

Patrizia Saolini

RETAIL COACHING

Excel in sales
with sport strategies



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**Excel in sales
with sport strategies**

FrancoAngeli

Original Italian Edition,
Retail Coaching. La gestione operativa della rete vendita secondo le logiche dello sport
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Foreword

by Oscar Damiani

A big champion never plays alone. Whether he is on the field or in the backstage, even the most inveterate soloist is always supported by the *winning team*, which, after a while, becomes the essential point of reference to improve the results we reached and to challenge ourselves towards new and ambitious goals. The winning team, though, must be led with passion and motivated to express its full potential, all the time. An excellent coach knows what I am talking about and I think that Patrizia is one of them, because she believes in this God-like ability called team performance, in the miracle of synergic actions and the sacred ritual of daily training.

When she described the project for this book, I was immediately enthusiastic, because I have known her for many years and I had the opportunity to see her work in the most popular boutiques; even now, I think she is the best fashion retail consultant I know. Maybe it is because Patrizia has always had a two-sided role that has always amazed me. She is a woman of numbers and humanity at the same time and she has always had this ability to convey love for the product to the most terrifying customer and also commitment to sell to the laziest of all shop assistants. Since she has become a professional life coach and created the retail coaching model, her leap towards excellence has become more concrete and this is flattering for me and quenches my thirst of marvel of the typical competent customer.

If you are wondering how I can be so interest in shopping, you have to know that before being ex-soccer champion, a sports agent and a modern art collector, I have always been passionate for what is beautiful and what beauty encourages: marvelous positive emotions as a panacea to give energy to body and mind. I have always been a fan of beauty living in the search of pleasure for a special purchase, the exclusive novelty and the unique collection items; since I am also a sophisticated traveler, I pay spe-

cial attention to rare objects, like Louis Vuitton trunks or Patek Philippe watches. Owning them means improving beauty in the world around me and dividing time in precious moments.

When I visit a shop I like to live the great and prolonged feeling of pleasure that only a cozy and professional environment can give. I want an expert in elegance to listen to me with great attention, an expert that knows about fashion and quality and I want to be involved and receive suggestions with creativity and vitality. I am so picky that I expect shop assistants to be warm and nice even when I buy a trivial product for daily use. In most cases, though, even in the most popular and elegant boutiques, I find myself with impromptu and tragically unprepared shop assistants and, even if I see some interesting objects, I leave the shop empty-handed and I stop shopping, disappointed and bitter. Without the opportunity to play with the precious bag with my fingers and since I cannot prolong that positive emotion until I am home, I immediately erase the unimpressive boutique from the list of the places I go to, because I did not receive enough attention.

My job as a talent scout of big champions makes me understand how difficult it is to choose the potential talent, among hundreds of young athletes. In the past few years I understood that passion for soccer comes almost by chance, exactly like passion for sale, but you get to the top only thanks to important soccer schools and leading soccer clubs. Schools for sale, on the other hand, are rare, especially in Italy and this is why the expert hand of retail coaching can really make the difference, especially inside a company that believes in the God-like factors I mentioned before. Without training for excellent for the entire team, the excellent result is short-lived. The investment on human resources risks to fail every time the synergic part of performance is overlooked and this is when you do not conclude a sale, like failing to kick the ball in when there is no goalkeeper. That is why I only go to trustworthy boutiques; that is, until this bliss lasts. Indeed, if the shop assistant changes store, I cannot go back and be helped by a stranger. When I lose my point of reference and since I cannot count on that person that intimately knew me and could anticipate some proposals, I am puzzled and I feel betrayed. Moreover, I think that the mentioned company that let an excellent shop assistant leave them, loses a priceless heritage made up of know-how and profitability and I cannot feel connected to the brand. I do not care how exclusive the object I want is; if it is not adequately presented, I do not buy it.

The relations I create with shop assistants is, in my opinion, more exclusive than the product and the brand together. The shop assistant needs to know my wishes before I even utter them, she has to read what my preferences are from my image, she should listen to what is around me and see

my word. In Italy there are very few fashion cult places where you can experience an impeccable service; I will not name because I do not want to despise the Made in Italy, but the list is very short and I am not surprised that nobody had ever written a book on retail coaching before; maybe they do not even know what we are talking about! This lesson of style and courage, therefore, is very welcome and Patrizia is the only one able to balanced them so well, matching her refined, humanistic and forward-looking approach with the determination of her entrepreneurial spirit, to let the customer feel guided in her exciting purchases and feel unique. This customer will always (and only) choose the winning team that will represent her the best.

Trust me, it is only a matter of coaching!

Introduction

The challenge that retail coaching wants to take is to guide retail organizations towards a revolutionary cultural change: to recognize the value of people, giving them the same level of attention and care as the product, which is usually much more taken care of and valued.

The person, be it the manager or the shop assistant, even though she is formally praised and described as the main resource in the ethical principles of several companies, in most cases is only an instrument constantly checked by the company, a mere operator following strict management and sales protocols. Whatever is their function, be it the unnerving job of the purchase manager, chained to the mechanism of the corporate procedures, or a professional with years of experience as store manager, for both there is only one keyword: sell, sell, sell. Like it or not, all retail professionals' mission is to meet the needs of the globalized customer who, often, turns out to be more competent than the expert herself. Will our person-shop assistant make it, maybe in her first experience, to meet the needs of an international, extremely savvy customer? If she does not add to her determination and the knowledge of the market the innovative technique of retail coaching, the shop assistant's fate will be that of losing the best customers and not reaching the sales targets set by the company. The same holds true for the purchase manager; if she does not exploit her potential to implement communication between her area and the store, she will risk to lose precious information to find the needs of the customer and to reach the budgets set by the retail director or the store owner.

The futuristic structure of integrated selling created ad hoc with retail coaching is more effective than assisted selling because it pushes the shop assistant to work together with the customer by integrating the brand into the life of the customer. To put this into practice we need to use a human-

istic approach with people, top managers, shop assistants or customers, so that they will use a new sales service style on a daily basis: the **R.E.T.A.I.L.** style.

The word **R.E.T.A.I.L.** summarizes all the necessary activities that can push the sales structure to its fullest potential, as it follows:

1. **Responsibility** to retail managers so that they reach corporate goals, to strengthen the value of team spirit and to create an action plan shared with the stores, so as to be effective and successful;
2. **Explore** the real needs of customers; show dedication in meeting those needs; express gratitude towards them;
3. **Turn** personal weaknesses of shop assistants in talent; give a positive leadership model;
4. **Align** corporate goals and store goals; train the potential of the team;
5. **Interact** with customers, stressing their potential; integrate brand offers with the daily routine of the customer;
6. **Launch praises** for the performance of the successful team; unveil the tastes and the habits of the customers.

Such approach only uses personal resources of each member of the staff, both shop assistants and manager, to improve relations among colleagues, customers and brand. Without any tricks, this style uses the effectiveness of four among the most overlooked human virtues in the retail sector: *courage, wisdom, justice and humanity*, mixed together to make the dream of the modern customer come true; instantly possess the product that will improve her life.

Now you are perhaps wondering what “*train the potentials of the team*” means. Good, please have a bit more patient and follow me for a couple of pages more, you will see that the answer will come in the next paragraphs. If, instead, some of you was curious by the activity of “*unveiling the tastes and the habits of customers*”, you will probably want to delve more deeply into this activity which is a bit rusty. If so, try to think what the opposite might entail, i.e. ignoring the tastes and the habits of customers. It would mean not listening to them during the negotiations, or not absorbing the useful feedback for buyers, or, even worse, give away obsolete items that needed to be discarded as soon as possible. Whatever is the meaning of this precious activity for you, rest assured that a deep knowledge of tastes of customers will make the post-sale phase much easier; the activity, to be perfectly clear, that will bring the customer back into your shop, i.e. the *integration of the brand in the life of the customer herself*.

Without listening there is no integration, without integration there is no service, without service there is no customer retention.

I really hope that you all agree on this basic concept at the start of our journey together.

In the following chapters you will notice that the peculiarity of the **R.E.T.A.I.L.** style is that of showing that there is no long-lasting success without ad-hoc strategies between people and products, companies and stores and shop assistants and customer. Without these strategic alliances based upon a common good, no marketing plan can keep up with a market travelling at the speed of light if it is not driven by the motivation of the global satisfaction of those who buy. When the retail structure uses human potentials related to virtues like *courage, wisdom, justice and humanity*, the sales force will be in a position to turn a good sales performance in a great productivity report. Sales assistants will be fully involved in the growth of the brand and will appreciate more corporate strategies. They will understand the necessary efforts for the common growth and, motivated by the love and generosity towards the company that invested on them, they will take more care of customers, colleagues and even the product, which is, really, the last thing you sell to the public. At the same time, customers will be motivated to become loyal to the brand that engaged them, as they will feel part of a life style in which they feel perfectly aligned and therefore they will come back to buy where they felt happy. The customer that is a fan of the successful team will invest in her favourite store more time and money you can imagine, because they are touched by a pleasant feeling of satisfaction in their hearts.

Retail coaching can be the ideal improvement tool for those working in retail areas that want to channel growth of the organization and productivity through enthusiasm of the employees and loyalty of the customers.

For this reason, it should be integrated in a constant training mechanism, otherwise it will lose the collective power of positive emotions that create and sustain successful ventures. We know we are far from the development we long for, so much so that it stays on a budget or a business plan, as if it was not part of reality, i.e. impossible to reach.

How can we make the use of this new approach real, even in this moment of crisis?

We can start by getting to know it through this book, for example. Then we can try it on people we trust with individual or team coaching sessions, as if it was a group benefit.

Or we can use it to reduce stress in the most difficult moments for the management team and we can integrate it as an ally in staff retention policies. Retail coaching can be used also as strategic ally to reach

shared objectives, at all levels of the retail chain, thanks to its ability to work on different targets, from luxury goods to department stores and outlets, that, nowadays, are very interesting in terms of profit, and even small entrepreneurial companies. In the book I tried to highlight the importance of this feature by offering a wide range of inputs and best practices, according to the different roles in the company.

If for instance, you are a retailer and want to have a coaching style, or you are a professional coach, you may find the first and the second chapters interesting, since you will have the opportunity to get to know the origins and the theory of this method and the six phases of retail coaching.

You will also have the chance to read the stories of the coachees, i.e. those who successfully tried the method and try the personal training schedules of the 15 potentials used in retail coaching.

If you are a retail director, or want to become one, the third chapter will surely capture your attention and will show you new possibilities in your great profession. I hope you will enjoy the interview with Rossana Bianchi, one of the most renowned retail directors in the world, or the coaching business case of Marina Osnaghi, one of the most popular corporate coaches in the world.

If, instead, you are interested in probing into what happens in the points of sale, you can explore the fourth chapter where I describe the profile of the store director, comparing it with the profile of the sports trainer. In addition to the interviews of my colleagues Fabrizio Cipriani, David Goldsmith and Alex Finelli veterans, respectively, in retail and sports coaching, in this chapter you will be able to get to know the concept of integrated sale and browse around the data of the research carried out by Connexia S.r.l., Nielsen and MIP (Milan Polytechnic University) on trends and purchase targets of Italian customers, and to discover how you can measure results of Coaching services with Lisa Edwards, Head of Talent Management for Corbis and founder of the Bloom Coaching Institute.

The chapter will conclude with the intervention of Stefano Dominella, President of Gattinoni and Member of the Board of the Italian Fashion Chamber, who, in the afterword, will unveil the most resilient part of retail, i.e. why we need to train our determination to overcome the most difficult moments in the market.

I hope the excerpts of the professionals I interviewed for this book will make you more aware of the concepts I will describe in the retail coaching method and that you will get the courage and creativity from the shared experiences described by my coachees. I love to work in teams, so this could not have been done in a better way for me.

To give you even more support in understanding some concepts, I made a final glossary where you can find the meaning of the words that are pertaining to the world of retail coaching, even though these words are widely explained during the book. For the glossary I took inspiration from the one made together with the Italian School of Life & Corporate Coaching where I got my diploma in Life Coaching.

I admit I have a couple of personal challenges: create mutual satisfaction with my customers and reach excellence in all fields of my life.

As a consequence, I am absolutely sure of the fact that, crisis notwithstanding, companies with points that are open to the public dedicated to direct selling, need to keep an adequate professional standard to meet the needs of customers. Even when companies went through a difficult moment and with a temporary downsizing, the retail staff needs to reach a shared objective: the budget.

If the company does not have the necessary tools to reach this target, action plans may fail or aims need to be constantly reviewed, with huge waste of time. In this sense, the retail coach may be the ideal professional to keep the members of the team focused, developing the necessary determination to overcome even the most uncertain moments. Of course, it is also a matter of corporate culture and not all retailers have as a vision that of investing on their people.

When the crisis is over and companies will be focused on boosting the potentials of the sales force, they will be the pioneers promoting growth and independence opportunities for their sales force, truly believing that investments on human beings are as important as those on the product. At that moment, the retail coach will be there waiting for them, in an epiphany of creativity and foresight. So, the savvy customer will be recognized as valuable and shall be finally attracted by the power of the successful team, like a fan to his/her favourite sports club.

If the customer is sacred, then the person is... divine!

Acknowledgments

Among all the people that supported me while I was writing this book, five were essential to complete this project.

The first one is *Paolo Tondo*, who was able to give power to that little voice in my head for some years and that kept on telling me it was time to write about my passion for retail and for coaching. I am quite proud when I think that retail coaching was already appreciated by my loyal clients and that, one day, it would become well known on a different scale but, without

a doubt, Paolo started this great writing project that led to the publication of my coaching method with FrancoAngeli.

Thank you for trusting me.

The second is *Simone Cattaneo*, my personal graphic designer that knows all possible evolutions of my career as retail coach. He is the one supporting all my visions as a retailer and that creates personal training schedules for my coachees. Thank you for the attention you gave me...as always!

The third is *Alessandra Marangoni*, who collaborated, side by side with me, to correct the draft of the book. I had the foresight to ask for her support and I know I did the right thing. Four eyes are better than two! Thank you for your precious alliance.

The fourth is *Oscar Damiani*, that inspired me with his look of a modern dandy... you are the genius of networking! Thank you because we kept in touch and that you introduced me to Ariedo Braidà... a great honour for me.

The fifth is *Stefano Dominella*, that, many years ago, gave me the opportunity to express myself and to allow this young lady to evolve in complete autonomy... maybe you already were a coach and we did not know about it!

In the first two chapters of this book the real protagonists, although without a name, are my coaches that I thank, from Antonella, to Lisa, Silvia and Paolo. Thank you guys for following me also in these pages.

I had the opportunity to tell about the experience some other of my coachees in the third chapter as well: Andrea, Marinella, Silvana, Luca, Antonia, Jenny and Alessandra, all great people, sometimes a bit complicated... well, otherwise, what would you need me for?...

Special thanks to Rossana Bianchi, that, once again, showed her extremely professional attitude and great humanity. Hurray for women managers!

Another great thanks goes to Marina Osnaghi: as a coach you are exceptional, as a friend you are irreplaceable.

I also have to mention the protagonists of the fourth chapter, Alex Finelli, as an example of excellent coach in life and on the basket field and David Goldsmith that, from the other side of the world, gave me many very important ideas.

To Elena Quattrone, for your rare authenticity.

To Fabrizio Cipriani that I have known for many years and for whom I have always had esteem.

To Lisa Edwards for her extreme care for detail and the patience to think about me also during weekends: thank you always.

A special thanks to Giovanni Pola and Stefano Vitta from Connexia Srl,

as we hit it off immediately and because they were able to have fun even when we were talking about numbers. And, obviously, to Nielsen and MIP.

To the companies that gave me the opportunity to work as a retail coach on the market, and that, for privacy reasons, I cannot quote.

To Connie Darrow, that immediately understood that I would make the difference in store management.

To Bobette Reeder as a very precious *mentor coach* that supported me in writing this book.

To Luca Stanchieri who taught me life coaching and Patrizia Breschi, from the Italian School of Life and Corporate Coaching.

To the guys of Foresight Srl, Enrico Illuminati, Andrea Falleri and Lorenzo Paoli who had the great idea to create the course of Sports Intelligence to which I participated exactly when I was writing this book. Perfect timing!

To Lorenzo Paoli again, for the translation of the whole book from Italian to English.

To all the staff at FrancoAngeli that dedicated their time and effort to create the layout of the book and make it impeccable.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank with great affection my parents and relatives.

A special thanks to my husband, Fabrizio, that I thank for the great patience I found out he had and to my son Federico that, all in all, looked more satisfied in seeing me working on the book than running after him, thank you for giving me your vitality.

To my parents and my brother, whom I couldn't see before Christmas because I absolutely wanted to finish the book... see you on Easter!

Systemic retail coaching: a coaching attitude is a revolution for the system

“We need to be the change we want to see in the world”.
Mahatma Gandhi

1.1. A couple of things I know about retail... and coaching

Opening stores and studying their finest details during their implementation has been a fascinating activity since I was twenty two and I had to replace a friend during an inspection for the opening of two department stores in China and Indonesia. It was 1990 and at that time opening a “shop in shop” was really unconventional, especially in those countries and especially for a five-month-pregnant model like me, determined to change job right after giving birth. From that point on, with my son, I went on travelling in Asia and Europe, opening all kinds of possible stores until 1997. I opened small, medium and huge stores; in the cities, at the seaside, in the mountains and also on the lakeside. I went on launching shops in shop not only in the biggest department stores in the world, but also in casinos and even in museums. I had the great opportunity to open extremely high-end boutiques in all continents, also scouting for beauty and vintage products much earlier than concept stores came around. Then, when my son reached school age, I had to accept to stay in Italy. Milan looked by far the city that was in line with my wishes the most. Indeed, I wanted to go on breathing in