



Will This Sales Dog Hunt?

You conducted the interview and the sales candidate was impressive. The resume touted success and awards. And the references all gave a thumbs up. So what's the reason your new sales hire is falling way short of expectations? Where are the top guns in sales and why are they so difficult to identify and recruit?

Most sales organizations do not have a well defined hiring process or if it is defined, it's missing important pieces. Examine five areas to see if your sales candidate CAN do it, is MOTIVATED to do it and ALIGNS with your sales culture and values.

Interview for the hard to train skills.

Think of the worst hire you have ever made? The descriptors are usually bad attitude, no work ethic or inconsistent performance. None of these are hard skills such as sales experience or industry experience, which is where most sales organizations focus. Incorporate interview questions that test the sales candidate for soft skills such as self-starting, interpersonal skills, assertiveness and delayed gratification. For example, if your sales team is located in virtual offices and your new hire scores low in self-starting skills, you might just have an individual that does not do well without outside stimulation or momentum. A salesperson scoring low in delayed gratification might not be willing to put in the time and effort to land bigger contracts. A salesperson that scores low in empathy may not do well in the likeability category. All are soft skills that yield hard sales results.

Principle: Hire what you can't train.

Hire for the sales job at your company.

We often get asked, "What makes a perfect salesperson?" The answer: Depends on the life cycle of your company, products you sell, the climate you sell in and the prospect you sell to. Every sales position has some uniqueness and successful organizations have a well defined process that qualifies or disqualifies potential hires based on the specific competencies needed for success at their company. For example, small to mid size companies may need salespeople that know how to uncover opportunities without a huge marketing budget or brand awareness. A company with a complex sale requires a salesperson with excellent problem solving and critical thinking skills. A salesperson that is going to handle a lot of accounts needs excellent planning and organization skills. (Yes, there are salespeople who are organized!) Past behavior is the best indicator of future results. Keep in mind that success at one company doesn't insure success at another for the above reasons.



Incorporate core values into the interview process.

Many companies say they have core values; however, when push comes to shove they buckle resulting in, “Core values hang on the wall that never hit the office halls.” Here’s the number one way to test if you truly have a core value or not: Are you willing to take a financial hit to uphold the value? For example, would you fire your top sales producer if she was not a good team player? If the answer is no, teamwork is not a core value. It’s a nice to have, not a need to have. If you are not crystal clear about your core values, there is a good chance you will hire a salesperson that doesn’t align with you or your sales culture. Yes, this salesperson can produce results. They also produce an equal amount of headaches and wasted energy.

ABR – Always be recruiting.

Top sales managers make recruiting part of their monthly prospecting plan. Instead of prospecting for new business, they prospect for new sales talent. Everyone knows that desperation hiring occurs when an unexpected vacancy arises and a sales quota still needs to be hit. Sales managers require their sales teams to run “X” amount of new appointments each month. The same discipline needs to be applied in meeting with new sales candidates each month.

Test the data.

Sales managers are human beings; therefore, they are subject to personal filters and bias. Sales candidates are usually personable and their likeability can skew our thinking and bias. Top sales organizations use assessments in order to obtain hard data and compare it to the subjective data of the interview. A person might act and sound like a hunter, however, if the assessment shows more of an account manager, believe the paper. Years ago, before assessments, I remember interviewing a young woman that was just about bouncing off the couch in enthusiasm. I loved the energy and passion she was showing and hired her. Too bad it was the last time I saw that much energy and passion!

Below, please find a profile that we use with all pre-hires. It gives objective data on the hard to training skills, hunter/farmer style and money motivation. Integrate empirical data into your hiring process. Numbers never lie.

Good hiring in 2011!

Best regards,
Colleen Stanley
Chief Selling Officer