

5 Steps to Hiring Sales People Better Than Your Top Performer

- Danita Bye



"In 77% less time, with 55% fewer people, the sales team garnered 57% more revenue. Now that's sales team!"

~ Joe Hines, President of Voice Data Networks

It's a complex, challenging and continuously changing environment. Recession, globalization, competition and commoditization are some of the challenges faced today. How do we find people who can successfully sell in these new market conditions?

Hiring the wrong sales person hurts the bottom line. Although you can often measure the "hard" cost of turnover, recruitment and training, it's more difficult to put a price on lost productivity lost clients and damaged client relationships.

"Hiring sales people is the business equivalent of formulating a marriage ... a sales marriage, that is. Appearance may be enough to initiate the relationship, but without deep commonality of needs and value, the future of the marriage is bleak."

~ Lee Saltz, Sales Management guru.

Joe Hines, president of Voice Data Networks, is a pragmatist, measuring success in numbers. Prior to implementing the new recruiting process, they hired and terminated nine sales people over a 27-month period. They only produced \$675,000 in sales and \$129,000 in margin. Yet, Joe absorbed all the costs of these "sales ghosts" who continued to haunt his financial statement.

Recruiting top performing professionals - through a comprehensive

process - forms a core foundation for building a successful sales organization. After significant research and practical experience, Dave Kurlan, president of Objective Management Group recommends the following hiring process. Notice the differences between the **sequence and the importance of each step.**

SEQUENCE	TASK	IMPORTANCE
1	IDENTIFY	1
2	SEARCH	4
3	QUALIFY	3
4	ASSESS	2
5	INTERVIEW	5

The Most Critical Step: Identify

The interview is NOT the most critical step in the hiring process, **identification of the ideal applicant** is. Clearly identify the essential competencies (non-negotiable) and desirable attributes that will translate into success. **You can teach someone the job but not to be the right person, they must come with the right DNA.** Without effective, comprehensive effort applied to this often ignored step, you are not likely to find strong sales professionals who WILL succeed. Objective Management Group has identified 19 different aspects that are critical in the identification stage.

A focused picture of exactly what the position requires enables you to write print or on-line ads targeted to attract your ideal salesperson. A "hunter" responds to a different type of ad than an account manager.

Bob Kinsella, president of Tri-Cities says, "Danita led us through what I believe is the most thorough, yet time-efficient process, starting with how to write the recruiting ad. I would never have thought to write the ad the way it ended up. And I certainly wouldn't have received 80 responses that we scored using her guidelines."

The 2nd Most Critical Step: Assess

Two equally likeable candidates, when interviewed, may produce very different assessment results. Great advances in the field of assessments provide you with objective data, assisting you in hiring a sales superstar.

Do your **assessments before the interview** weed out unsuitable candidates and save time?

Objective assessments also protect you from falling in love with likeable candidates...who can't sell. Before implementing screening tools at Micro-Tech Hearing Instruments. I had a rule, "Don't hire nice people!" Sounds odd, but I was tired of nice people who couldn't sell. As a start-up company, short on cash-flow, I needed bottom-line results.

Although assessments designed for unique workplace applications can measure psychological -, personality - and behavioural styles; analyze aptitude, values, and integrity - the most highly validated tool for hiring sales people is the Kurlan Express Screen.

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This tool can eliminate 96% of hiring mistakes (including managers.)

Do you benefit from the latest assessments available to eliminate hiring mistakes?

The Phone Test

Personally phone your shortlisted candidates. Ask a question like, "How do your qualifications compare to those listed in the ad?" It's important to use an objective scoring system. Do they try to close by asking you about the next step? If not, say goodbye. **Your objective is to hire someone better than your best sales person; so keep raising the bar to stay.**

The Interview

Although the interview rates as 'least significant', no other step in the process can help you measure composure, maturity, style or resilience. Approach interviews unemotionally and with a buyers' mentality. Do candidates exhibit desired sales behaviours?

While interviewing a candidate for a client who was seeking a third party perspective, I was greeted by the candidate with a warm, charming aura; (called the "halo" effect) she built rapport quickly. For a receptionist, this warmth may be sufficient. However, in professional sales you need people skilled in probing, selling value, gaining commitment and moving the sales process forward. When the candidate realized that she lacked the sales core to support her success, she turned hostile.

A Michigan State University study estimates over 90% of all hiring decisions stem from interviews, yet it's only 14% accurate in predicting success. Behavioral interviewing is a powerful tool to use—asking competency-based questions focused on past behaviour... once you know that you're interviewing someone whom you know has the core beliefs needed to be successful selling.

Ever used a professional coach to challenge your interviewing techniques?

The Resume

The resume also dropped in significance. A professional resume writer can create a resume for anyone. Ask for further details and documentation to substantiate key claims. "More than 50% of all resumes contain dishonest information."

~ Steven D. Levitt, economics professor, University of Chicago.

A resume can indicate how long the candidate may stay with you. A pattern of seasonal job changes could indicate depression or some root problem worth investigating.

SUMMARY

Back to Joe Hines: Using the new process, he hired one sales manager and four sales people.

The replacement team produced \$1.168 million in revenue and \$327,000 in gross margin. In

77% less time, with 55% fewer people, Voice Data Networks has garnered 57% more revenue.

Successful leaders will execute this disciplined hiring process, followed by an effective onboarding program.

It's like an iceberg. We have to look beyond the 10% that's easily seen to see what's really at the core.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Danita Bye".



ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Danita Bye

Danita is president and founder of Sales Growth Specialists. Sales Growth Specialists works with business leaders who are frustrated with their current sales trends and bottom line results. They've tried quick fixes, aren't satisfied with the results, and are committed to a turnaround on both trends and results. Sales Growth Specialists provides a "Sales Turnaround" program that is guaranteed to strengthen the processes that drive sales performance resulting in significantly improved margins, revenues and sales costs.

Danita frequently authors articles in *Upsize Magazine*, *The Business Journal*, *Minnesota Business* and the *Star Tribune*. She's a guest speaker at *St. Thomas Entrepreneurial Fast Track* and is on the advisory team to the *Carlson School's Entrepreneurship-In-Action* team. Danita's new book, *Sales Management in the No Excuse Zone*, is due for release in mid 2009.