GONG

eBook

The Sales Leader's Playbook for High-Impact Coaching

5 Coaching Techniques that Produce BIG Results

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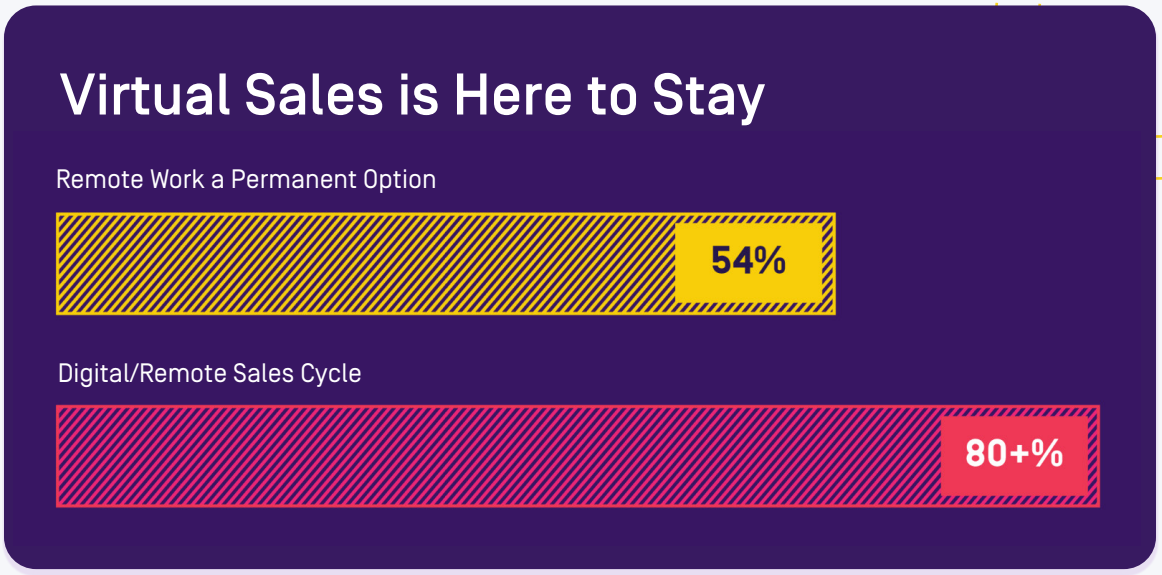
Intro

Coaching just changed. And it's a big deal.

Virtual selling is here to stay. How do we know? In a 2020 PwC survey, **54% of CFOs plan to make remote work a permanent option**, and according to Forrester, **80+% of future sales cycles will be digital or remote:**



Yes, that's going to impact your coaching. Big time.

You can't rely on the energy of the bullpen to boost your team. And tap-on-the-shoulder coaching opportunities that happened during meetings, before and after calls, and at the water cooler just aren't possible anymore.

With fewer coachable moments at your disposal, you have to make each one valuable.

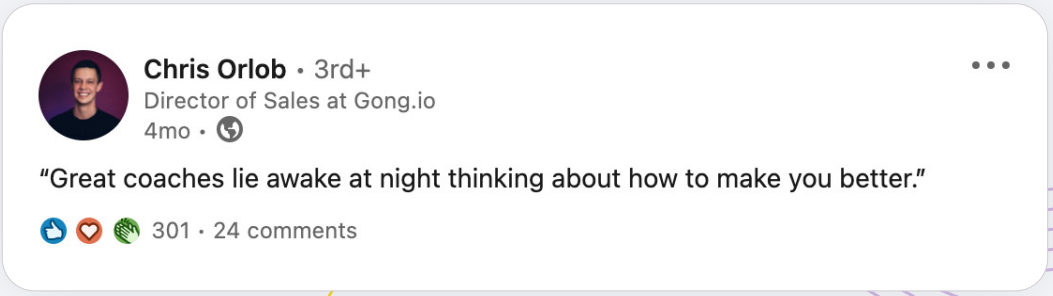
That means doing the opposite of this: jumping on a call with the customer, handling it solo, and moving on.

Jumping in seems easier. After all, most top managers used to be top reps. But in the long-term, it keeps reps dependent on you to close deals. And it keeps you from delivering on strategic initiatives – where you are most valuable as a leader.

Enter coaching.

It's the difference between 50% of reps falling below quota and 75% of reps hitting their number. And it compounds every quarter.

If you want to make every coaching opportunity count, there are three plays to run in your 1:1s, pipeline reviews, team meetings and everything in between. Nail them and your reps will run laps around the competition.



Tactical Coaching

How to coach smarter, not harder, with data

There are two types of coaches: those who rely on data and those who don't.

Without data, you don't know which calls are slowing down (or killing) deals. Is it happening in discovery, demo, or closing? So you listen to a handful of calls, but not enough to see a pattern. You take your best guess at what's going wrong, but can never really tell if your reps are turning your coaching suggestions into habits.

Coaches who use data? They rely on reality — facts and evidence. Their advice is based on **actual**, not **perceived** problems in their pipeline. **Their approach has three main benefits:**

1. **Data doesn't lie:** Data turns "uncoachable" reps into feedback fanatics. Coaching that isn't based on hard numbers can feel...fluffy. And fluffy is easy to shrug off. Know what they can't shrug off? Data.

2. **Data saves you time:** Forget catch-up questions in your 1:1s. Spend your time coaching. Data shows you exactly where your reps need to improve, so you can cut to the chase in meetings and offer valuable advice.

3. **Data tells you what's working:** Are your reps talking price too early? Talking features instead of benefits? Not sure? Data identifies what sends deals sideways. What's more, it tracks whether your coaching is implemented and how it affects win rates.

In short, data is how elite sales managers get their coaching to pay dividends. Without it, you're stuck with stab-in-the-dark coaching and interrogation-style 1:1s.

Data gives you insights into your reps' conversations and deals, so you see where they're struggling:

- ✓ Are they going off track with a patchy discovery call?
- ✓ Are they losing deals to common objections?
- ✓ Did momentum drop because of their lack of follow-up?

Here's how data can save winnable deals by pointing areas of improvement for coaches:

WHAT YOU WANT TO SOLVE	THE DATA TO WATCH
Light discovery	Do they ask rapid-fire questions or do they let the conversation unfold naturally? Are they asking open-ended questions? Are they listening more than talking (poor talk ratio)?
Poor objection handling	Look for key words/phrases used on calls ("budget's tight", "frozen", "cutbacks", etc.) and listen to your reps' responses. Did they use the right talk tracks?
Driving deals forward	Are next steps set? How many people are involved? What's their email engagement like (known as email velocity)?

Those are your prime coaching opportunities. **They kick-start your four-step coaching plan:**

1. Identify low-hanging fruit using data; say, patchy discovery.
2. Provide your rep with actionable feedback and strategies. Stop asking rapid-fire questions and just let the conversation unfold naturally. Listen to your buyers.
3. Hone in on their success metrics. Watch the numbers that directly correlate to your advice. Are their questions open-ended? What's their talk ratio with buyers?
4. Track those stats week over week to see whether they improve. If they're implementing your coaching, you should also see their closed-won numbers go up.

Here's what it looks like in practice:

Example 1

Frame the Conversation

Too often, reps are told "Here's the feature. Here's the talk track. Go sell it."

Your reps are better off selling features framed around their buyers' problems. Teach your reps to ask high-impact questions:

- ✓ Which KPI do you need to impact?
- ✓ What have you already tried that isn't working? And how do you know it's not working?
- ✓ If you don't do something, what happens?
- ✓ If I asked your CEO the same questions, would they agree with what you just said?

Once reps understand the root of their buyers' problems and the emotions and processes involved, talk tracks make more sense.

Track how often these questions are used by your sellers, and watch their win rates climb week-over-week.

Example 2

Ask Clarifying Questions

Every time buyers provide information, reps need to clarify its meaning. Why? **There are three risks if they don't make sure they understand the new information correctly:**

1. The rep might never uncover the root cause of a problem or the real meaning behind an objective if they take everything at surface value. Knowing the real reason behind a request is critical.

2. If they misunderstand an issue that was shared, they may respond with the wrong solution. Getting it right the first time avoids disaster.

3. Having the wrong data/information can take the conversation off course and into territory that doesn't matter. Make sure the buyer's info is truly relevant.

Here's what that sounds like during discovery:

Rep: "It sounds like increasing ACV for your SMB team is mission critical. What tactics are in place today to reach that goal?"

Here's what that sounds like during an objection:

Buyer: "Your product is too expensive."

Rep: "Too expensive? Compared to what?"*

**Notice the mirroring language tactic used, à la Chris Voss.*

Here's what that sounds like when there's a question:

Buyer: "What's the patience score on this dashboard?"

Rep: "Before I answer, I'm curious to know why you're asking."

Armed with a playbook to aimed at uncovering real business outcomes, your reps will start solving real business problems for your buyers and their average deal size will grow dramatically.

Strategic coaching

How to coach on deals, not just calls

In meetings with reps, are you asking catch-up questions (who are you talking to... what's the next step) or strategy questions (how are you going to get multi-threaded... how can we close the discussion around pricing)?

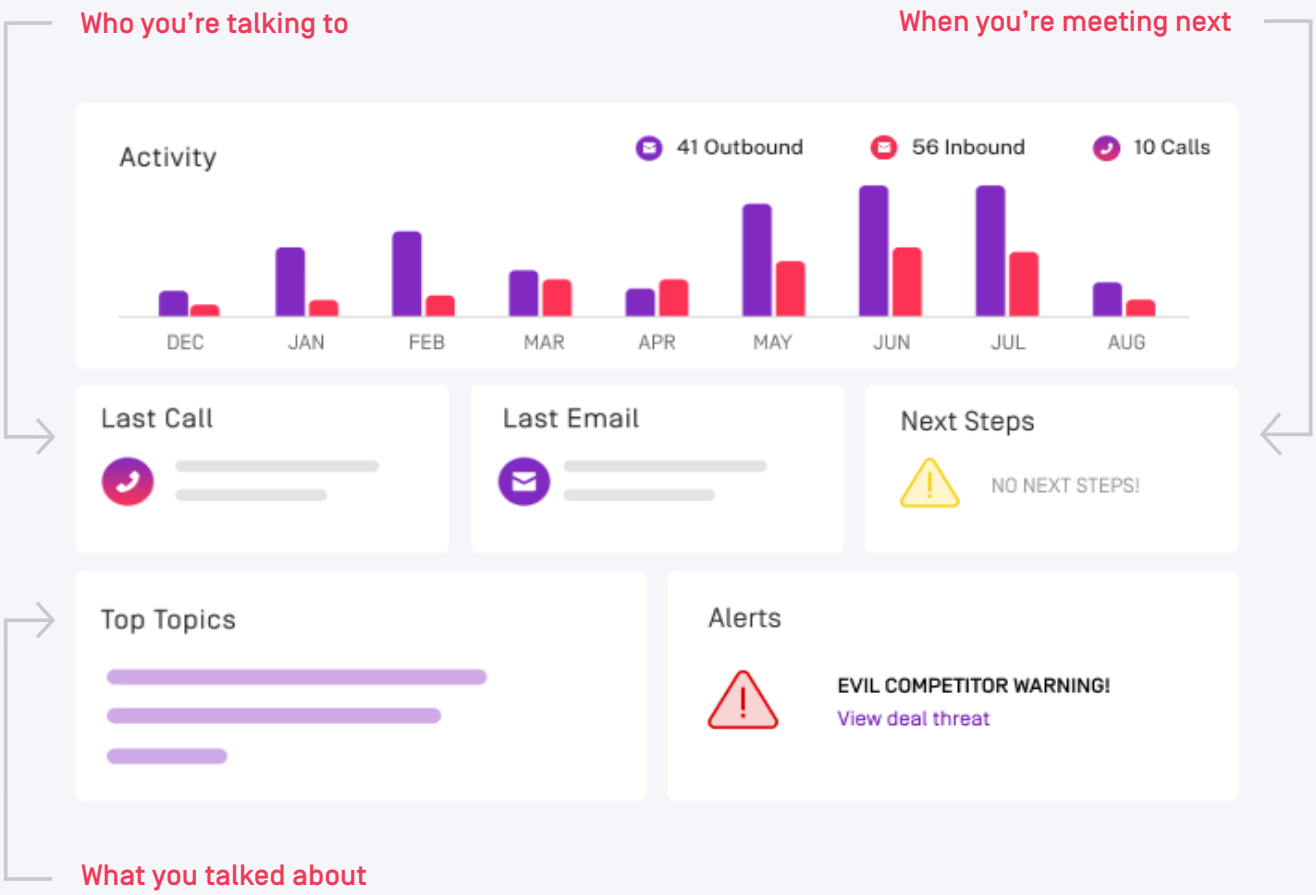
Catch-up questions AREN'T coaching. They're just updating your CRM. Out loud. To each other. Very anti-coaching.

Coaching means planning how to counter deal-breaking risks. **But you can't offer that guidance until you know a deal's entire path and its problem areas:**

- ✓ When was the last call?
- ✓ Who was on it?
- ✓ Which next steps did you agree to?
- ✓ Is there enough email velocity in the deal?
- ✓ What are you discussing next?
- ✓ Have you talked about pricing yet?

In an ideal world, it's all in the CRM. But we both know that's not how things work. Instead, you're doing detective work to find out what actually happened.

Here's what getting deal-breaking information in advance looks like in Gong's Revenue Intelligence platform:



Now that you're up to speed, you can coach on strategy. That means finding risks in deals and laying out plans to get ahead of them.

Here's how coaching interactions roll when you have the right information:

YOU STOP...	YOU START...	HERE'S HOW
Jumping around from topic to topic, trying to figure out where the risks are.	Focusing on one or two major risks that could sink the deal.	Identify the main issues your rep has before your meeting. Focus all your attention there.
Setting arbitrary goals like "convert X deals forward".	Discussing concrete strategies that target known risks in deals (no power involved, not multi-threaded, etc.)	Agree to a shortlist of clear actions for the coming week.
Moving onto the next deal without understanding whether the rep implemented your suggestions in their most recent deal.	Following up on whether the rep implemented last week's plan.	Before your next meeting, look at the data. Did the rep implement your plan? Is it working? Are there new risks cropping up? Talk about all of this so you can set new objectives for next week.
Making your tracking process complicated.	Comparing your team's objectives against their reality.	Keep an evergreen doc of weekly goals and track your team against data from your CRM and Revenue Intelligence system.

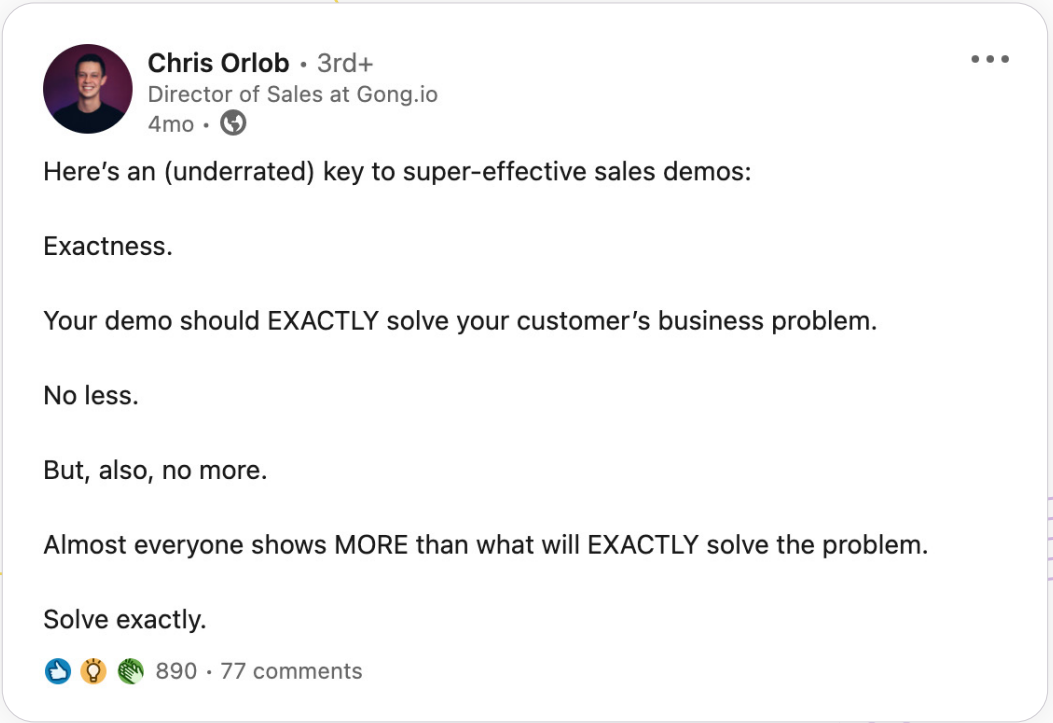
That strategic thinking is where you're most valuable as a leader.

Consider this: most reps avoid talking about the competition.

Instead, they default to positioning your product as market leaders. **Give your reps insights into why they're better off learning about the buyer's context before they start positioning, using these questions:**

- How familiar are you with the space as a whole?
- Are you going to evaluate multiple vendors?
- How familiar are you with competitor XYZ?
- Have you talked to them?
- If you're going to invest here, which business outcomes are you trying to achieve? Have you talked about pricing yet?

Context is everything, and they should get as much clarify as possible before positioning themselves a certain way. Then they can differentiate themselves using their new context clues.



Personal Coaching

How to motivate your team (and keep them motivated)

Keeping your team's energy up is essential... and tough to do when you're virtual. One or two low weeks can mean everyone's playing catch up for the rest of the quarter.

If you're not sure what motivates a rep, ask these questions to uncover what drives them:

- ✓ What was the high point of your work week?
- ✓ What was the best call you had this week and why?
- ✓ What's the toughest part of your sales cycle today?

Despite your best efforts, motivation isn't a given, even in the best of times. Keep an eye on the numbers. That's where it shows up — in activity, win rates, deal progression, you name it.

Getting your team on an unstoppable winning streak means they know how to shake off a bad call, prioritize their activities, and stay accountable. That means getting them used to scratching beneath the surface of a deal.

Here are some questions that can help you do that in meetings:

Question: How did last week go?

Follow-up: Okay, now how did it REALLY go? (If they told you everything up front, great! And if they didn't, you can address any issues lurking beneath the surface.

Question: What are you trying to achieve in this [deal/call/activity]?

Follow-up: What would it mean to you if you could achieve this? (This one helps get them excited about achieving a positive outcome.)

One thing I'm hyper-vigilant about in this situation is motivation. It isn't just their work-life that has been upended by the current environment. It's their personal life, too. And that can mean unexpected disruptions at work as well as having more difficulty getting motivated.

Jared Smith
Manager, Sales Development

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Confidence and comfort are another area for coaching.

When your reps feel solid, it shows up in their calls and rubs off on buyers. Even if buyers throw a rough question out in the first five minutes of a call, your rep will be able to respond with a cool and collected "Can we table that for a few minutes? Let's dive into..."

How do you coach confidence and comfort into reps?

- Don't let them demo too soon.
- Make sure they have an agenda and structure for their calls and throughout the conversation.
- Teach them the importance of pre-call research and using context clues to make the conversation better.
- Teach them how to set next steps sooner with phrases like "You said you're trying to triple your revenue, right? So why don't we find time sooner? It seems like this could be a game changer for your numbers.

"Put your buyer first and understand their business better than anyone, and you can make the proper recommendation to drive a deal forward."

Tanner Robinson
Manager, Commercial Sales

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P.S.: Some simple things can give your reps confidence as well, like knowing they have great decks (grammar included).

Now for the least used (but most powerful) coaching technique.

Self-discovery. It's the next step in motivation.

If you think that coaching means telling your reps what to do and how to do it, it's time for a reframe.

When you know what's happening on your reps' calls, it's tempting to want to jump in and save the ones going sideways. Don't. Your reps won't learn much, and it's not a scalable solution.

The best way to help your reps grow is by having them solve things themselves. That's where you really add value to your team as a manager — by helping reps level up, instead of running around fixing everything yourself (so not scalable).

Even when you know the solution to a given problem, try to help reps come to it on their own. When they do, they're more likely to implement that solution and make it a habit.

Establish best practices for your reps to follow. And when they struggle with a deal, ask them questions like these:

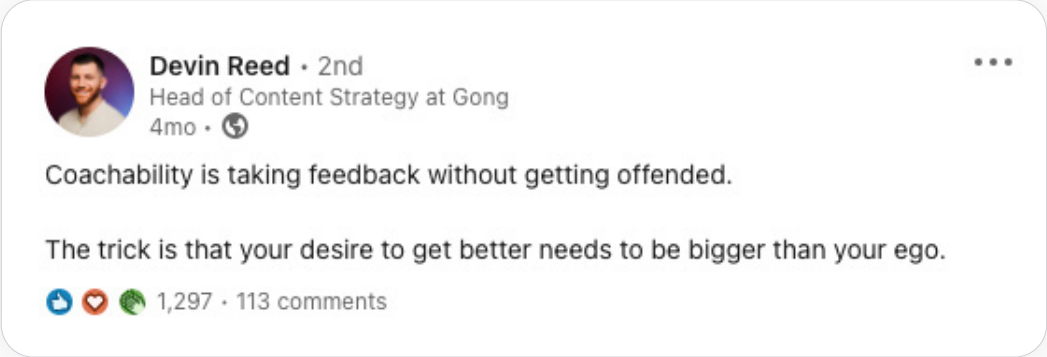
- ✓ What about the call didn't go as planned?
- ✓ Why do you think that is?
- ✓ If you could go back and do it again, what would you do differently?
- ✓ How are you going to ensure you do that next time?

Let them find the answers with your help. (I mean, if they're at a total loss, don't leave them hanging.)

Bonus

Beyond Manager Coaching

Know who you want on your team? Coachable reps. They expect managers to offer strategic guidance, act as a sounding board for ideas, challenge approaches to deals, and help them grow their skills.



But there's another big tactic you can give your team that goes beyond manager-to-rep coaching: initiating self- and peer coaching. It's a boost for your team and takes up little of your time.

Few sales reps are ever taught how to assess their performance accurately or how to engage in productive peer-to-peer coaching. With the right platform, both can happen, even in a 100% remote environment. Just build it into your processes and culture.

Self-coaching

Athletes beat their personal best by studying past performance. What would happen if your reps did the same?

This is a low-touch way to help bring coaching into your team culture for junior reps in particular. It's the least intimidating form of coaching, as it involves reps tracking their own performance against best practices. When reps critique their own performance they become more receptive to outside coaching (like yours!).

Make sure your reps can access their past calls and the team's best talk tracks in a call library. If you don't have a call library, you need to get one now. It's a critical component of a coaching culture. It's where you store your team's best calls across the entire sales process. Forget about old-fashioned, unpredictable call shadowing. This learning tool is available 24/7/365...whenever reps have a minute to boost their game.

1. They identify areas of improvement quickly because the big stats are easy to pinpoint and address...like monologuing during discovery.
2. They track their progress week over week. With a hard stat they can see, talk ratios will shift *immediately*.
3. They start paying more attention to — and learning from — your top performers. How do they reach those great stats?

Peer-to-peer Coaching

Encourage reps to share what works and spots where they're stumped. They can do that on Slack or in call libraries. You can also have the team offer their opinions first when you do group call reviews. If you have confidence in your top sellers, you could even designate a team coach or two. They'll learn valuable leadership skills most sales managers are rarely taught

Key Take-away

Coaching takes time and that's in (really!) short supply. As much as you'd like to coach every rep through every call, it's not feasible. But peer-to-peer coaching is. That changes everything.

Your team can listen to top reps' calls to hear what they do differently. They can ask for feedback from each other (without needing to shadow calls).

That's coaching that takes care of itself. Auto-coaching, if you will.

Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence, Real Results

How Gong Brings Sales Coaches the Power of AI

Master all five coaching approaches — tactical, strategic, personal, motivation, and self-coaching — and you'll have a fully-functioning coaching engine firing on all cylinders. **Here's a quick review of how it works:**

→ Tactical Coaching

This is coaching 101. It's the point at which you choose a coaching strategy that's reliable and evidence-based. Relying on data (not anecdotes) decreases your team's exposure to risk and prioritizes a coaching approach that wins more often.

→ Strategic Coaching

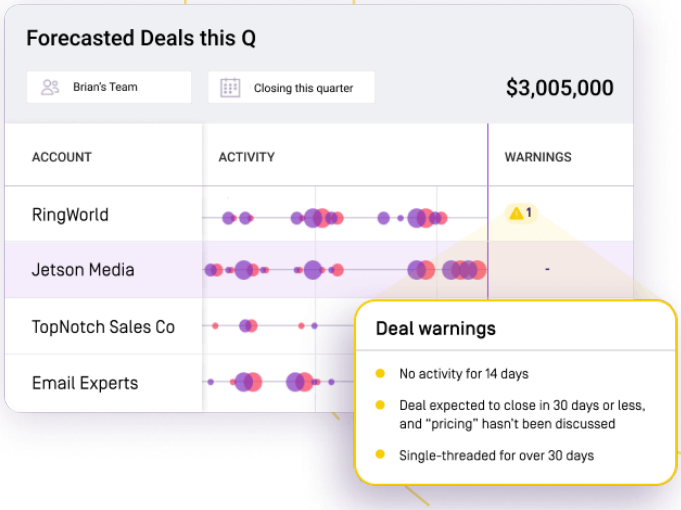
Use data to help your reps proactively unblock their deals. Spend your call reviews looking at what's really happening and develop strategic responses. Learn where reps are struggling (pricing, objection handling, positioning, etc.), and teach them how to respond.

→ Personal Coaching

This is how elite sales managers get reps to shake off a bad call. When they learn to self-coach or reach out to their peers, the whole team is better off. It's a supportive culture that makes reps more self-reliant and takes some coaching pressure off the sales manager.

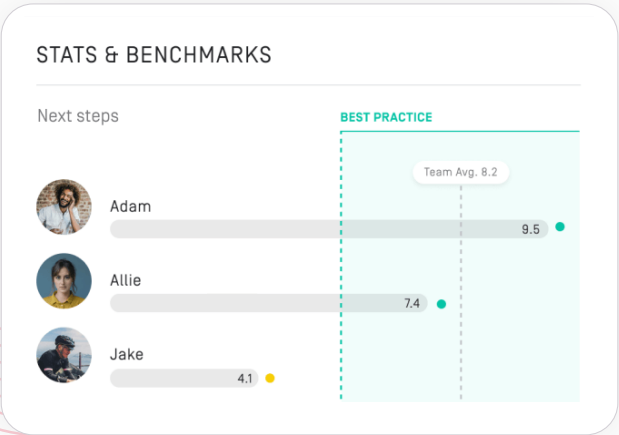
Gong Ties It All Together

Gong is the #1 sales coaching platform. It tracks and analyzes all your reps' phone calls, emails, and web meetings, then sends you insights about your pipeline.



That means you can give your best reps' playbook to everyone on your team so they all level up. When you understand what sets top performers apart, you can shrink the number of reps who don't hit quota.

You'll also learn exactly where things went (or are about to go) sideways for everyone else. **Imagine having an overview like this before you walk into your next 1:1:**



Once you have that high-level view, you can dive into individual deals and pinpoint your reps' challenges. Now you're coaching strategically. In just three clicks, you get to the root of what's going wrong inside a deal, whether it's talk-to-listen ratios, addressing the competition, or involving a decision maker.

And you can track of your team's progress week-in, week-out.

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Interested in seeing how Gong can surface can't-miss coaching opportunities for your team and prevent them from losing winnable deals?

Book your hassle-free consultation to see Gong in action.

Request Demo