
Recruit Your Way To The Top!



by JOHN BOE

Essentially, a sales manager's primary responsibility is to recruit, train and motivate their sales force to achieve peak performance. Of these three vitally important tasks, recruiting is the least understood and by far the most challenging.

When you recruit the right person you will find that they are self-motivated and eager to train. On the other hand, if you hire someone who is not suited for the position, you will experience low morale, high turnover and find yourself constantly in the training mode.

While there is no perfect system that can guarantee you will hire the right person every time, there are fundamental guidelines you must follow if you expect to recruit your way to the top!

Are You a Buyer or a Seller?

It pays to be patient and selective during the interviewing process. Obviously, what you are looking for is a hard-working, self-motivated team player and not just a warm body to fill the position. By approach-

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During the initial interview, the vast majority of sales managers have a tendency to oversell the position. These well-meaning managers make the fundamental mistake of describing the sales profession in its most favorable light by over-emphasizing the compensation potential and understating the inherent challenges.

Buyers understand the importance and the responsibility of being straightforward and laying all of their cards on the table. They know through experience that it is better to run the risk of scaring off a prospective hire than to face a disillusioned salesperson after the fact. Buyers tell it like it is by emphasizing the demanding aspects of the sales profession such as rejection and hard work. By placing a few roadblocks and challenges in front of a prospective hire you are able to check their interest and validate their resolve.

The Process Makes the Difference

You will never see a bad resume. Buyers understand the absolute necessity of doing a thorough reference check. In addition to the standard questions regarding character and work ethic, it's always a good idea to ask their reference, "In your opinion, if (candidate's name) were to fail as a salesperson, what do you think the reason would be?" This question is

never anticipated and frequently invites the most insightful discussion.

I strongly recommend that you use a checklist, because it allows you to stay on message and helps you to remember important questions. Relying on your memory is a poor business decision and will normally come back to haunt you. Take good notes throughout the interview. If you talk more than you listen during an interview, you are a seller and not a buyer.

As a manager there are several benchmark questions you need to keep in mind during the interviewing process. Ask yourself, does the candidate make a favorable first impression and would you want this person working for your competition?

You would be fooling yourself not to anticipate that your prospective hire has been coached and is well prepared for a standard office interview. With this in mind, I suggest that you conduct two formal interviews followed by a social interview. The initial interview is designed primarily to probe for general suitability such as punctuality, communication skills, financial stability and evidence of past success. It's been said that both success and failure leave a trail. Look for past experiences where they have faced difficulties and have shown the resiliency to bounce back. This approach lends itself to a valuable discussion about the necessity of being self-motivated and maintaining a positive attitude in the sales profession.

To allow for reflection, temperament testing, and verification of references, I would advise a minimum of one week between interviews. Consider setting up some hurdles between the first and second interviews that will allow you to measure interest and personal responsibility. When I was a sales manager, I would invite both my potential hire and their spouse out to dinner or to a sporting event. When you are interviewing a salesperson for a commission-based position, it's imperative to check for spousal support and address their concerns as well.

Here are my favorite interview questions:

1. **Do you have written goals you want to accomplish? If so, tell me about them.** You are looking for indications of maturity, focus, planning ability and desire for achievement.
2. **How did you earn your first paycheck, how old were you, and what did you do with the money?** With this question you are probing to check their work ethic.
3. **What are the top three leadership traits that you look for in a manager?** With this question you are

attempting to gauge their expectation and ascertain their preferred management style.

4. **Have you ever failed at something, and if so, why did you fail and what did you learn from the experience?** This question lends itself to a discussion on resiliency, personal responsibility and their tendencies under pressure.

5. **Everyone has strengths and weaknesses as employees. What are your strong points for this position?** This question gives them the opportunity to tell you what assets they bring to the table and how they see themselves fitting into your organization.

6. **What is the one thing you would improve about yourself?** This question gives you an indication of their self-assessment capability.

7. **Other than family members, who has been the greatest influence in your life and why?**

8. **If you were to fail in this business, what do you think the reason would be?**

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Temperament Profiling an Absolute Must

Sales managers who lack the benefit of temperament understanding are inclined to place too much emphasis on their gut-level feeling during the hiring process. Progressive organizations that understand the value of temperament profiling actively seek people with varied behavioral styles and thereby benefit from a richness and diversity of perspective. People with different behavioral patterns are more likely to complement rather than duplicate each other's strengths and serve in a check and balance capacity.

Managers frequently ask me which traits are the most important to look for in a prospective hire. In my opinion, there are two mandatory qualities any new hire should possess. The first quality I look for is loyalty. If a person is not loyal to their company, research indicates that they are more likely to violate company policies and procedures. Disloyal employees are also the first to leave when the going gets tough. Look for signs of job stability on their resume and check their attitude regarding their previous em-

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ployers. The second quality I look for is dependability. It makes absolutely no sense to invest huge amounts of emotional and financial capital training someone you can't depend on.

The most effective people are those who know themselves, know the demands of the situation, and adapt strategies to meet those demands. Research indicates that career incompatibility is the major cause

of personnel discontentment and costly turnover. The hidden cost of excessive personnel replacement is often measured through a decrease in customer retention.

Simply put, you want to hire a person who has a temperament profile compatible with the job opportunity. For example, some people are born analytical and have a temperament style that excels in administration and attention to detail. Others are more comfortable in a supportive role and are better suited for a customer service position rather than the uncertainty of commission sales.

The importance of matching the job description to the correct temperament style cannot be overstated. Temperament testing is not only advantageous for hiring and suitability but also as a management

aid to assist in training and supervision after the hiring process. I strongly recommend that a temperament evaluation be administered between the first and second interview.

When a temperament evaluation is properly implemented and utilized in conjunction with other standard hiring and interviewing procedures, it ensures that applicants are treated fairly without regard to race, color, age, religion, gender or national origin. If a temperament evaluation is used as part of a hiring process, it shouldn't constitute the total basis for hiring or placement. I recommend that an organization establish and utilize a consistent standard hiring process. Information gathered in each step of the hiring process should be reviewed in total prior to making a final hiring decision.

You're Only as Good as Your Pipeline

While some turnover in your sales force such as retirement, promotion and transfer is understandable and can be anticipated, the quitter is often unpredictable. With this in mind, recruiting must be thought of as a long-term strategy, not a knee-jerk reaction.

Perhaps the greatest mistake a manager can make is underestimating their turnover. If your personnel turnover is high, it's more than likely caused by improper recruiting, rather than inadequate training or a lack of incentives. Even if you're the world's best trainer and motivator, if you haven't recruited correctly you will experience high turnover and may find your sales team bogged down with low morale. If your recruiting pipeline has dried up, here are tips that will assist you in filling it back up with quality salespeople:

- To have an effective recruiting program, it's imperative that your sales team be enthusiastically involved in the recruiting process. Let them know that their ability to recruit is considered a vital skill in leadership development and that their assistance is essential to the health of the organization.
- Keep your sales team informed by focusing on recruiting as an agenda item at the weekly meeting. On the agenda show the status of each recruit, highlighting the salesperson who has recruited them.
- Design and implement an incentive program for your sales force that places an emphasis on recruiting.
- Consider inviting potential new hires out for lunch and cultivate relationships with clients that you think may be successful on your sales team. Make certain to include them in your company's social events when appropriate.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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