskins, 2019).

Structured around five progressive levels, the *Level Five Coaching System* book delineates key stages in cultivating a preeminent sales team:

- Level One: Baseline. As the initial assessment, this level gauges the sales team's current performance and skills while identifying gaps and opportunities for improvement.
- Level Two: Build. This phase empowers the sales leader to equip the team with the tools, resources, and skills to plan and execute quality sales calls.
- Level Three: Benchmark. Here, the sales leader monitors and evaluates the team's progress and performance, employing the Level Five Selling model and other metrics.

- Level Four: Boost. This level challenges the team to achieve higher performance and results through the guidance of the sales leader.
- Level Five: Become. At this pinnacle, the sales team attains preeminence in their market and industry.

Hoskins adeptly guides readers through each level, facilitating the assessment of their team's current stage and progress to the next. The book provides detailed advice on developing coaching skills, building trust, fostering a culture of accountability, and leveraging data-driven insights for enhancing sales performance.

One of the book's standout features is Hoskins' emphasis on the crucial role of mindset in sales success. Arguing for the indispensability of a growth mindset for sales leaders and their teams, he offers numerous examples of cultivating this mindset through coaching and feedback. This perspective aligns with existing research on the significance of mindset in the sales process (Hoffeld, 2022; Farellacci & Hollet-Haubert, 2021; Farnoosh, 2018; Marcos-Cuevas et al., 2014).

While the market boasts several sales coaching and team development books, Hoskins' *Level Five Coaching System* stands out for its unique framework. Unlike other publications, this book provides a clear and consistent approach for implementing and measuring sales coaching, making it applicable to various training purposes, including sales training workshops, sales leader training, team-building exercises, reading groups, ongoing coaching, and development.

Although not intended as an introductory sales book, the *Level Five Coaching System* is a valuable addition to existing sales literature, assuming a fundamental level of sales understanding. It proves particularly beneficial for new sales leaders, guiding them to adopt the right mindset for leading a sales team effectively. Hoskins' system enables sales managers to coach their teams not only in self-assessment but also in self-correction of sales call behavior. It underscores the importance of direct, concise feedback in the coaching process, filling a literature gap by establishing a standard approach to observing, reinforcing, and coaching sales call quality in the field.

Furthermore, the author's work synthesizes multiple sales philosophies, including SPIN Selling (Rackham, 1988), The Challenger Sale (Adamson & Dixon, 2011; Dixon & Adamson, 2013), Consultative Selling (Hanan, 1970), and Solution Selling (Bosworth, 1994). The book reinforces fundamental selling principles such as understanding buyer needs and delivering value, which is especially pertinent in today's market, where research suggests customers derive almost zero value from the average sales call (Almquist et al., 2016).

Implementing Level 5 Selling

The cost of implementing the Level 5 Selling and Level 5 Coaching system in an organization will depend on various factors, such as the organization's size, the number of salespeople and sales managers being trained, and the level of customization required. There may be costs associated with hiring a consultant or external training provider to help develop and implement the system. Additionally, costs may be associated with training materials, software, and tools to support the system. However, investing in training can also lead to returns on investment via increased sales, improved customer satisfaction, and more engaged and motivated sales teams. Ultimately, the cost of implementing this, or any, system should be weighed against the potential benefits. While some initial costs may be involved, the long-term benefits of a highly effective sales team can far outweigh the upfront investment. Recognize that sales training programs can easily range between \$500 and \$5,000 per person depending on many variables (Altman, 2014) and have different levels of effectiveness (Oh & Johnston, 2023).

Those implementing the Level 5 Coaching System in a firm can face some barriers, including resistance to change, lack of leadership support, a need for more training and resources, cultural barriers, and lack of accountability. Overcoming these barriers requires leadership support, communication, training, and resources, involving stakeholders in the implementation process, communicating the system's benefits, and providing ongoing support and training to ensure successful implementation.

Use in Higher Education

Incorporating the Hoskins *Level Five Coaching System* into sales management or advanced sales classes in higher education can benefit instructors and students by offering:

- **Practical Application:** *The Level Five Coaching System* provides a practical framework to help students apply sales management concepts in real-world scenarios.
- **Real-World Relevance:** Sales management classes often benefit from real-world case studies and examples, enhancing the relevance of the curriculum.
- **Skill Development:** The coaching system focuses on developing essential leadership and coaching skills in sales managers, which are critical for sales team success.
- **Adaptability and Customization:** Instructors can tailor the *Level Five Coaching System* to meet their sales management classes' specific needs and objectives, allowing for a customized and adaptable curriculum.
- **Improved Learning Outcomes:** The structured nature of the *Level Five Coaching System* can lead to improved student learning outcomes.

Summary

The *Level Five Coaching System* serves as a practical solution for immediate implementation in professional settings and extends theoretical discussions on critical sales management concepts. Addressing dialogues between sales managers and their teams, exploring experimentation for performance optimization, and emphasizing reflexivity which all significantly impact management, particularly in the context of sales and organizational effectiveness. Its alignment with existing sales methodologies minimizes potential clashes with organizational culture during implementation, and its structural clarity and conciseness provide a framework across five distinct levels for developing preeminent sales teams. The resource's versatility and value extend to professional and academic contexts, from sales training workshops to ongoing coaching and development initiatives. The *Level Five Coaching System* emerges not only as a practical guide for immediate use but also as a contribution to both theoretical foundations and practical applications in sales management.

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