

Delta Force Sales StrategySM

The U.S. Army's 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta, commonly known as Delta Force by civilians, was organized to execute the government's strategy for countering terrorism, rescuing hostages and eliminating covert enemy forces. During tough economic times it may be wise to develop a Delta Force Sales StrategySM to counter business threats that arise in a volatile economy.

Our Delta Force Sales StrategySM is a plan for preserving and expanding business with your company's key customers and securing business with your top prospects. It calls for assembling the best sales professionals you can find into an elite, Special Operations Sales Team whose primary task is to execute this strategy. The success of the strategy requires unwavering commitment from senior management, a front-line leader whose sole responsibility is the tactical success of the Special Ops Sales Team, and the right people with the talent and combination of special skills to get the job done.

The Special Ops Sales Team is organized as a non-traditional, tactical response to economic emergencies that threaten a company's well being. Execution and the ultimate success of the team require continuing confidence and support from the sponsoring senior executive. For reasons that will become clear at the end of this summary, anything short of 100% executive commitment to the strategy, and to the team, will result in failure, and may well do unintended harm to the company's culture.

Once commitment to the strategy is secured, a front-line leader must be selected to lead the Special Ops Sales Team. The right team leadership is critical for success. Leading the team requires special talent and some unique abilities. Ultimately, a leader of this special team must be viewed as "the best who leads the best."

Because the Special Ops Sales Team does not operate in a vacuum, and is dependent on many internal departments for its success, the team leader must have the qualities and abilities of a master politician. Success of the team is only possible if the leader garners full support from cross-functional departments in the organization.

Just like the leader of a team of Delta Force sharpshooters doesn't have to be the best marksman in the army, the front-line leader of the Special Ops Sales Team need not be the best salesperson on the team. He must have superior sales skills, but those skills will be employed more in the areas of persuading and motivating his team members and internal support teams than in direct customer interactions.

The front-line leader must be adept at dealing with a myriad of egos. Not only must he gain and maintain the respect of his team, he must keep the egos on his team in check, avoiding unnecessary conflicts with egos in the rest of the organization.

Because the Special Ops Sales Team operates outside the sales organization's normal chain of command, the front-line leader must have the freedom and authority to allocate corporate resources and coordinate cross-functional departmental teams in support of initiatives assigned by the senior sponsoring executive.

The front-line leader of the Special Ops Sales Team is a special breed. He may not be found among a company's existing group of sales managers or anywhere else in the company. Delta Force Sales StrategySM mandates that this exceptional sales leader be recruited from outside the company if a suitable leader cannot be found inside the business.

Because success of the team rests squarely on the shoulders of the front-line leader, it is imperative that the right person is chosen for the position. The selection process is formal and disciplined and applies to all candidates, whether recruited inside or outside the company. The selection process includes:

- Multiple, structured interviews designed to provide all candidates an equal opportunity to respond to identical questions and to provide their leadership insights and appetite for difficult, demanding, stressful assignments.
- A statistically validated, predictive assessment designed to reveal talents required for the job as well as behavioral characteristics that predict success in this specialized position
- A disciplined process for thorough reference checking and reporting
- An open discussion format to consider the gut feelings regarding the candidates from the candidate selection team members
- A final decision process where the decision components are weighted as follows:
 - 30% structured interview
 - 30% predictive assessment results
 - 30% background and experience
 - 10% gut feeling

The first component of the selection process is the structured interview. Our interview guidelines are designed to avoid the all-too-typical scenario where the average bad candidate is infinitely better at giving a good interview than even an experienced, part-time interviewer is at conducting an interview.

Candidate interviews are structured to uncover problem solving abilities in a fast-moving, volatile environment, the ability to operate coolly under severe pressure, superior verbal and written communications skills, and leadership characteristics and qualities. Candidates must reveal the ability and willingness to respond decisively and creatively to challenges while balancing team and organizational needs.

The second component of the selection process is the statistically validated, predictive assessment. It isn't enough to know that a candidate has the skills for this specialized position. Many candidates will have the skills, and *can* do the job, but experience has taught us that only a select few have the *will* to do this highly specialized, demanding job.

A special, statistically validated, predictive assessment not only measures a candidate's innate talents against others who have demonstrated success in similar positions, but predicts, with a high degree of accuracy, the candidate's probability of success in the position. Because strengths in certain areas usually indicates weaknesses in other areas, the statistically validated position assessment will provide the hiring decision makers with key information regarding candidates' strengths as well as weaknesses.

The third component of the selection process is background and reference checking. A background and reference checking system is used where strict standards are applied to a process specially designed to uncover candidates' recent performance habits and behavioral trends. Information gathered in the background and reference checks should correlate with the information contained in the predictive assessment report. Any major discrepancies raise red flags and require further investigation.

The final component of the selection process involves an examination of "gut feelings" about the candidates. In reviewing candidate interviews, assessments and background/experience data, members of the candidate selection team will have a gut feeling about each candidate. These feelings should be freely discussed among the candidate selection team in a safe, open session where gut feelings are challenged and debated. While a consensus of gut feelings about a candidate should comprise approximately 10% of the final hiring decision, it is an important component that could, in an extremely close competition, be the deciding factor in a hiring decision.

By definition, the Special Ops Sales Team operates autonomously from the main selling organization. This requires special talent and some unique abilities. All team members must have a self image of "the best of the best." They must have superior selling skills, and they must have the ability to quickly establish relationships at the highest levels in customer organizations. They must be team players, must willingly follow instructions, work smart and tirelessly to complete important objectives, and remain fiercely dedicated to the tasks they are assigned.

The selection process for Special Ops Sales Team members is very similar to the process employed to select the front-line leader. It is formal and disciplined, and includes the same components found in the system for selection of the front-line team leader.

In many cases, however, multiple predictive assessments must be used in selecting Special Ops Sales Team members. Specialists must be matched to specific needs and opportunities. For example, where the company must shore up relationships with key customers, candidates for these tasks must have the innate talents to rapidly build and sustain relationships at the highest level in customer organizations. They must excel as relationship managers.

If, on the other hand, an opportunity arises for rapid penetration into new markets and immediate sales to early adopters, candidates must have innate business development talents and the willingness to close business in the short term as a primary objective. Regardless of specific talents, each member must be willing to meld into a cohesive team.

Like the ideal front-line Special Ops Sales Team leader, Special Ops Sales Team members are a special breed, and may not be found among the company's current sales staff. Just as in the case of the team leader, Delta Force Sales Strategy mandates that team members be recruited from outside the company if suitable members cannot be found inside the business.

Members of the Special Ops Sales Team will require reward and compensation plans that differ from those in the main selling organization. To keep the best, rewards and compensation must reflect the magnitude, success and impact of superior skills and exceptional performance.

A final and key element of the Delta Force Sales StrategySM is the communications plan. The quality of the communication plan is as crucial to the success of this strategy as anything else.

A well thought-out, clear communications plan articulates the rationale for the strategy, the expected outcomes, the critical role the Special Ops Sales Team and its leader will play in executing strategic objectives and the commitment of the sponsoring senior executive to the success of the strategy.

Owners of the communications plan must be identified, standards for timing, frequency and the tone of communications must be established, events that trigger communications should be identified and regular feedback from employees should be encouraged. All communications should be targeted to employees as the company's internal customers. A successful communications plan avoids an ad hoc approach to communications and promotes consistent delivery of messages and feedback – upstream and downstream.

Success of the Delta Force Sales StrategySM delivers an all-around win-win outcome: Customers benefit from interactions with the company's best sales professionals, mid-performers in the company's selling organization learn from Special Operations Sales Team members, and the company benefits from stronger relationships with its best customers and from a selling organization better equipped to deal with future economic turbulence.

A note of caution: In a corporate environment, just as in the military, special operations teams are often viewed with suspicion and envy. Mitigating these natural responses to special, elite teams is a primary responsibility of the sponsoring senior executive and the front-line sales leader, and a specific set of procedures must exist to guide these players in the management of perceptions.

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