

Hiring Is Like Looking At The Tip Of The Iceberg

by DAVE KAHLE



When interviewing a hiring candidate or coaching an employee, it's helpful to visualize the image of an iceberg with 10 percent visible above the surface, and 90 percent invisible below the surface:

The visible 10 percent is necessary, but limited information:

- Skills.
- Experience.
- Education.

The invisible 90 percent is the essence of the total person and helps to create a good job match:

- Thinking style.
- Behavioral traits.
- Occupational interests.

The difference between what you see and what you need to see can make the difference between hiring a top performer or an under performer.

Companies that use pre-hire and coaching assessment tools discover that certain key attributes for attaining sales success are not always apparent during a traditional interview relying on a resumé and scripted questions. Key attributes are often hidden below the surface (of the iceberg) and have the potential to sink your sales forecast if they are not discovered in time. These include competitiveness, self-reliance, persistence, energy level and sales drive.

Sales Behaviors

Furthermore, there are seven important sales behaviors that affect sales performance and are often invisible even with existing employees. They are (1) prospecting, (2) closing, (3) call reluctance, (4) self-starting ability, (5)

teamwork, (6) building and maintaining relationships, and (7) compensation preference.

Companies that use pre-hire and coaching assessment tools to see more of the total person can also increase the likelihood of hiring top performers by asking themselves this question:

Question — Which of these two choices is more likely to result in an effective salesperson:

1. Hiring someone with technical expertise and training them to become a salesperson, or
2. Hiring someone with sales aptitude, and training them in the product knowledge and technical aspects of the job?

Answer — That's simple. I think you are almost always better off hiring someone with sales aptitude and educating them in the technical part of the job.

Here's why:

- In any population of people, there are far more people with technical aptitude than there are with genuine sales aptitude. As a result, good salespeople are harder to find than good technicians. That's one of the reasons why a good salesperson earns more than a good technician.
- Sales is a more difficult job than engineering, technical repair, or any of the other highly technical professions. Technicians invariably work with "things," and "things" have reliable and

known characteristics. Salespeople, on the other hand, invariably work with people. Each individual person is ultimately an unknown combination of thoughts, feelings, values, goals and beliefs — incredibly complex. Now add together a group of people in the context of a business, and you have a very difficult and complex situation, full of unknown variables.

If you can find someone with the qualities to handle this chaos — the discipline to work an unsupervised, effective workweek, the personal self-image strong enough to withstand daily rejection, the personal motivation to press on no matter what — then believe me, training them in technical details is the easy part.

- Technical people who become salespeople almost always view their job as essentially uncovering technical problems to solve, and then proposing solutions to those technical problems. While this is a component of the job, it dramatically limits the salesperson's effectiveness.

Those of you who are familiar with my "peeling the onion" analogy will recognize that "technical problems" are very near the surface of the onion. As long as a salesperson views their job as that of finding solutions to technical problems, they'll never penetrate

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to the heart of a customer's goals and motivations.

While technical problem solvers are working at the surface of things, the professional salespeople are working with their customers on systems and partnerships.

The largest sales I ever made were always at deep levels in the organization, where systems and corporate philosophies and values were more important than technical issues.

- Finally, from a very pragmatic point of view, it is easier to educate someone in product knowledge and technical applications than it is to train someone in sales skills. Ultimately, product knowledge and technical issues are knowledge, and knowledge can be learned. Sales, on the other hand, requires a complex combination of aptitudes, motivations, beliefs, concepts, skills, processes and tools. You are far better off hiring someone who has the raw core competencies to develop into an accomplished salesperson than someone who has gained knowledge, but doesn't have the aptitude.

Having said all that, I have one last thought. Don't think that just because someone has sales aptitude, they don't need instruction

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in the competencies that make one an effective salesperson.

Just like any other profession, there are specific competencies that effective sales practitioner's practice. You can make your company's success far more likely by looking below the surface (of the iceberg) when you're hiring and when you're promoting by using aptitude assessment tools. You can make your company's success far more likely by seeing to it that salespeople are trained and then stimulated to continually develop their skills than if you simply allow them to learn by trial and error. □

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