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## Most Performance Problems Aren't Effort Problems. They're Knowledge Problems.

An excerpt from *Carry the Weight: The Sales Leader's Guide to Coaching, Trust, and Building People Who Win*

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The clearest example came during a meeting I had scheduled as an accountability conversation with a rep I will call Chris.

He had missed his number two quarters in a row. Activity logs looked reasonably full: calls made, follow-ups sent, meetings booked. The effort appeared to be there. So the problem had to be ownership. At some point, results are a choice.

I went in prepared. Notes. Data. Three missed commitments from the prior quarter.

Halfway through, Chris described a recent prospect conversation. He explained how he had positioned our product: confidently, articulately, and completely wrong.

Not slightly off. The framing he was using was the version we had retired at a training session seven weeks earlier. He had attended. He had taken notes. He had said he understood the update. It had never made it from the training room into his actual conversations.

I stopped him.

"When we updated the positioning in Q3, how did you understand that change?"

He explained it back to me. The old way.

I felt something quiet in my chest. Not anger. Something heavier.

I had been preparing to challenge his ownership for 45 minutes. What I was sitting across from was not an effort problem. It was a teaching gap that had been compounding silently for two quarters while I measured the wrong thing.

I did not deliver the accountability conversation that day. I had to earn the right to it first, by doing what should have happened after the training. By checking for understanding instead of assuming attendance meant absorption.

I had coached effort when the issue was knowledge. I had coached knowledge when the issue was strategy. I had tried to motivate people who were confused, and I had tried to teach people who already knew what to do. Every time I got the diagnosis wrong, I made the next conversation harder.

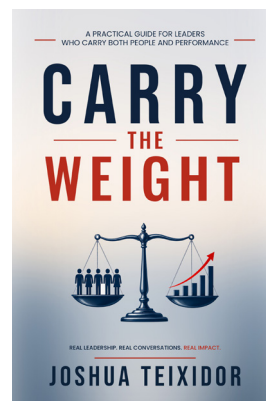
That is the hidden cost of bad coaching. It does not just fail to improve performance. It weakens trust.

What came out of that meeting eventually got a name.

EKS™. Effort, Knowledge, and Strategy. Three categories that account for almost every performance gap a leader sits across from.

The name leads with Effort because Effort is the word leaders reach for first. The diagnosis runs the other direction. Knowledge first. Strategy second. Effort last.

"Do they understand what good looks like?" That is what Knowledge asks. A knowledge gap hides behind confidence. The person nods, uses the right language, sounds like they



understand. Then you look at the work. You cannot pressure someone into knowing what they were never taught.

"Can they apply what

they know in the right way at the right time?" That is what Strategy asks.

They can explain the process. But when the work turns situational, their judgment breaks down. They send the right message to the wrong person. They ask the right question in a way that feels scripted instead of connected. They are not ignorant. They are misapplying what they know.

Effort is the conclusion you reach when knowledge and strategy are not the issue. The person knows what to do, understands how to approach it, and still does not do it.

Effort should be the last thing you conclude, not the first.

Chris was a knowledge problem. I had spent 45 minutes preparing to coach it as an effort problem.

The same symptom can have different causes. Three reps with weak pipeline: one does not know how to prospect, one knows how but is targeting the wrong accounts, one understands both and is not doing the work. Coach all three the same way, and you fail all three differently.

EKS™ exists to slow that moment down. One question before every coaching conversation.

What kind of problem is this?

Excerpted from *Carry the Weight: The Sales Leader's Guide to Coaching, Trust, and Building People Who Win*, Chapter 8, "EKS™: Effort, Knowledge, and Strategy." *Carry the Weight* is coming this month on hardcover, paperback, eBook, and audio. Sign up to get it early [www.carrytheweightbook.com](http://www.carrytheweightbook.com).