

DIFFERENTIATING YOUR ORGANIZATION THROUGH WORLD-CLASS SALES EFFECTIVENESS



A whitepaper from

THE BROOKS GROUP

We all make purchasing decisions every day—some more important than others.

The Brooks Group's VP of Sales has a son who recently made the most important purchasing decision of his life—which college to attend.

He had his heart set on one school in particular. He'd dreamed about it for four years, and he was thrilled when he received his acceptance letter.

When fall came around, however, he was sitting in classes at a different school, one that he had only applied to as a back-up. Why?

The answer lies in a reality that too many sales organizations ignore:

Buyers (and college applicants) make decisions based on their customer experience more often than any other factor, including price, features, and benefits.

In a study by the Sales Executive Council, 37% of buyers said that they made their most recent major purchase based on features and benefits. Only 20% of them cited price.

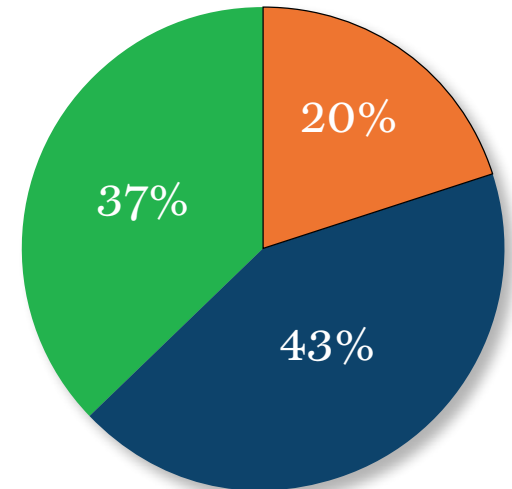
43% said the customer experience was the defining factor.

And who is responsible for delivering customer experience during the buying process?

Your salespeople.

In this whitepaper, we explore how sales organizations can deliver a buying experience that makes loyal fans of skeptical prospects, by focusing on three key areas:

- Recruiting, Selection, and Hiring
- Onboarding and Retention
- Coaching



- price
- benefits
- customer experience

Via Research from the Sales Executive Council



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THE 4 R'S OF RECRUITING, SELECTION, AND HIRING

One of the biggest challenges sales organizations face is finding good people. In most cases, when organizations need to fill a position quickly, they look for someone with industry experience to “hit the ground running.”

Unfortunately, this knee-jerk hiring practice often results in salespeople who perform well out of the gate, but then hit a plateau after a few months and, in some cases, decline in performance. One reason for this is that cultural fit and alignment with the role's requirements are a better predictor of success than industry experience.

Taking the time to get the right person on board from the start saves time in the long run and results in better customer experiences. Here's a process to make sure you're getting the right people in the right seats.

The 4 R's of Recruitment, Selection, and Hiring



1. Resume

When it comes to evaluating resumes, widening the field of prospects beyond industry experience can make it easier to find high quality candidates. It can be valuable to look for experience in adjacent or similar fields rather than only exactly the same industry. For example, salespeople with a background in intangibles often perform well in the professional services industry, regardless of their specific industry experience.



2. Rapport

Your initial experience with a candidate will be similar to the experience of a prospect, so it's important that you feel a connection. But be careful not to rely exclusively on first impressions. Salespeople know how to come to an interview to impress.



To ensure you get what you expect from your new hire, don't stop at rapport. Also be aware that someone with a different communication style from yours might still be an excellent candidate. A communication assessment plus the remaining 2 R's will help you identify the right candidates.



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3. References

The first thing to know about references is that you should actually check them. 37% of applicants lie on their resumes, and 72% of those people are applying for sales jobs. You can't afford to skip this step.



Don't settle only for employer references. Ask to speak with customers and co-workers to get a well-rounded view of the candidate.

Sample Sales Reference Questions

Tell me about a time when this person had to deal with a challenge, how did they overcome it?
What was it like to coach this person? How was this person's relationship with peers on the team?
Why do you think this candidate will be successful in this specific role?
Tell me about a time when you weren't planning to make a purchase and this person convinced you to. (*Question for a client reference*)

Finally, do your due diligence on social media, to ensure what you see on the resume matches up with what they're telling the rest of the world.

4. Report

Hiring assessments can be a powerful tool for understanding how your new hire will perform on the job. Choose one that will answer 5 key questions:

<i>How will this person sell?</i>	Will they be high energy or reserved? Results-oriented or relationship-oriented?
<i>Why will this person sell?</i>	Not everyone is motivated primarily by money. The answers to this question will help you drive performance.
<i>Will this person sell?</i>	Does the candidate have blockages and issues in their lives that will interfere with their ability to perform?
<i>Can this person sell?</i>	What are the skills they bring to the job?
<i>How will this person sell here?</i>	How will this candidate perform in this particular company culture and under the conditions of their specific role?



A Brooks Talent Index Assessment can answer the first three questions, while a Selling Skills Index addresses the fourth. To answer the fifth question, establish behavioral and skills benchmarks based on input from people in your organization who have been in the role, reported to the role, and managed the role. Identify key behaviors, motivators, attitudes, and skills to create a benchmark for each role, then use the report to see how well each candidate lines up.



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4 BEST PRACTICES FOR ONBOARDING AND RETENTION

According to the Sales Management Association, organizations with a strong, formal onboarding process sell more and at greater profit margins than other organizations.

The 4 Best Practices for Onboarding and Retention

1. Review Assessment Results Together

Reviewing assessment results with each new hire increases their self-awareness, reveals growth opportunities, and establishes clear communication from the start. Have a manager sit down with each recruit and share their own assessment results as well. This creates immediate rapport, and ensures everyone is clear about the best ways to communicate and engage with each other.

2. Set Goals

Don't wait for a performance review to begin setting goals. Collaborate with each new hire to create 30-, 60-, and 90-day goals, then review those goals with them at regular checkpoints. This exercise will help them get focused right from the start, and it also will reveal whether they are capable of setting smart goals and also achieving them. In some cases, this exercise may reveal that you have a "project" employee on your hands. See the coaching section for what to do in that case.

3. Set Clear Expectations

A new hire needs to know what high performance looks like so they can choose to live up to it. Review company guidelines, standards for work, and communication channels with each new hire. Make sure they understand the activities and the mindset that are expected of them, and set measurable milestones for them to achieve.

4. Train the Skills Necessary for High Performance

Too many companies hire "superstars" and expect them to simply wing it. Don't let your new reps out into the field without adequate product training and a clear understanding of your process and methodology. Salespeople with a consistent process have a 93% chance of closing business with a qualified buyer, compared to a 42% chance for salespeople without a formal process. Establish a buyer-focused process such as IMPACT Selling, and train it across your organization.

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3 KEYS TO COACHING SUCCESS

According to the Sales Executive Council, top performers are 50% more likely to stay with an organization when they feel they are receiving effective coaching.

Coaching That Maximizes Performance

TOP PERFORMERS

Are 50% more likely to stay with an organization as a result of effective coaching

MID-LEVEL PERFORMERS

Achieve 102% of their performance goals, on average, with effective coaching

LOW PERFORMERS

Should receive <50% of your coaching time. Research shows that coaching generally has the least effect on the lowest performers

Via Research from the Sales Executive Council

1. Ask, Don't Tell

Coaching is most effective when reps take ownership of the solutions to their problems. Focus on asking probing questions to guide salespeople to their answers, rather than telling them what to do.

2. Less Is More

Telling salespeople everything they're doing wrong will only lead to burnout and resentment. Focus instead on the few items that will bring each salesperson the greatest improvement.

3. Consistent Cadence

Prioritize regular coaching in a variety of formats, including one-on-one and team meetings, deal coaching, and joint calls. Hold coaching sessions at least weekly or bi-weekly, and don't cancel these appointments.



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3-2-1 Coaching Magic

To avoid letting your reps become dependent on you for every issue they have, ask them to follow the 3-2-1 approach:

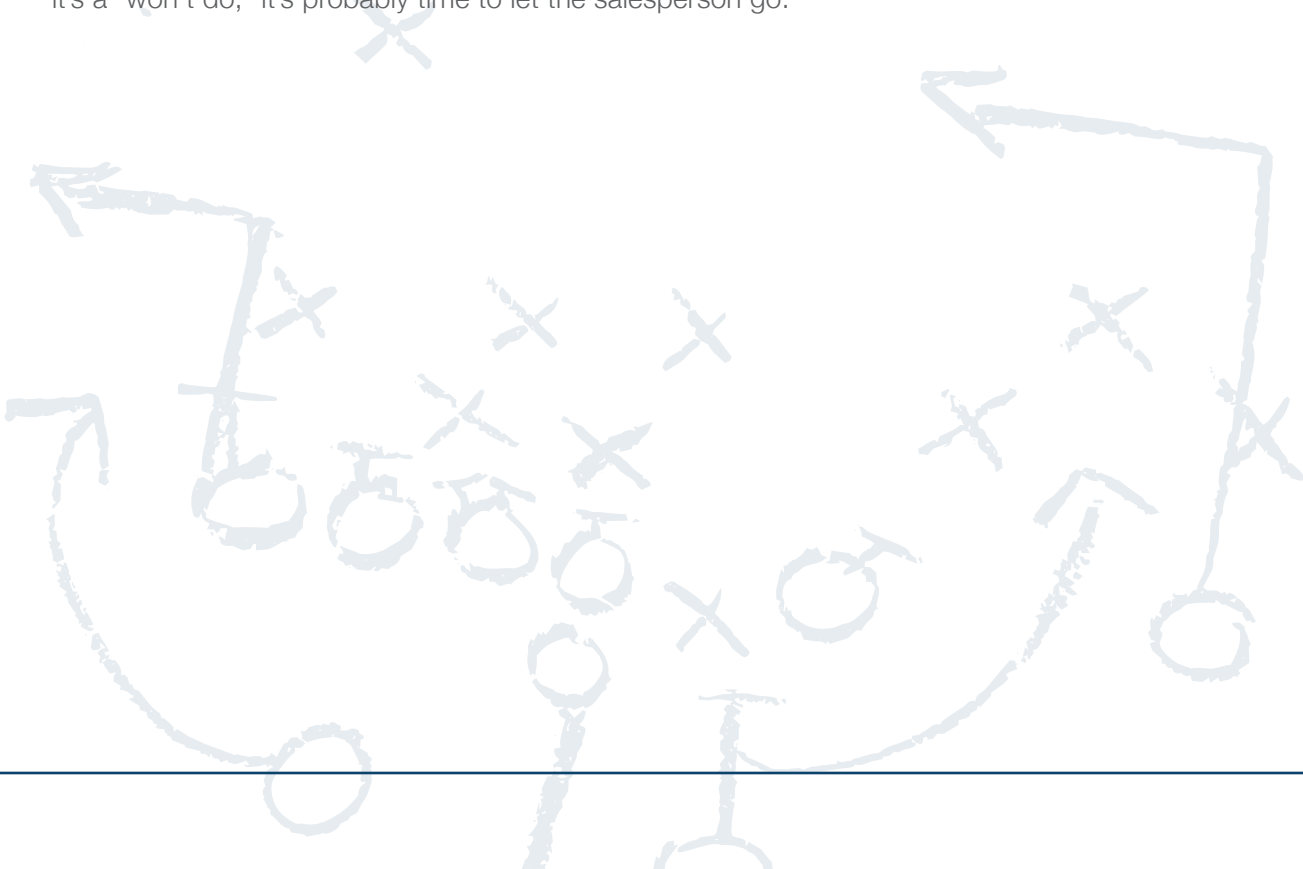
3. Have them describe the issue in 3 minutes or less
2. Have them offer 2 potential solutions to the issue
1. Have them tell you which 1 solution they think is best

When they consistently choose the best solution, you can replace the process with: “You got this! I trust your judgment.” They’ll feel empowered, and you’ll gain back precious time.

Course Correcting: When Something Goes Wrong

Even with the best hiring, onboarding, and coaching practices, sometimes a salesperson just doesn’t perform as expected. The most important thing to understand when this happens is whether the issue is a “can’t do” or a “won’t do.”

If it’s a “can’t do,” it may be worthwhile to provide additional training and coaching to get the salesperson the skills they need. If it’s a “won’t do,” it’s probably time to let the salesperson go.



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THE REST OF THE STORY: HOW ONE COLLEGE'S BUYING EXPERIENCE WON OVER A COMPETITOR'S RECRUIT

Often, a buyer comes into the purchasing process with a predisposition for a competitor's solution. This can be a frustrating experience for salespeople, who may feel strung along by the buyer when they find out the decision was made ahead of time.

But the reality is that a stellar customer experience can win over even a reluctant buyer. When our story's main character started his college shopping experience, he was sure he would choose the college where his heart had been set for four years.

But that college failed to provide a winning customer experience.

Despite plenty of buying enthusiasm indicators, including attendance to open houses and regular written communications, the school failed to court the applicant's loyalty. They missed the opportunity to make his experience extraordinary.

Meanwhile, our main character had applied and been accepted to multiple other colleges – in the rare event that his “dream school” didn't work out the way he'd planned. One of the schools towards the bottom of his list surprised him with their outreach.

There were letters from professors and other students, a phone call from the Dean, and an overall extraordinary experience that told him they really wanted him to be there, and demonstrated for him the type of experience he could expect there.

In the end, he chose the competitor who had started out at the bottom of his list, simply because of the buying experience.



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ABOUT THE BROOKS GROUP

The process of improving your customer's buying experience isn't a big secret. It starts with hiring the right salespeople, proceeds with solid onboarding and training, and requires outstanding coaching and management to solidify best practices.

The Brooks Group can support your organization on every step of the way towards achieving world-class sales effectiveness. To learn more about hiring assessments, the IMPACT Selling® process, and the holistic approach you can use to improve and maintain the performance of your sales team, visit TheBrooksGroup.com.



Click Here to Start
Your Journey to World-Class
Sales Effectiveness Today

With nearly 40 years of industry experience, The Brooks Group achieves sustainable sales culture transformation for clients by delivering targeted training that becomes operationalized by threading into an organization's existing systems.

The Brooks Group takes a holistic approach to practical culture shifts and focuses on customized "street smart" sales and sales management programs, with a high level of relevance and practicality for the individual learner. Training gets reinforced with an industry-leading cloud-based sales and sales management coaching platform.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Brooks Group can be reached by phone at **(800) 633-7762**, by email at Contact@TheBrooksGroup.com or online at TheBrooksGroup.com.



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