

ARTICLE REPRINT

Ducks In Eagle School

Anyone who has managed salespeople must admit to making hiring mistakes. At one time or another all of us have found ourselves unable to resist the temptation of hiring the next great sales superstar, even though our intuition made us uneasy, or something in their story just didn't jibe with reality.

If you continue to rely on "gut checks" in your hiring process, you are likely to make more bad hires than necessary. I once heard someone admonish sales managers: "Don't send your ducks to eagle school!" It just won't work. You send the ducks out hunting, they find a rabbit and they make friends with it! You then yell at the ducks, "No, no, no, reread page twenty-one of your hunting manual!"

The same thing happens when you send the wrong salespeople on a hunting expedition for new prospects and you realize that they make friends with potential customers, buying them lunch, treating them to sporting events, and showering them with expensive gifts. In frustration, you yell, "No, no, no, bring in the orders, close the prospects, close the prospects!"

The first step in avoiding hiring mistakes is to recognize some of the myths about sales. A big myth about sales is that a truly superior sales person is equally good in any sales situation. Just because ducks, like eagles, can fly, doesn't mean they are good candidates for eagle hunting school. It's the same with salespeople. Just because a salesperson has shown exceptional skills at hunting for new customers doesn't mean she is a good candidate for managing strategic account relationships.

Another myth about sales is that you can train talent. The truth is talent cannot be trained. You either have the talent to sing like an opera star or you don't. Practice and training can improve innate talent, but the talent must already exist. The experts tell us that the performance of talented salespeople can be improved by up to 20%.

Let's look at the numbers. If you can improve someone in the 80th percentile by 20%, they can become a 96th percentile performer. The bad news, unfortunately, is that all the time and money in the world won't boost a 20th percentile performer past the 25th percentile!

Nearly 45% of all money spent by business on employee training and education is spent on sales. At some point companies will demand a better system for selecting sales candidates whose talents match the job for which they are hired. For many companies this may become their single most important investment to improve market share and profitability.

Finally, avoiding bad hires is a true win-win. The company and sales managers win because time and resources aren't squandered on candidates that just don't have the talent or the *will* to succeed in a specific area of sales. The candidates win because they are free to pursue other opportunities more suited to their talents and predispositions.

Copyright © 2006 Selling Up™. All Rights Reserved.

About the author: Steve Chriest is the founder of Selling Up™ (www.selling-up.com), a sales consulting firm specializing in sales revenue improvement for organizations of all types and sizes in a variety of industries. He is also the author of *Selling The E-Suite*, *The Proven System For Reaching and Selling Senior Executives* and *Profits and Cash – The Game of Business*. You can reach Steve at schriest@selling-up.com.