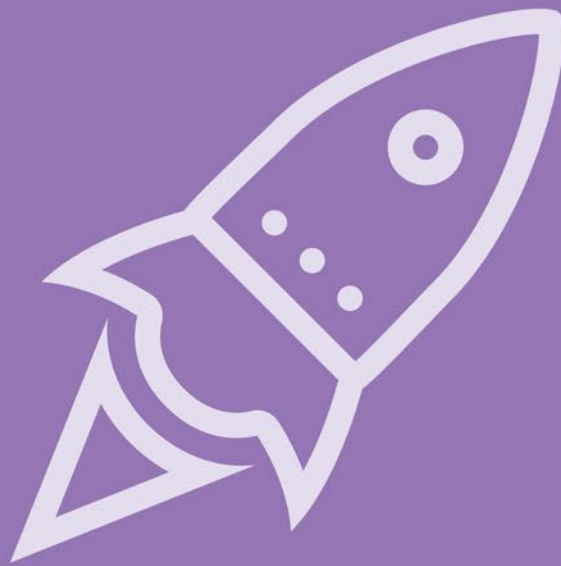




# THE IMPORTANCE OF A WELL-ESTABLISHED HIRING, ONBOARDING, AND CAREER PATHING PROCESS



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A WHITEPAPER BY THE BROOKS GROUP

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# No matter what kind of company you have, your people are what makes it run. With the right sales talent, you can raise your productivity, increase your revenue, and improve your organization in a myriad of other ways.

**But what, exactly, constitutes “top sales talent” and how do you find the right people for your organization?**

It starts with the hiring process, then moves to onboarding them properly, and continues with guiding them along the right career path. All three of these components need to be well-established in your company in order to find your version of “top sales talent” and help them reach their full potential. Let’s take a closer look at how each of these factors of success works.

## The Hiring Process

It’s critical that you begin by bringing the right people onto your team. No amount of training or onboarding can change a person’s innate motivators and behavior style, so you need to be sure you have a good fit upfront.

So who are the right people? Finding the ones who are the most skilled at what they do is an important factor, but it’s not the only one. Truth be told, there are plenty of people who have the right skillset to work at your company. What’s more challenging is finding people who are the right fit for the role and your company culture.

## Sales Talent Acquisition

First things first, you’ll need to determine exactly what the position requires for success. Gain insight on the role by bringing together a group of existing staff—those who will be working closely with the new sales hire, as well as internal stakeholders.



Once you've identified the key competencies needed for long-term success in the position, your next step is to begin sourcing qualified candidates. Don't limit yourself to placing ads on job sites or hiring a recruiter to get a list of potential employees. You may meet people at conferences, trade shows, or other industry events who seem like they'd thrive within your company.

Keep the ABR mindset – Always Be Recruiting. It's important to be doing this constantly—not just when you have a specific position to fill in your company. Make connections wherever you can, and keep them on file. Even if they're not what you're looking for right this minute, you may be able to find a place for them in your organization down the line.

So, what are you looking for? There are, of course, the hard skills: things people need to be able to do in order to perform the job, along with the required knowledge and experience. As we said before, that's the easy part.

Just as important, though, is making sure they have the right soft skills. This includes things like their attitude, their behavior, and the way they communicate. You also need to make sure they're naturally motivated and engaged by what the position rewards. If they're not innately driven to perform the duties that the job requires day in and day out, they're not a good fit. They'll quickly become disengaged and eventually will experience burnout—leaving you back at square one, and with a lot of wasted time, money, and energy.

Finally, one of the most important issues is this: even if they have all the right skills, are they the right cultural fit for your company? Will they fit in with the dynamic that your existing team has already established? Every company is different, and someone who thrives in one type of working environment may flounder in another. The best way to determine if someone is the right fit for your company, culturally and otherwise, is in the interviewing and screening process.

## Best Practices for Interviewing

Many positions will require interviews with multiple members of your team. Committee interviewing provides a system of checks and balances, so that one person's bias for or against a particular interviewee doesn't become the deciding factor in what could be a poor decision. The committee decides on a specific standard for how to judge applicants, and each member decides how well each candidate meets those standards.





It's very important to get everyone involved in [the interview process](#) on the same page. Clearly communicate interview expectations, and make sure everyone understands their roles. That means clarifying what each individual will be focusing on during their time with the candidate in order to maximize the interview process.

Instead of falling back on the standard job interview questions, ask [behavior based questions](#) that get to the heart of how the candidate will act and react in specific situations that they'll encounter regularly on the job. Here's a good example for sales:

*"You're talking to a prospective client, but they've made it clear they don't like or trust you. In fact, they're being openly hostile and belligerent to everything you say. How do you handle it? What do you say to them to gain their trust?"*

An honest answer to a question like this will tell you much more about a candidate than a parroted answer from a hundred other interviews.

You can also use peer interviewing: have your candidate shadow one of your top sales reps for the day. Someone who's actually in the field, doing the same work that the candidate is interviewing for, will often have their own unique perspective on what someone needs to succeed in your organization.





Plus, having candidates experience a day in the life of an employee is a good way to see firsthand whether or not they fit with your company culture. And finally, if they have some personality trait that doesn't fit with your company—for example, a short temper, or generally impatient nature—it can be easy to hide in a 10-minute interview, but becomes a lot harder to hide over the course of an eight hour day.

Keep in mind that resumes give a lot of information about a candidate's previous work experience, but they don't do much to reveal what's truly "under the hood." To see past the interview façade and ensure you're hiring someone who is a good fit for the role and your culture, back up your gut feelings with a validated, EEOC compliant [assessment](#).

## Onboarding

Once you've completed the hiring process, your next step is to acclimate your new employees to your company and culture. The onboarding process is about much more than basic training, or filling new sales hires in on company policies. The purpose is to make them a part of your company culture, so that they'll grow and thrive within your organization over a long period of time.

## Sales Talent Retention

On average, [about 46% of new sales hires](#) will leave a company within their first 18 months. A high turnover rate can have a variety of different negative effects on your company. For one thing, the constant churn lowers morale for the rest of your employees, which in turn leads to a loss of productivity.

Even more important, the more frequently employees have to be replaced, the more it costs your company. Recruiting and hiring new people costs not just money, but time and resources, as does training them. Plus, there's always a catch-up period, where a new employee works to reach the productivity level of more seasoned employees. If your turnover rate is high, then there's a greater amount of time in which productivity is lower than it should be.



Counting time, money, and other resources, all told, it can cost a company, on average, nearly \$115,000 to replace one salesperson on their team. Therefore, it's in your best interest to keep employees around as long as possible. To do that, you need to be able to understand why they leave and what you can do to keep them engaged and motivated. The onboarding process is where you can first address these issues.



## Training and Coaching

The first step in onboarding is to train your employees. Many organizations think of this as a one-time event, or a brief period at the beginning of their time at your company. But if it's done right, training should be an ongoing process. Your employees should never stop learning, growing, and becoming better at what they do.

It should also be tempered with coaching. While training is about showing employees the ropes at your organization, coaching is more about mentorship, guidance, and improving skills. Coaching not only helps to improve performance, but also increases employee retention.

While coaching is widely considered to have the greatest impact on job performance, formal strategies tend to be poorly executed or non-existent. Quality coaching really is the catalyst of high performance and retention, so it's important to make coaching programs a priority in your organization. Whether through one-to-one or team based coaching sessions, make it a point to implement a standard coaching cadence and stick to it.



It's also important to lay out job expectations in a clear, straightforward manner. What is expected of the new employee? What constitutes an acceptable success rate, versus an unacceptable one? Training helps employees to understand expectations. Coaching helps them to meet them.

## Onboarding Over Time and Reducing Turnover

Much like training and coaching, the onboarding process as a whole continues over time. To make sure employees are successfully acclimated to your company, you should have 30, 60, and 90-day plans for onboarding. Be sure to check in on your new sales hire's progress after each of these milestones and determine what they're doing well, where they're struggling, and what type of targeted coaching can be used to help them further improve.

When it comes to employee turnover, one of the most prevalent reasons for leaving, [as stated in exit interviews](#), is generally problems with the employee's direct manager. By fostering better communication and a more helpful, mentoring relationship, employees are more likely to stay.

As far as progress goes, it's important to set clear, measurable goals, with measurable outcomes. For instance, how many sales should an employee make in their first month? How much total revenue should they bring in? How long should it take to nurture a lead into a sale? Laying this out allows employees to see their own progress and gives them something to strive for.



To help them meet these goals, it's important to provide regular feedback, in both formal and informal settings. Have meetings to discuss their progress, but also have casual conversations, where you provide encouragement for how they're doing and tips on how to improve. Different employees have different communication styles, so find out what they respond to best and do your best to reach them on that level. Using a [personal assessment](#) is a great way to identify communication preferences and approach employees in a way that gets through to them.

Since communication is key, it's also necessary that the channels of communication be very clear from the beginning, and that they work both ways. Just as you need to be able to talk to your employees to provide feedback, they need to be able to reach out to you when they need help. Therefore, they need to know who to go to when they have an issue, and what resources are at their disposal to help them find an answer.

In this regard, it often helps to provide mentors. A veteran employee who knows the ropes can help a new sales hire onboard more smoothly, and be there to answer questions and provide coaching, which takes some of the burden off of management. In fact, the bond between an employee and their mentor can continue for years, allowing the more seasoned rep to help their mentee to grow and advance, helping them lay out a career path and reducing the likelihood of them leaving for another company.

## Career Pathing

Onboarding is an important step in improving employee retention, but it's still just the beginning. The next step is helping your employees with their careers, in order to make sure that their future is with your company, rather than another one. Career pathing, if done right, shows employees that they're more than just a cog in your machine. It demonstrates that you genuinely care about them and are committed to their development at your company—that their success is your success as well.

Career pathing provides them with an opportunity for growth and advancement within your company. Another major reason why people leave their jobs is because there aren't enough opportunities, and they feel like their career is stagnating, or stuck in a place where they don't want to be. If you want to get employees invested enough in your organization for them to stick around, then you need to provide a path for them to be able to move forward.





Of course, growth and advancement mean different things to different people. Not everyone is gunning for the corner office. In order to help employees on their career path, you first need to understand what motivates them.

**Some of the most common motivators that people possess are:**

- **Utilitarian** – interest in money and control of income
- **Theoretical** – discovery of knowledge and learning
- **Aesthetic** – interest in form, harmony, and creativity
- **Social** – giving back and helping others
- **Individualistic** – desire for leadership and influence
- **Traditional/Regulatory** – defined rules, regulations, and systems

Each of your employees will have a mix of what motivates them to get up every morning and perform. Every job has a unique set of motivators that it rewards, as well. The key is matching your sales talent to the position that rewards these motivators the best.

When position advancements are not available, organizations can broaden an employee's responsibilities based on their motivators and skillset, or even give them a special project that is closely aligned with what motivates them. This can improve engagement and help an employee feel valued.

For this reason, it's important to get to know your employees and find out what it is that motivates them, so that you can find opportunities for them, and help them move forward in other ways. An assessment such as Brooks Talent Index uncovers what is beneath the surface of a person, helping you align their motivators to the role.

Of course, sometimes, the move people want to make is lateral, rather than upward. You can give them all the advancement there is in their current position, and they still won't be satisfied. That's because what they really want is the opportunity to do something else, or thrive in a different environment. For instance, maybe instead of sales, they want to move into marketing. If you can recognize this in them, you can show them what it will take to make that move, help them along that path in whatever way you can, and consider them next time a position opens up in that department.



## Conclusion

Many people simply show up to their job only to receive a paycheck—they're not passionate about the work they do. In that scenario, these employees are likely to leave the organization if another opportunity comes along that offers them more money, better hours, more job satisfaction, better location, etc. That's why it's so important—right from the beginning—to take steps to keep your employees around for the long run.

It starts with the hiring process: finding people who don't just have the hard skills to do the job, but who will fit in with your company and thrive in their role. Then, onboard, coach, and mentor them to help them succeed and make them feel like an integral part of your organization—that your company really cares about them as part of a family, rather than just someone doing a job. And finally, keep an eye on their career goals. Know what it is they want, and work with them to find ways of achieving it.

If you can do this, you'll not only improve employee retention, but also have better productivity, more revenue, a better bottom line, and happier, more effective employees for years to come.

The Brooks Group offers a selection of hiring and talent development solutions, including comprehensive assessments that can be used for the entire lifecycle of the employee.

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The Brooks Group provides a suite of proven sales and sales management development programs, industry-leading reinforcement tools, and best-in-class assessments.

### **For more information**

The Brooks Group can be reached by phone at (800) 633-7762, by email at [Contact@TheBrooksGroup.com](mailto:Contact@TheBrooksGroup.com) or online at [TheBrooksGroup.com](http://TheBrooksGroup.com).



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