



Coaching Humans in an AI-Augmented World



A VP of Sales looked at the dashboard on Monday morning and smiled. Activity targets hit. Pipeline healthy. Deals moving. Nothing to see here.

Then she sat down with a rep to talk through a stalled deal. He opened his laptop, found the AI-generated summary, and started reading from it. She stopped him. *“Close your laptop. Tell me what you think is going on with this account.”*

He had nothing. He knew what the tool told him. He had never formed an independent point of view.

She had been coaching the output. She had never coached the thinking behind it.

That distinction is the challenge for every sales leader managing a team in an AI-augmented environment. Skill and tool-dependency produce identical outputs right up until the moment they don't. A rep building real judgment and a rep who has learned to rely on AI look the same in your CRM, on your dashboard, and in your pipeline review. The difference only surfaces when a deal gets genuinely complicated, when a buyer goes off script, or when judgment is required in the middle of the big meeting and there is no tool to consult. By then, the gap is usually wider than you realized.

Most leaders have not stopped coaching; they're just coaching the way they always have. It's just that the job has fundamentally changed.

Stop Coaching the Output. Start Coaching the Thinking.

Here are the three biggest mistakes:

Mistake 1: Coaching after the fact

Post-call reviews have become the default. Manager pulls the recording or the AI summary, identifies what went wrong, shares feedback. It feels productive. It is almost always too late.

The highest-leverage coaching moment in an AI-augmented workflow is before the call. Before a rep walks into a high-stakes meeting, the right questions are:

- What's your read on this buyer going into today's call?
- Where do you think the resistance will come from?
- What does the AI-generated exec. brief not tell you that you still need to figure out?

Those conversations build judgment. The post-call review documents what already happened.

The shift is structural. Replace at least some of your pipeline reviews with short pre-call sessions before your reps' most important meetings of the week. No dashboards. No AI summaries. Just a conversation about how the rep is thinking before they walk in the door. You will learn more about your team's actual capabilities in four of those sessions than in a month of post-call reviews.

Mistake 2: Praising outputs without testing the thinking behind them.

Clean CRM notes. Polished follow-up emails. Thorough meeting summaries. These things used to signal rep capability. Now they may signal that the rep has a good AI tool and a working copy-paste habit.

Managers who evaluate performance on outputs alone no longer know what skills their team is building. They know what the tools produced. That is a meaningful difference when the outputs look strong, but the judgment underneath is undeveloped.

The fix is to add pressure-testing questions to your regular coaching conversations.

- Ask a rep to walk you through a deal without looking at their notes.
- Ask them what they think needs to happen for the buyer to buy, separate from what the summary says.
- Ask whether they agree with the AI's risk flag and why.

Those questions take the same amount of time. They surface entirely different information. Within a few weeks of asking them consistently, you will have a much clearer picture of who on your team is thinking and who is executing AI's plan.

Mistake 3: Abdicating coaching to the tools.

Some managers have started using AI-generated call feedback to coach reps. That is not coaching. It is forwarding. The rep receives a machine's assessment with the manager's name on it, and no human judgment was used.

When AI handles the preparation and execution work, the moments that remain for human sellers are the ones that require real judgment: reading a room, navigating an unexpected objection, deciding how to respond when the buyer goes somewhere the brief did not anticipate. Developing that capability in your reps requires a human coach who is paying attention and asking hard questions. A manager who outsources that function to a tool is not closing the development gap. The gap grows, quietly, until something goes wrong.

The ask is straightforward. In every deal review and one-on-one for the next ninety days, add one question: "What's your point of view on this, separate from what the tool is telling you?" Ask it with genuine curiosity. Not like it's a test.

That question, asked consistently, will tell you more about the state of your team's ability to apply objective judgement than any report you are currently running. Use what you learn to coach the thinking. The reps who are developing real judgment get harder accounts and bigger deals. The reps depending on the tools need deliberate development before the moment that exposes it.

Agents can draft the email. They cannot build the instinct that closes the complicated deal.

That's your job now!

Process. People. AI. In that order.

Kristie K. Jones helps B2B founders and sales leaders ensure their GTM strategy starts with formal processes, then helps them hire the right humans, and then over-lays AI. Her 2nd book is coming early Fall, *The Sales Leadership Gap: Leading Humans in an AI-Augmented World*.

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