



Resource Library



The 6 Pillars of Sales Management: Pillar #1—Talent Identification and Acquisition

In a previous article, we introduced the 6 Pillars of Sales Management, what comprised them and why they were critical to performance. Here is a quick review of the pillars:

- Talent Identification and Acquisition
- Sales Methodology and Skill Development
- Analytics and Performance Tracking
- Professional Development
- Compensation/Recognition/Rewards
- Planning

Pillar #1 – Talent Identification and Acquisition

Properly identifying and hiring the right sales talent to meet and exceed the objectives of all positions within a sales department

The first of the Six Pillars of Sales Management, Talent Identification and Acquisition, is one of the most important areas of responsibility for any sales leader. This is because there is simply no substitute for having the right talent in your organization. It doesn't matter how efficient processes are, how strategic plans are, or how profound coaching is; if you don't have the right people to follow these processes, execute these plans or receive this coaching, then the organization is not going to be successful. The right talent is simply the foundation of any top-notch sales team.

The process for getting the right talent into your sales organization falls into three key areas. First is **sourcing** quality candidates, creating a talent pool from which you can immediately pull when open positions arise. Second is **screening** for necessary traits, ensuring that you are investing time in the candidates most likely to succeed. Third is **interviewing** candidates, using 1-to-1 behavioral-based interview, team-based interviews and validated assessments in order to identify the people that have the talent and fit to be effective in your organization.

Sourcing

The most effective way to source a talent pool of qualified candidates for your sales team is to establish a recruiting culture in your organization. In a company with a strong recruiting culture, it is everybody's responsibility to constantly look for quality candidates, rather than waiting until positions come open and just relying on the sales manager or recruiters to find the right people. To create this kind of culture, the first step is to set the expectation that it is everybody's responsibility and include meeting

with candidates in performance measures, such key performance indicators or performance reviews. To ensure that all employees are sourcing the right candidates, it is also important to share with them a list of the essential traits the candidates should possess. Not only will this propel employees to recruit the right people, but it will also help them think outside the box in considering candidates who may have the natural talent to excel in a sales role, even if they don't possess the typical experience.

The second step is to conduct activities to motivate everyone in the organization to bring forth candidate names, such as holding a recruiting brainstorming session where each person shares a name of a talented person they know who may fit within the organization. When brainstorming, employees should be encouraged to think of everyone they know that may possess necessary sales talent. This could include acquaintances from their church, people they know from volunteer or civic organizations, and fellow parents from their children's schools or activities.

The final step is to reward employees for recruiting candidates that ultimately join the organization. Rewards can include giving a monetary bonus to the person that recruited a person on the recruit's first day at work or just simply giving public recognition to those employees that recruit the most new employees. By recognizing those that recruit others, the organization will be reinforcing the type of behavior they want to see from all their employees. Ultimately, by following all the steps identified in this section, the organization can turn their entire organization into a recruiting team in order to bring forth a greater quantity of candidates and save on headhunter fees.

Screening

Once candidates have been sourced for a position, the next step is to begin narrowing the pool of potential hires to those that have the necessary skills and talents to be successful in the role. Since screening is an early step in the hiring process, the most important thing is to quickly evaluate each candidate to determine whether to move them forward. There are two primary ways to do this quickly and effectively: via phone or online.

If screening online, the major benefit is that you can screen any volume of candidates by investing hardly any time. This is especially helpful when you are hiring for numerous roles. If you opt for online screening, you may want to consider contracting with a third party vendor who can provide a standardized screening tool so they can help you identify "must have" criteria and craft a short list of questions for your candidates. Their expertise can help ensure you are weeding out those that are unlikely to fit the role and your organization. If you are doing online screening on your own, ensure that you are only asking questions on essential criteria. Remember, this is just the first step in the process, so too restrictive requirements for candidates should be avoided at this stage.

If you opt for phone screening instead, spend no more than 10 minutes on the initial call. The benefit of phone screening is that you can ask more open-ended questions that give you a better sense of whether the candidate could be effective in a sales or sales leadership role. Accordingly, you don't just have to evaluate the candidates on "must have" criteria, you can also begin to evaluate whether they have the

presence than would make them effective in the desired role. Again, don't be overly strict since this is just the first step in the process, but also don't move forward with a candidate about whom you are highly skeptical. Remember, the ultimate purpose of effective screening is to ensure you don't waste the time of the candidate, your associates or yourself if there is not likely to be a good fit between the candidate and your organization.

Interviewing

The final step in the selection process is to interview the sales candidates. The first interview should be in person, one-to-one and limited to between 30 and 60 minutes (depending on how strong you feel about the candidate's potential). Ideally, this interview should be completed using behavioral based questions (that is, questions about behavior you want to see that require the candidate to identify a specific time when they demonstrated that behavior). Behavioral-based interviews are among the most effective in accurately predicting candidate job performance, especially when the interviewer is disciplined in listening for the desired behavior in the candidate's response.

After a candidate effectively completes the initial one-to-one interview, they should be moved forward to interviews with other team members, including with your manager, colleagues and potential peers. These team interviews should also be one-to-one, ideally behaviorally-based. It is important that team members have a strategy ahead of time about the questions they will ask to avoid repetitiveness. After each of the team interviews have been completed, the team members should discuss their perceptions to help determine whether to move the candidate forward.

Another key aspect of the interview stage is to have the candidate complete a validated assessment that measures their potential to effectively perform the job. Whether it is an online tool or a structured interview, a validated assessment (typically provided by a third party vendor) can help uncover talents and deficits that have gone overlooked in the rest of the interview process. If you choose to use an assessment from a third party, make sure you ask about the assessment's predictive validity (that is, its documented reliability in predicting on-the-job performance) before you employ it.

Overall, talent identification and acquisition is so essential because the right people are the foundation of any great sales team. By following these best practices in sourcing, screening and interviewing candidates, you will be more effective in creating a quality sales organization.