

# Selecting and Developing an Effective Sales Team

eBook



SUPERIOR SOLUTIONS, POWERFUL RESULTS.

## Introduction

While all employees play an important role in an organization, the sales team most directly drives revenue. Today, given a tightening economy and increased global competition, it's more important than ever to fill sales positions with the right types of salespeople. In this eBook you'll learn how to differentiate sales styles and how to find the right person for the right sales position.

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# Using Assessments to Develop Your Sales Team

While recently on a flight to Philadelphia, I noticed an advertisement in an airline magazine. The advertisement claimed to be able to “put your sales into overdrive” by using new marketing technology that allows a salesperson to use a tablet PC for sales presentations. I asked myself, “Will this gadget truly help sales people become more effective?” Marketing folks would say “probably” but only if the product or service has desirable features that appeal to the masses. If that was the case, businesses wouldn't need sales people to sell –the product would sell itself. But what if you are selling something that does need a business development manager's expertise? Then this new marketing tool now becomes a lot less intriguing.

At the end of the day your buyers (especially in business-to-business sales) are not impressed with flashy presentations, but rather they are trying to ensure that what you are selling matches an organizational need. To achieve success, businesses need a competent sales team that will be able to overcome objections and create value for the potential customer. So what types of sales people are the best at doing this? Research is clear that there are a handful of traits that differentiate between a successful salesperson and one that is average at best. Some of these factors include:

- 1. Work ethic/conscientiousness**
- 2. Adaptability**
- 3. Problem solving/critical thinking**
- 4. Extraversion**

So we have a good idea of what makes someone successful in sales. But what about those employees who are struggling to meet quotas? Answering this requires you to figure out the relative strengths and weaknesses of your current sales team.



Two data points should be collected:

- 1) Performance Data & Supervisor Evaluations**
- 2) Personality and Cognitive Ability Assessment Data**

The first is fairly straightforward and most organizations already collect this data on an annual basis. The second, assessment data, is a bit trickier for most organizations. However, leveraging a good sales assessment can help you better understand why your sales team is underperforming and help you to identify some training needs.

Additionally it can also be helpful to look at group-level assessment data to get a snapshot of what is going on across the sales team (e.g., by region). This can help to determine where you should be allocating training dollars to get the biggest bang for your buck.

# Don't Be Sold By a Sales Candidate

Having the right salespeople in an organization can make the difference between a good company and a great one. Finding effective salespeople can be particularly difficult because the very same skills that are used for selling can be turned on you during the hiring process.

Sales candidates can be very savvy and their strong interpersonal skills can aid them in interviewing very well. In some cases, they could be using their charm to cover up their deficiencies. Remember, candidates are going to present their best features and benefits and spin their experiences to get the job.

How can you prevent yourself from buying the wrong salesperson?

- **Look Beyond the Charm**

- o Many salespeople can be very charming. They are personable and friendly and have the ability to connect with you quickly. You feel good when you spend time with them and you want to be their friend. Charm is important, but there are other behaviors that are more important for an effective salesperson to possess. Friendliness can get you in the door but if the salesperson doesn't present the right information, uncover the underlying need or follow through on promises -- the revenue will not follow.

- **Goals, Goals, Goals**

- o Research clearly shows that if you had to pick one characteristic you want a salesperson to possess it would be Achievement Orientation. This goes by many labels, but, in general it means: goal driven, results-oriented, fire in the belly - motivated! Unfortunately, a salesperson is unlikely to be successful if he/she doesn't have the internal drive to succeed.

- **Don't Forget the Details**

- o I've heard many people say that salespeople aren't detail-oriented and that they tend to leave the details to others. However, our research has shown that, those who are better at time management and tend to the small details of their clients are more effective salespeople.

- **Ask for Results**

- o When it comes to figuring out if someone will be able to get you results, ask them for examples. If they have been successful in the past, they are likely to be successful in the future. Ask for specific examples and probe into detail about how they have dealt with difficult customers and situations.

- **Use More Than an Interview**

- o If you want to be certain that you don't fall for a candidate with no substance, supplement an interview with an in-depth assessment. Find an assessment that can give you more information about a candidate's achievement orientation, time management and accountability. Your personal experience coupled with these results will help you make a well-informed hiring decision.



# Why Good Sales Candidates Fail

Unfortunately not all hires end up working out. There are many reasons why an individual doesn't work out, but one of the main reasons is often because they just don't "fit." You've probably heard people say that before – "It wasn't a good fit for me." Just like a pair of jeans, a job can sometimes be a little tight here or a little loose there. Poor fit often leads to turnover, which can be costly for both the organization and the candidate.

Let's look at this fit issue specifically within a sales team. What could cause a poor fit in a sales job? As discussed in previous blogs, there are certain competencies that all sales people should possess.

These competencies speak to their potential to be a good salesperson. Whether or not the individual will become a good salesperson has to do with motivational factors and how well they "fit" the job and the organization. In sales, fit tends to be related to someone's actual sales style as well as the underlying motivators of their sales behavior.

Let's discuss these in more detail...



## SALES STYLE

Sales jobs can differ greatly from one organization to another. There's the salesperson who is selling timeshares to couples on vacation and then there's a medical device salesperson who is assisting surgeons in an operating room with heart valves. Both of these salespeople will be most successful if they possess the right competency profile, but their performance could be affected if they aren't the best fit for the job requirements. For example, timeshare salespeople need to be very comfortable with rejection and able to talk to a large number of people in day without developing strong relationships. Medical device salespeople may not experience as much rejection, but they need to be technically knowledgeable and able to maintain a long-term relationship with their customers.

There are three main factors to consider when looking at someone's sales style:

**Hunter/Farmer:** A hunter salesperson is interested in finding and generating leads for new business, and a farmer is focused on mining current accounts and working patiently with clients to build relationships and business.

**Intuitive/Analytical:** Intuitive salespeople tend to prefer a quick and uncomplicated sale and use their interpersonal skills to appeal to the customer. On the other hand, analytical salespeople are interested in ensuring that the customer is getting the "right" solution.

**Product/Solution:** Product salespeople prefer to work with something that is tangible and easy to show the customer. Product salespeople focus on explaining features and benefits, while a Solution salesperson would focus on asking questions to identify the need behind the need.

[... Continued](#)

# Why Good Sales Candidates Fail (continued)

## DRIVERS

In addition to one's preferred style, each individual tends to be motivated by certain underlying needs. These needs, if not met by the job or organization, can also lead to turnover. Pay attention to the needs of your salespeople and determine if your job or organization meets them.

Typically people are motivated more strongly by one or two of the five listed below:

### Need for Achievement

Individuals with a high need for achievement gain satisfaction from successfully completing tasks perceived by them and others as challenging. These individuals tend to be competitive, and have a strong desire to succeed, and ultimately, to "win."

### Need for Affiliation

Individuals who are motivated by this need gain satisfaction from building close relationships with other people, and would likely prefer to work in an environment that offers the opportunity to collaborate and engage with other people, whether they are colleagues, customers, friends, etc.

### Need for Money

Individuals who are motivated by this need gain satisfaction from receiving monetary compensation for completing assignments. While everyone, to some extent, is motivated by financial gain and stability, these individuals place monetary gain as the primary driver of their behavior and basis for their satisfaction.

### Need for Power/Authority

Someone who is motivated by this need gains satisfaction from influencing others and being in a position of authority or control. Individuals who are highly motivated by this need are compelled to gravitate towards positions of power, authority and leadership.

### Need for Recognition

Someone who is motivated by this need gains satisfaction from receiving a gesture or award as an expression of acknowledgement or appreciation. Preferably, the recognition should be public and tangible.

If you want to reduce your sales team turnover, pay more attention to fit. Find out more about a candidate's sales style and drivers before making a final offer.

# Have the Competencies for Success in Sales Changed Over Time?

When I present at sales effectiveness conferences or on webinars, people often ask me if the competencies for success in sales have changed or evolved over time. My response is no - the core competencies of what it takes to be successful in sales have remained stable for decades.

For instance, being driven and focused on achieving goals has always been one of the most important characteristics of successful salespeople. That's been the case as long as goods and services have been sold.

Having said that, however, how these [competencies](#) manifest themselves and their relative importance has changed. Two competencies that come to mind are: Adaptability and Reading People. Without question, both of these have always been important in sales. But, over the past decade the workplace has become more heterogeneous and global which makes these two competencies more critical.



Consider for instance that you are a salesperson and your selling audience or target market consists of predominately people who had similar upbringings and backgrounds as you and who have similar views on the world. While being able to read people, or understand another person's perspective is not a given and some people are inherently better at it than others, it's certainly easier in a relatively homogenous environment. Also, the types of behaviors that you are likely to see are somewhat restricted because of shared values, norms, etc. and therefore adapting to novel situations is less important, because the range of differences is less.

Now, consider that instead of selling mostly to people who are similar to you, your customers have wildly divergent backgrounds, races, gender, religious beliefs, world views, customs, etc. Your ability to "read people" and to adapt become more important, primarily because there is more variability in the environment. You can no longer assume that someone is thinking a certain way because "most people" think that way.

In essence, the environment has become more unpredictable. Those who can adapt to that environment and make sense of subtle cues are more likely to be successful.

# Your Best Sales Person Could be Your Worst Sales Manager

Let me tell you a little story about a man named Joe...

Joe was an amazing sales person. He was easily one of the best you could have the good fortune of learning from. He was smart, hard-working, a quick-study, creative and could think outside of the box and reframe a situation in such a way that most people had a hard time saying “No” to him.

Joe was always outselling the rest of the sales team. His product knowledge was impeccable. If you had a question about any product, you knew Joe would have an answer. Joe had also been through many different sales training programs, and from a sales perspective, you really would be hard-pressed to find something new about sales that he did not already know. Tough negotiation situation – leave it to Joe. Hard customer with lots of objections – that was one of his favorites!

Joe was promoted to Sales Manager. A gregarious guy, the company felt confident that with Joe’s impeccable skills and sales career, he would be a great manager and help others to achieve the same success he had. They did not interview him; they just assumed that this would be a good move for him and for the company.

Joe was fine for the first few months while he tried to learn the ropes and expectations in his new role. He had several seasoned sales people on his team, so he did not need to focus heavily on their needs. Over time, however, things began to unravel. Joe started with a seasoned sales team; however, he monitored their every move, and always had the “right” answer. There was no discussion about alternatives, no openness to the opinions and ideas of others. Joe was always right, which was part of what made him successful as a sales person.

Joe was also quick to blame others for mistakes, and first to take credit for his team’s new ideas. You could not tell him otherwise since, after all, he was smart and knew more than everyone he managed. He led with an iron fist, and made it crystal clear that you could not challenge his authority – he was “the boss” and what he said you were expected to follow.

Many of the things that made him exceptionally good at what he did in sales actually led to his failure as a manager. Joe ended up leaving the company – a once revered salesperson, now with a tarnished reputation as a poor leader. It was a loss for Joe, and the company lost one of the best salespeople they ever had. If they had simply taken the time to look a little more deeply and determine if Joe would have the skills needed to lead effectively, they may still have a great salesperson on the team.

If the story of Joe is one you have experienced, consider looking at three different pieces of data before making your important leadership decisions:

1. Performance. Before considering someone, determine what level of technical knowledge is truly needed and what the “performance” threshold must be (e.g. all meets and/or exceeds performance criteria). Some of the best leaders are those who are lifelong learners, and are not afraid to admit they do not know it all.
2. Potential. Add an in-depth assessment to the process! This will help you to uncover the knowledge, skills and abilities that the person may not yet have had the opportunity to exhibit on the job, and help you better ascertain any issues that might lead to less than adequate job performance as they move up through the organization.
3. Perception. Gather 360-degree data about the person. Understanding how the person is perceived by others can help to determine what behaviors they exhibit and the effect of those behaviors at work.



# Three Ways to Hire Better Salespeople

We have heard a lot lately about the economy, the very slow recovery and the need for most companies to continue to grow revenue in order to keep the business afloat. For many, sales have been flat or only showing modest increases, with companies hanging on to their hard-earned cash until they are confident the economy will respond in a positive direction. There has been some improvement, but probably not at a rate that gives people confidence that the economy is turning around.

So it's a new year. Do we sit back and do what we have always done, expecting a different result (definition of insanity), or take the bull by the horns (so to speak), and try to do what we can to spur on economic growth? And who will help your company achieve strategic objectives set forth to keep your company moving in the right direction?

Maybe you are one of the lucky companies that have all the right people in place, and a sales organization that is truly outstanding. You are ready to face 2013 head-on, with a plan in place and the people to get you where you need to be. Congratulations to you! But if I were to hazard a guess, I would say there are more companies who desire to be in that state versus those who have achieved it. If so, what are you going to do about it?

Many companies have increased revenue as a key strategic initiative. Maybe it's forging into new markets or geographies, finding new distribution channels, or getting a new product to market, but the bottom line is -- we all need sales. And, sales often mean PEOPLE to get that job done. With so much riding on the success of salespeople to help companies meet their strategic objectives, one would assume that a lot of effort and thought has gone into selecting the best people for that job. However, there are many companies that don't have strong selection procedures in place for these roles.

Many companies rely on interviews to select people, especially sales people, because after all, their verbal skills are the only thing that makes them successful, right? Interviewers may ask the person to elaborate on things found in a resume. This is not a bad thing, but does it tell the whole story? Do you have all of the necessary information about the person to be sure they will thrive in your company? Have you ever made a mistake with a key sales hire that you thought would be the "knight in shining armor" -- someone with superior communication skills, who could tell a good story, but who was not even remotely matched to the type of sale they needed to do?

There are many things you can do to help improve your "hit rate" in finding the best sales people for your company. Here are three suggestions that you can consider, and can make you select people who are much more likely to be successful at your company:

- 1. Find out what motivates the person.** This is critical to helping you find someone who will fit within your company, culture, and the job they will be asked to do. Everyone is motivated differently -- many leadership training programs teach managers to look for the things that motivate the individual and use those as incentives if possible. It just makes sense that you would try to see what motivates the individual before you hire them, and see how what they desire aligns with what you offer. For example, if someone is highly motivated by money, they may not enjoy a sales job where there is limited upside.
- 2. Determine their natural sales style.** This is important because people tend to excel in situations that play to their strengths. For example, if the product you sell is more technical and tends to have a fairly long sales cycle, a person who employs a more consultative sales style, enjoys learning the technical details, and prefers selling solutions over products, may be a better fit.
- 3. Measure the competencies proven to differentiate sales people.** By nature, most sales people make their living persuading others through their verbal prowess, and their ability to persuade others to see their product as something the person could not live without. Certainly you can measure verbal communication style in an interview, but if you allow a candidate's verbal capability to be the sole determinate regarding their hire-ability, you would be missing many other things that could potentially impede their success down the road. Things like their drive, reading people and situations effectively, knowing when and how to adapt in sales situations, effective time management, accountability and intelligence all play a role in differentiating the average from those with the potential to be great.



## 5 Common Mistakes When Hiring in Sales

Sales positions are always difficult to fill and even more difficult is **keeping them filled**. Many attribute this turnover to be a result of sales professionals always chasing a bigger paycheck and simply write it off. However, it has been my experience that selecting the right candidate for a sales position is rarely ever done correctly. Sales managers tend to have a “just like me bias” and figure that candidates similar to them will succeed as they did. The truth is that sales professionals are often in a silo when it comes to making hiring decisions. They focus more on what the candidate has done than what they can do and this does not usually spell success in a new and different role. While there are many hiring mistakes for hiring in sales roles, here are five of the most common mistakes made by hiring managers:



### 1) Their references check out

This goes for any position, not just sales roles. References are almost never negative.

Think about it—would you ask an individual you were not friendly with to be a character witness for a future boyfriend or girlfriend? I think not. This is essentially what job applicants are doing; they are attracting prospective companies for their services and putting their best foot forward. References are a necessary last step in your hiring process, but not one that holds much water.

### 2) They met their quota in their former role

There are a lot of underlying factors with quotas and like many items on resumes, they are grossly exaggerated. After all, it is rare that a prospective employer will call a candidate's current employer to see if their quota achievements check out, especially when sales candidates are transferring positions unbeknownst to their current employer. Additionally, hiring managers are usually unaware of the support that the candidate may have received along the way to meeting his or her quota.

### 3) They are outgoing

We hear it time and time again -- salespeople must be outgoing and there is no disputing much of that fact. The problem is that we often don't consider other essential competencies and focus on this, more easily identifiable competency. While a great majority of salespeople are extraverted, the most successful ones are not necessarily outgoing all of the time. It is important to project excitement and enthusiasm to prospects, but just as important may be the ability to read people and adapt to situations and surroundings. When assessing your applicants, be sure to measure a variety of competencies to achieve a more well-rounded and accurate understanding of your candidates.

### 4) They have “sales experience”

Not all sales experience is good experience. For instance, Dwight from *The Office* had extensive experience selling paper to corporations, but struggled when he left to take a job at an office supply store. His sales situation went from a long, consultative and large-volume process to a much shorter, less consultative and low-volume sales cycle. Clients became customers and his face-to-face interactions were not favorably perceived. A person with experience in one area does not necessarily translate to a successful hire in another industry. For instance, the experienced product salesperson is used to constant successes, while the solution expert may have to wait and act strategically for periods of time without a constant string of wins.

### 5) They interviewed well

These are salespeople after all and an interview is the perfect forum for a candidate to sell themselves. They have a captive audience and if they are remotely good at sales they can sell something they should know better than anyone else: themselves. Interviews are an essential selection piece, both from a data-gathering standpoint and for the hiring manager's own approval. However, interviews, along with reference checks, should be completed as part of a more robust and less subjective selection process.

# What Do I Do Now?

Finding the candidates that will be most successful goes beyond simply reviewing qualifications or previous sales success - **you also need to know what type of person will perform best in your organization's unique sales environment.**

Do you know how to measure Sales fit? Check out this [video](#) for a quick overview.



Learn more about hiring for sales positions [here](#).

Have questions? Contact Select International at (412) 358-8595 or email [info@selectintl.com](mailto:info@selectintl.com).