

ARTICLE REPRINT

Increase The Odds Of A Good Hire By 257%

Hiring Sales Professionals: Don't Trust Your Gut

Anyone who has managed salespeople has made hiring mistakes. At one time or another all of us have found ourselves unable to resist hiring a candidate who seemed to be a sales superstar, even though our intuition made us uneasy or something in their story just didn't jibe with reality. In an increasingly competitive world, success will depend on getting the right people on the sales team and making sure they are doing jobs that best use their innate talents.

Get The Right People On The Team

According to the International Personnel Management Association, typical hiring methods are ineffective. If you simply pointed, blindfolded, to one among a group of candidates and hired that person, your hiring method would depend entirely on chance. If your hiring process includes a typical employment interview, your odds of improving over chance increase about 1%.

If your hiring process includes a standard personality test, you will improve your odds over chance by another 1%. If, along with the interview and personality test, you require a candidate to have relevant job experience your chances of a good hire increase to 5%. If you include a scoreable interview in your hiring process your odds of a good hire increase to about 7%.

If your company is among a growing number of firms that include validated and objectively administered selection tests in the hiring process, you can increase your chances of a good hire by up to 25%. An improvement of 25% may not impress you, but the math shows that this is an improvement of 257% over even the best interview processes that lack selection tests!

So, exactly how would a validated and objectively administered selection test help you avoid making hiring mistakes? These tests reveal not only aptitude for performance, but also a candidate's willingness to perform the duties of the particular sales position. The tests answer the questions: Can the candidate do the job, and is the candidate likely to do the job?

Allocating Sales Talent: Don't Send Ducks to Eagles School!

Assuming you've hired a salesperson based on the results of a validated selection test, it is now imperative to place the new employee in the right position on the team.

I once heard someone admonish sales managers: “Don't send your ducks to eagle school!” It just won't work. Unlike eagles, which are skilled predators hard-wired with a hunter's instinct, ducks are friendly creatures. You send the ducks out hunting, they find a rabbit and they make friends with it! You then yell to the ducks, “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. They make friends with potential customers, buy them lunch, treat them to sporting events, and shower them with expensive gifts, all in the hope of winning business through friendship. But the new business seldom materializes. In frustration, you yell, “No, no, bring in the orders, close the prospects, close the prospects!”

Nearly 2500 years ago in his essay on The Art Of War, Sun Tzu, the great Chinese military thinker admonished, “Do not demand accomplishment of those who have no talent.” He continued, “Do not charge people to do what they cannot do. Select them and give them responsibilities commensurate with their abilities.” This wisdom has been largely lost on leaders who manage sales organizations.

Talent can't be trained. You either can or cannot sing like an American Idol. In the world of selling, the characteristics of great strategic account managers - by definition - limit their success as business development sales professionals. Likewise, great business development salespeople rarely have what it takes to become great strategic account managers. Both require different skills and different talents! Yet somehow sales leaders believe that talent in one area naturally translates into an ability to perform equally well in other areas.

Coaching Talent

Although you've done your best to select the right talent, and to make sure she has the right position on the team, how do you retain her and develop her innate abilities? First, you continually review your employee's assessment test to remain knowledgeable about her natural abilities and willingness to perform certain job functions. Second - and this is a key to successful talent management- you resist the temptation to place her in a job for which her talent and interests are not aligned.

When it comes to utilizing sales talent, perhaps the biggest error most sales leaders make is promoting great salespeople to the role of sales manager. Most often, when a great salesperson is promoted to sales manager, four things happen: 1) the company loses a great salesperson; 2) the company gets a mediocre – or worse – sales manager; 3) customers suffer in the transition; 4) failure prompts the great salesperson to flee to another company.

We believe that much of the money spent by business on sales training is spent educating people in roles they should not occupy. At some point companies will demand a better system for selecting salespeople and sales management candidates with the talent and the will to perform up to management's expectations. For many companies this, and not simply more sales skills training, may become their single most important investment to improve market share and profitability. Using statistically validated assessment tests in the hiring process, placing salespeople only in jobs for which their talents and interests

are aligned and developing career paths that allow employees to expand their natural talents is a win-win for the employees and the company.

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