Hiring Salespeople: 3 Keys to Getting It Right

As the world of complex B2B sales becomes more intense, competition for top talent is increasing, and will continue to increase in the coming years. In the United States alone, Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts a 15.6 percent increase in new wholesale and manufacturing sales positions will be created over a 10-year period, a net increase of more than 223,000 jobs. Industry experts believe that trend will extend worldwide.

With 70 to 80 percent of the total cost of sales tied up in personnel, pressure to hire salespeople who fit and can be trained to excel within your organization must rank high in every talent management strategy. Ramifications of getting it wrong spread beyond lost revenue. Your company's credibility and your personal reputation are on the line.

Basic Qualities of Top Salespeople

- *Persistence* – an optimistic person who will preserver through constant rejection.

- *Curiosity* – includes the skill of listening. By paying attention to what the customer says, a curious salesperson can hear the stated issues, then ask the right questions to dig deeper into issues and challenges.

- *Empathy* – means the salesperson can put themselves in the customer's shoes so they can understand what the customer is trying to fix, accomplish or avoid – and that they can appreciate the process this customer is using to make the decision to buy, this time

Common Missteps In Hiring

Error: Hiring from only one source. Many organizations repeat the mistake of always looking for salespeople from the same vertical and from their direct competitors. Instead of hiring people who can sell, they seek people who know their product or industry.

Too many clients are blinded by certain backgrounds, so they go for the lesser candidate that comes from the 'right' vertical. That's kind of playing it safe in wanting them to produce revenue quicker because they know the product, but in the long run they lose out because they can't sell.

The Fix: Hiring people who know how to sell first and foremost. People with the right characteristics and capabilities can be trained and educated in product features.

Error: Lack of clarity on salesperson attributes. Organizations often lack, or fail to develop, an ideal salesperson profile – one that weighs attitudinal attributes and personality characteristics along with work and education histories.

The Fix: Examining the work and personality attributes shared by the top performers in your organization, then leveraging that information when developing an ideal salesperson profile can greatly increase success rates of new hires. Defining what you want in the person is absolutely essential.

You need people first and foremost who are capable of selling. Many companies often promote from (the products side) and a lot of the time these people never grasp it. They just aren't great salespeople.

Error: Corporate neglect. Many companies expect salespeople to "figure it out" on their own.

The Fix: Organizations should evaluate their corporate role in sales performance and consider when they last invested in professional development for the sales force. Best-in-Class Sales Organizations invest in both new-hire training and in ongoing professional development. In addition, these organizations make it a management priority to become actively involved with their sales team to offer the advice and resources needed to advance sales opportunities.

The return on investment in training is ongoing. When a company becomes known for its commitment to professional development and its excellent sales organization, it becomes part of its DNA. That DNA will attract top salespeople who will want to work for a company that will permanently train, coach, and add value to them.

Revealing Interview Questions

1. **What made you successful in your past job?**

   a. If the answer is: "I've been lucky" or "I had a good territory" be cautious.

   b. The better answer: "Well, I do certain things that most salespeople don't. I always force myself to do a specific amount of prospecting work. Every Monday morning, I call at least four or five potential customers from a list that our marketing department sends us every month."

2. **Under what circumstances would you walk away from a sales opportunity?**

   a. If the answer is "never," then walk away – this is not a customer-focused person.

   b. The better answer: "If we aren't a good fit with the customer, then I move on because my experience is that it's just not worth the hassle of trying to force a square peg into a round hole."

3. **Describe to me the process you follow to reach out to a new client.**

   a. If the answer is: "I cold call or email to let them know of a new enhancement or product offering that has a new benefit." This "it's about me" answer, does not focus customer issues.

   b. The better answer: "I study problems within an industry or vertical to see what is happening from the client's perspective and then I set a meeting to determine if they are realizing the same things."

Long Term Benefits

Experienced, tenured salespeople are a vital asset of any enterprise, clearly outperforming those with less experience. For many customers your salesperson is the source of knowledge that they need to make a decision. Defining the skills and approach that works for your company is absolutely essential to your success – as is recognizing that your "ideal" salesperson may not be the top performer at your competition's business.

When personality, cultural and attitudinal fit are part of the hiring equation, and an organization makes the commitment to train its sales force, it sees much lower turnover and increased success.

Companies that understand the unique characteristics of successful salespeople within their organization and build those specific best practices into their hiring and training structure, increase the potential for successful revenue growth. When combined with other fundamentals such as instilling a strong sales process and commitment from management, an organization can propel itself to world-class status.

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