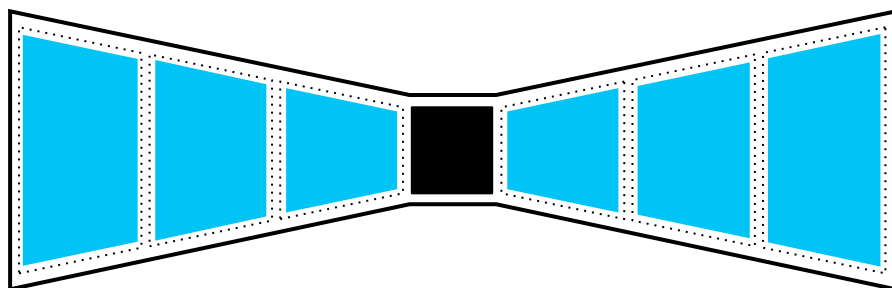# RESEARCH BRIEF

# AI COACHING IN GO-TO-MARKET:

## AND THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE FRONTLINE MANAGER

*By Dominique Levin, CEO Emeritus of Winning by Design*

# AI Coaching in Go-to-Market and the Changing Role of the Frontline Manager

By Dominique Levin, CEO Emeritus of Winning by Design

*Research conducted Q2 2025*

## Research Abstract

In this Research Brief, we cover the emerging trend of using AI agents as coaches to provide personalized guidance, feedback, and training for go-to-market personnel, including sales and customer success professionals. We look at both skills coaching and deal coaching, and we examine the implications of AI coaching for frontline managers.

For those looking to implement these approaches, the full version includes a feature-level vendor comparison and a ready-to-use RFP template, available to Winning by Design Advisory Access subscribers.

## CEO Take

If frontline managers don't improve the productivity and performance of individual go-to-market personnel, then why have managers? With the help of AI, frontline managers can dramatically improve rep performance, while overseeing a significantly larger team.

You may wonder whether coaching is still relevant in an era where go-to-market tasks are increasingly taken over by AI agents? The short answer is "yes": AI will not replace all human activities. In particular, more complex customer management throughout the customer journey will be executed by humans for the foreseeable future.

Consistent research, preparation, strategy, and practice significantly increases the outcomes of activities such as stakeholder meetings, trade/negotiation, business stakeholder onboarding, executive business reviews, and such.

Deploying AI coaching alongside your managers improves the frequency and consistency of deal and skill coaching interactions. AI coaching is available to every employee 24/7 and, at its best, is tailored to specific employees, as well as specific upcoming customer interactions.

By leveraging AI for deal and skills coaching you can free up about half of managers' time so managers can handle larger teams and/or be involved in more strategic activities such as cross-functional collaboration, people strategy, and AI oversight.

Managers will still be involved with coaching, but rather deal with exception management and only intervene in the most critical and relevant moments, as highlighted by the AI.

Overall, the role of the frontline manager will shift from tactical to strategic, and may require rethinking your job description and hiring/recruiting strategy for go-to-market team leads: bluntly stated, in the future, the frontline manager role will be a VP- or C-Level job.

> *"In the near future, the frontline manager role will be a*
> *VP- or C-Level job and you should plan accordingly."*

Key features to look for in an AI Coaching solution include the ability to provide coaching before, during, and after each customer interaction; to tailor coaching to specific meetings and deals via calendar and CRM integration; and to provide solid trend and exception reporting for managers.

## Strategic Insights: The Promise of AI Coaching

Skill coaching and deal coaching have long been an important part of a frontline sales manager's job, consuming about half of a manager's time. Unfortunately many managers aren't very good at consistently coaching.

Herein lies the dual opportunity of AI Coaching: giving every single customer-facing rep an excellent and 24/7 available coach, which can dramatically improve rep productivity, while also significantly cutting down on management time (and costs).

1. **Improve productivity per rep with skills coaching.**

   Skill coaching can dramatically improve productivity of customer-facing humans within a few short months. Winning by Design ran an experiment with a public SaaS company wherein reps received a single training session and six weeks of facilitated skill practice sessions. Within two months, question-based selling skills had dramatically improved with upwards of 90% of reps displaying the desired behaviors. This resulted in reduced sales cycles, increased close rates, and a total increase of 16% in the ARR per rep:

| 60-Day Leading Indicators | 60-Day Lagging Indicators |
|---|---|
| Asking Impact Questions<br><br>32%  →  90% | Sales Cycle reduced by 11% |
| Asking Critical Event Questions<br>21%  →  70% | Close Rate increase by 21% |
|  | 16% increase in ARR / rep |
|  | Incremental $724k ARR over a year |

**Table 1**. *The Impact of a Single Coaching Sprint*

With AI Coaching, every rep has a personal coach available 24/7 to:

- Facilitate role play practice tailored to specific customers *before* important meetings.
- Get feedback immediately *after* each meeting based on call recordings.
- Receive in-real-time guidance *during* customer calls.

The AI Coach can hold reps accountable for practice by logging the amount of time practiced, as well as specific skills progression and reporting back to the human manager. The human manager now only has to watch trends and manage exceptions.

2.  **Drive results with deal coaching.**

Beyond skills coaching, the AI coach can also handle deal inspection and deal coaching. Imagine a world in which all reps are well prepared for every customer meeting on the calendar. Before each meeting, the AI coach would ask questions such as "have you identified the potential blocker in this deal?" or help practice for a specific  "trade/ negotiate" session. Manager time can now be spent on conversations that are uniquely human, such as creating confidence or discussing a rep's longer term career goals.

**3.    Dramatically reduce overhead and increase cross-functional alignment.**

Because skills coaching and deal coaching together make up 50% of a frontline manager's time, the role of the frontline manager will change with the adoption of AI coaching. With AI coaching in place, each manager can handle a significantly larger team–up to thirty reps per manager. In addition, managers can now spend time on more strategic tasks, including  cross-functional collaboration with product, marketing, and finance. Managers will also need to spend more time both on organizational and people strategy as well as AI oversight and tooling.

In total, we predict that managers can free up as much as 30 hours a week using AI in various aspects of their job (see Table 3). Assuming the remainder of the time (30 hours) will be spent on strategic projects and cross-functional collaboration, then the shift from tactical to strategic tasks will be dramatic. By focusing on more strategic tasks, managers can significantly contribute to new growth initiatives for the organization:

| Frontline Manager Tasks | Before AI | After AI |
|---|---|---|
| Tactical | 80% | 30% |
| Strategic | 20% | 70% |

*Table 2. The Frontline Manager Job Will Be a VP- or C-Level Job in the Future*

| | Without AI | With AI | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Size of Team** | **10 ppl** | **10 ppl** | Assuming same size |
| Deal coaching | 10 hrs | 2 hrs | Exception review |
| Skills coaching | 15 hrs | 2 hrs | Exception review |
| Forecasting | 5 hrs | 2 hrs | Human in the loop |
| Interviewing | 4 hrs | 2 hrs | Human in the loop |
| CRM data entry | 6 hrs | 2 hrs | Human in the loop |
| Strategic work | 10 hrs | 10 hrs | If no change |
| **Total** | **50 hrs** | **20 hrs** | **60% replaced by AI** |

*Table 3. Where Frontline Managers Spend Time with and without AI*

In summary, with AI Coaching, an organization can exponentially increase individual rep performance in a short period of time, enhance its ability to seize future growth opportunities, and reduce overhead costs by as much as 50%.

*SalesHood, a provider of AI-driven sales enablement and AI Coaching solutions recently reported that their AI helped reduce enablement headcount by 45% while coaching grew by 231% across customers on their platform.*

**4.    Focus on uniquely human skills**

"Why focus on AI Coaching if I can replace human SDRs and AEs with AI Agents altogether?" Humans will be replaced only gradually by AI Agents.
Also, not all human tasks will be replaced. In the short term, AI Agents will begin to take over inbound prospecting (see *AI SDR Agents* report), outbound prospecting, transactional selling, and supporting roles such as being an all-knowing sales engineer on a call with humans. But for higher-order tasks, AI will serve more of a supporting function, to help humans be better at their jobs.So when it comes to AI Coaching, the promise of AI is to focus on improving those skills that are innately human, such as creativity and complex human relationships. This means focusing your AI coaching efforts on key moments and skills involved with stakeholder meetings, joint impact planning, or executive business reviews. Deal inspection and deal coaching are also relevant. More details are provided in the next section, which includes an implementation plan for practitioners.

# Practical Insights: Implementing AI Coaching

Humans cannot develop new habits and skills without reinforcement and practice. An AI Coach can be available 24/7 for your reps to provide both skills coaching and deal coaching, before, during, and after customer calls and meetings (see above).

Historically frontline managers have owned coaching – but with mixed results. AI can more reliably and consistently coach based on role plays, call recordings, and even provide real-time guidance.

AI Coaching can have an immediate and considerable impact on revenue, typically within 6 to 12 weeks. Investing in AI Coaching also sends a strong signal that you continue to value human contributions at a time when you may be replacing some human work with AI Agents. Start your AI Coaching program with:

1.  Bottom-of-funnel moments, where you can have a more immediate impact, and where reps have fewer real-life "at bats".
2.  More complex sales cycles and skills, specifically innately human skills involving creativity and human relationships.

### *Bottom-of-funnel skills*

We recommend you start with coaching on skills that are near the bottom of the sales funnel such as trade/negotiate skills. There are several reasons for this:

1.  Focusing on bottom-of-funnel skills can show increased revenue within the shortest period of time. Improved discovery calls will take months to yield revenue, while reducing the discount of a deal may have an impact on revenue within a month or less.
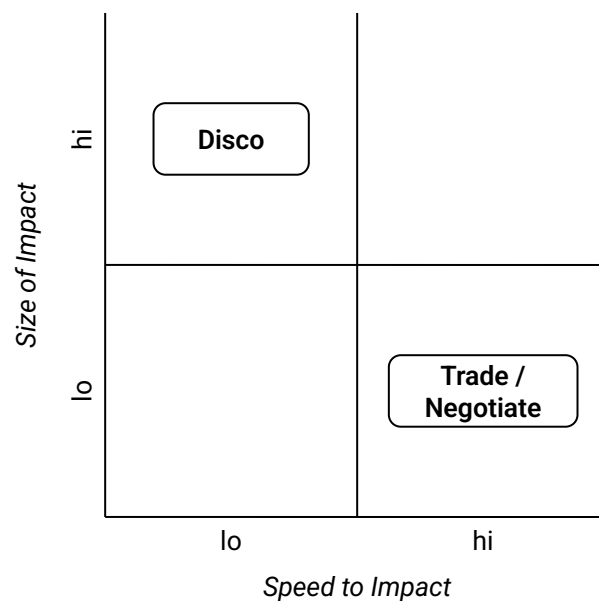


**Figure 1**. *Comparing Speed and Size of Impact of Different Skills*

2.  When it comes to bottom-of-funnel skills, reps have much fewer real-world at bats. While a rep may do hundreds of discovery calls in a given year, she may only do tens of trade/negotiate closing meetings, making each meeting that much more mission-critical and necessitating preparation and practice ahead of time.

3.  Bottom-of-funnel tasks such as agreeing on the final proposal and price are less likely to be taken over by AI in the short term, so coaching efforts will have a longer shelf life.

### *Complex sales skills*

Focus AI Coaching on key moments in your customer journey that involve uniquely human skills that will not be replaced by AI any time soon, specifically moments involving creativity and complex relationship management, e.g. joint solutioning, impact planning, controlling the room during a stakeholder meeting, trade/negotiate meeting, business kick-off, or executive business review.
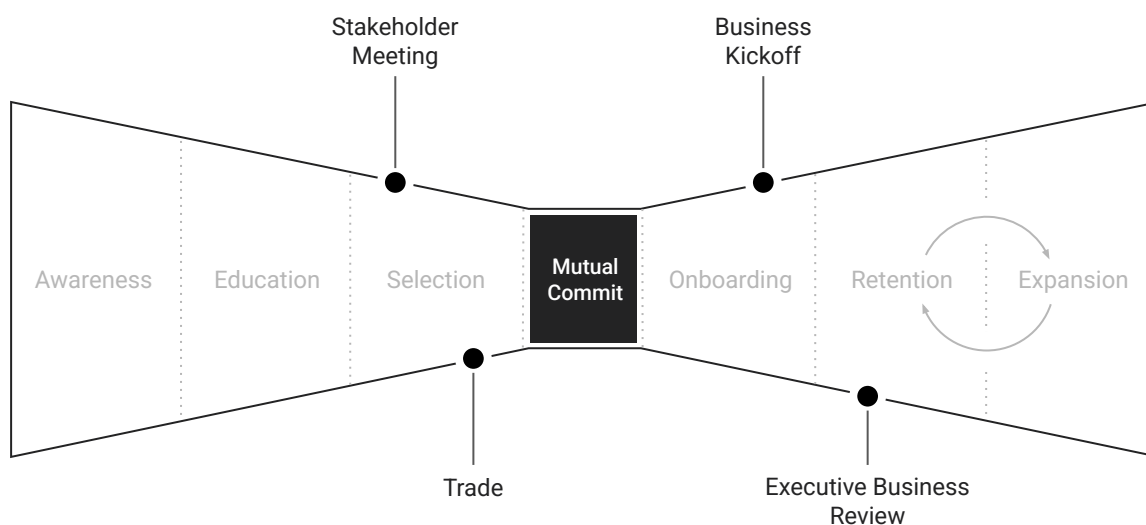
*Figure 2. Examples of Complex Sales Skills Mapped Against the Bowtie*

# Process, Systems, People

When implementing AI Coaching, remember the process, systems, people framework. In the past we hired rockstar humans to solve problems, which isn't repeatable or scalable. Adding systems to high performing people may increase the productivity of the top percent, but it also scales instability. Instead focus on proven processes first, then put systems in place that reinforce those processes, and finally add high performers to the mix to maximize your investment.
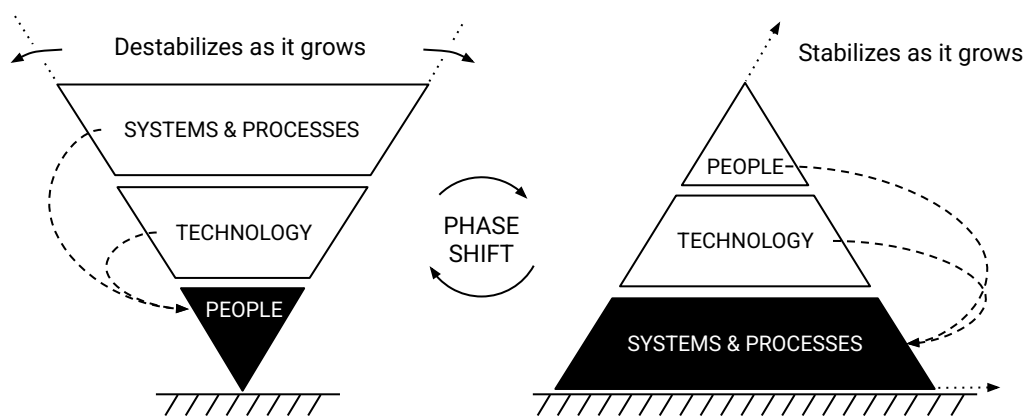


*Figure 3*. *AI Coaching Needs To Sit on a Foundation of Systems & Processes*

## *Process*

From a process and operating cadence point of view, use your AI Coach to conduct continuous improvement Impact Sprints with your team. An Impact Sprint is a hyper-focused 4- to 8-week program that zeroes in on improving one key skill for an outsized impact on rep performance. Sprints are a collaborative, data-driven system of upskilling that any team can repeat on an ongoing basis, to achieve a significant lift in performance.
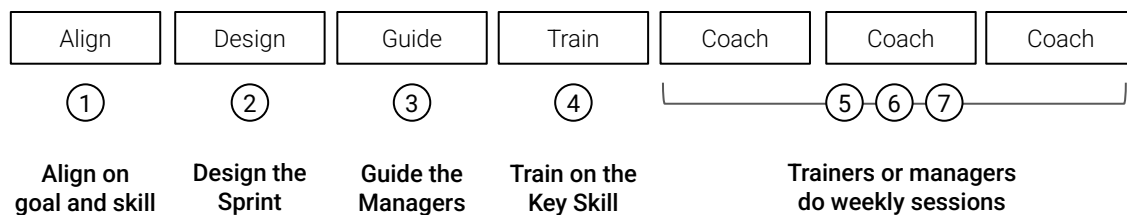
Historically, an Impact Sprint relies on a human coach: either a company would hire professional coaches for weekly sessions, which is very expensive, or it would try to leverage its managers, who often don't have the time and experience to provide consistent skills coaching sessions.

AI Coaching is making the planning and execution of an Impact Sprint much more efficient and effective. The average rep will get much more practice at a much lower cost using AI Coaching. We also believe that an Impact Sprint can now be a short 30 days instead of the prior 60 days, increasing the velocity of your business and the speed to Impact.

**Steps of an Impact Sprint:**

1.  Define leading and lagging indicators that indicate measurable improvement
2.  Decide on the key skill to focus on during the sprint
3.  Train the reps on the new skill in a single session - either synchronously by humans or individually by an AI Coach
4.  Let the AI Coach reinforce the skill for a three week period, starting immediately after the training sessions
5.  Hold monthly accountability sessions where the teams reviews and discussed time practiced and lessons learned - and where you roll out the skill for the next month

**Before AI Coaching: 7 Weeks**

| Align | Design | Guide | Train | Coach | Coach | Coach |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ | | |

| Align on goal and skill | Design the Sprint | Guide the Managers | Train on the Key Skill | Trainers or managers do weekly sessions |

**With AI Coaching: 4 Weeks**

| Align | Train/Coach | AI Coach | AI Coach |
|---|---|---|---|
| ① | ② | ③ | ④ |

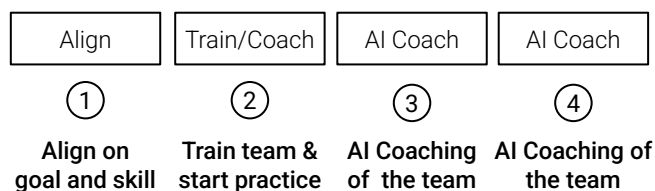| Align on goal and skill | Train team & start practice | AI Coaching of the team | AI Coaching of the team |

*Figure 4. With AI Coaching, You Can Run More Impactful and Higher Velocity Impact Sprints*

## *Systems*

Although there are many vendors in the AI Coaching space, most vendors are small, so make sure to inquire about their finances and ask for customer case studies and references. Over time AI Coaching will likely become a feature of broader revenue enablement solutions, but in the short run you may be better off working with a small vendor that can be responsive to your needs and to changes in the market. Some incumbents have already released or announced integrated AI coaching solutions, including Saleshood, Gong, and Salesforce.

Solutions from adjacent markets may also be worth considering, such as general purpose AI Coaching and Role play platforms and players from the services space, where some vendors offer innovative solutions for in-person (door-to-door) sales.

Regardless of the vendor, here are key features to look for in an AI Coaching solution:

### *Types of Coaching*

Most AI coaching vendors in the market today focus on skills coaching, which is also the domain of many sales training vendors. However, in addition to skills coaching, we expect (and wish) that more vendors will also integrate deal coaching. Some vendors show promise in this area.

### *Timing of Coaching*

The most powerful solution provides options for coaching before (role play), during (in real time), and after (based on recordings). Most vendors focus on role play practice. Real-time coaching is the most difficult to get right and so far, we have only seen Winn.ai deliver a credible solution in this space. We expect more players to emerge in the next twelve months.

### *Integrations*

The best coaching is tailored to the individual rep and situation. Integration with a rep's calendar and CRM offers the promise to suggest and offer preparation and practice before every specific customer meeting. The AI Coach can read past conversations and meeting transcripts with a particular customer and generate preparation questions and a role play scenario on the fly. Several vendors offer this capability.

### *Modalities*

Most vendors offer voice-based coaching, with some experimenting with video. Most video avatars are laggy and will be more expensive. We are not convinced yet that video offers a significant advantage over voice-only solutions. The future will tell.

### *Range of Feedback*

Different vendors offer different types of coaching feedback. Most offer scorecards and look for specific elements to be present in a call such as "building rapport" or "diagnosing pain". Usually, these scorecards are customizable. Some vendors come with out-of-the box scorecards that align with Winning by Design's SPICED diagnostic framework and other industry frameworks. In addition to scorecard-based coaching, some vendors provide feedback on general soft skills such as tone, pace, filler words, and talk ratio. A few offer sentiment analysis as well.

### *How to Set Up a Role play*

Many vendors dump learners into a role play scenario without setting much context. Winning by Design has written blueprints on the importance of setting up a role play carefully and providing learners with enough context so they can be somewhat successful on the first try and not get frustrated immediately with the concept of AI Coaching.

### *Reports*

We were unable to find significant differences in the depth of reporting across vendors, but this doesn't make reporting less important. In the future managers will have very large teams and need to be able to manage by exception based on dashboards and reports trending individuals and teams across the company and over time. With the reports and exceptions in hand, it is the human manager who will have to create accountability for deal preparation and ongoing practice. Most exception reporting is still in its infancy.

### *Vertical Focus/Specialization*

Some companies have a specific focus or specialization in terms of customers, which we support. Vendors tend to either focus on:

- Transactional selling or complex sales

- Face to face selling or online sales

- Enterprise or mid-market customers

- A specific vertical such as technology, pharma, or financial services

## People

The AI Coaching implementation and ongoing Impact Sprints could be owned by the head of GTM strategy and operations or by the head of GTM enablement. In either case, the job of the person in charge of AI Coaching is to:

1. Identify a conversion rate that is lagging behind the industry.
2. Articulate what key moment and skill that you want to focus on improving this quarter.
3. Configure the role play scenarios and the scorecards to apply to recorded calls (and real-time, live calls if applicable).
4. If relevant, configure the real-time guidance that reps receive while on the call.
5. Set a coaching cadence, how often do you expect reps to practice.
6. Convene the reps and review the "why" and "how" of the program.
7. Review both efforts and skills demonstrated by reps as compared to results.
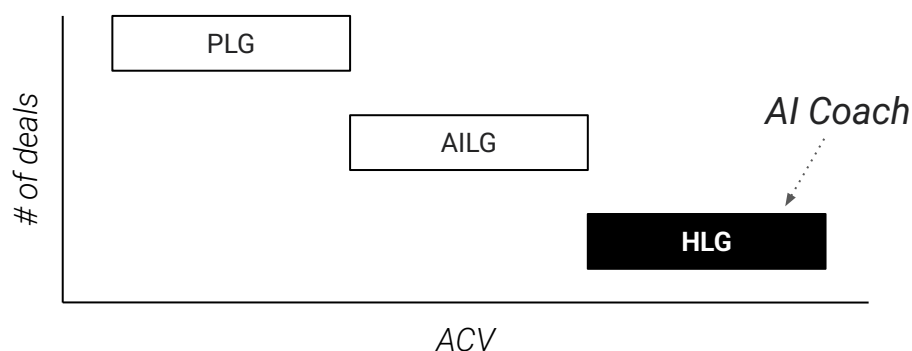8. Adjust and optimize the program as needed.
9. See results!



*Figure 5. AI Coaching Applies to Human-Led Growth (Less AI-Led Growth or Product-Led Growth)*

## *Vendors to Consider*

For subscribers to the Winning by Design Advisory Access Pass, we have a detailed comparison of vendor capabilities as well as a template for an RFP you can use in your own evaluation.

Vendors included in the comparison are:

- *Avarra (Avarra.ai), San Mateo, CA*: Complex sales for B2B high growth companies, used by Owner.com and BrightEdge amongst others. Working on deal coaching. Supports SPICED (not yet certified)..

- *Brevity (Brevitypitch.com), Minneapolis, MN:* Large enterprise, large companies with custom programs, such as SAP. Partnered with a top MBB consulting firm.

- *Claap.io (Claap.io), France:* B2B, medical, and insurance verticals. Supports SPICED. PLG version available.

- *Coachable AI (Joincoachable.ai), Miami, FL:* Solution for individual sales reps. PLG version available.

- *Demodesk (Demodesk.com), Germany:* Transactional sales. Also have a solution that competes with Zoom for remote selling that can provide real-time guidance. Customers include Pipedrive. Supports SPICED (not yet certified). PLG available.

- *Dextego (Dextego.com), New York:* Complex sales solutions. Customers include Aptivio and Deloitte. Working on deal coaching and already has integration with calendar and CRM. PLG version available.

- *GetBlue (Beta.getblue.ai), New York:* Going beyond coaching, focused on individual reps, making reps more productive also through AI email edits, recommending next steps, and (eventually) scheduling those follow-up meetings.

- *Hyperbound (Hyperbound.ai), San Francisco, CA:* B2B tech, mid-market to enterprise. Customers include Monday.com, Tipalti, and Vanta. Supports SPICED (not yet certified). PLG available.

- *Luster (Luster.ai), Indianapolis, IN:* B2B tech companies. Customers include Shipbob Logistics. Predictive Enablement™uses skill proficiency data to predict revenue impacting mistakes.

- ***Quantified (Quantified.ai)*, Austin, TX:** Big pharma, insurance and in-person selling. Customers include Novartis, Sanofi, and Open Lending.

- ***Replicate Labs (Replicatelabs.ai), London, UK:*** B2B sales-led companies with 100 reps or more. Customers include Gitlab, Similarweb, and Payhawk. Working on true coaching, including deal coaching. Supports SPICED (not yet certified).

- ***Saleshood (Saleshood.com), San Francisco, CA:*** B2B sales-led companies with 100 reps or more. Customers include Gitlab, Similarweb, and Payhawk. Working on true coaching, including deal coaching. Supports SPICED. (**officially certified**)

- ***SalesMagic (Salesmagic.com), San Francisco, CA:*** Generating complete training plans out of the box. PLG version available.

- ***SecondBody (Secondbody.app), New York:*** Face to face selling environments, including construction. Customers include FreightWaves. PLG version available.

- ***Second Nature (Secondnature.ai), Tel Aviv:*** Soft skills and hard skills of complex sales cycles. Have been around longer than most. Customers include Zoom, SAP, CheckPoint, PureStorage, Oracle, and Adobe amongst others. PLG available.

- ***Winn.ai (Winn.ai), Israel:*** Realtime guidance and updating the CRM after the call. Customers include Sendoso, Intercom, Kaseya, and Deel amongst others. Supports SPICED (not yet certified). PLG version available.

## Case Studies

**SalesHood | Star Compliance:** "SalesHood's AI Role Play changed the script on seller prospecting. The AI creates real, life-like conversations allowing sales reps to think on their feet, angle new positioning strategies, and create learning actions to follow up on. We're able to reduce the number of meetings and gain deeper level interactions, improving productivity and increasing win rates by 7-10% over the last quarter."  Craig Jones, CRO StarCompliance

**Second Nature | Zoom:** Zoom used Second Nature's AI-driven sales coaching software, featuring an AI bot named Jenny, to train its global sales team on updated brand messaging. Zoom framed the training as a gamified, team-based competition to increase engagement. The sales team was asked to pitch to Jenny as many times as they wanted and were given a minimum score to achieve. Zoom took great care to "humanize" the AI and presented Jenny as a member of the sales enablement team to bypass skepticism towards the new software.

**Zoom Outcomes:**

- Achieved 100% participation in the training
- Improved skills and message mastery across all sales reps
- Increased the number of practice sales conversations performed by each employee
- Standardized feedback and scoring of practice sessions
- Salespeople spent more than 300 hours talking to Jenny in thousands of simulations
- Sales employees appreciated the tailored feedback

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## SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

The following supplementary materials are available in the full version of this report, available to subscribers in the [reference library](#). For more information on subscribing, see [winningbydesign.com/access-pass](#).

**01**   **Vendor Comparison**

**02**   **RFP Template**

**03**   **Stakeholder Meeting**

**04** **Trade/Negotiate**

**05** **How to Set Up a Role Play**

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