



EDITORIAL | BILL BROOKS

IF YOU CAN'T **HIRE** A GOOD  
SALESPERSON...

**MAKE ONE!**



**BILL BROOKS**

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Turnover for salespeople typically hovers around 25%, and at some organizations it's even higher. As a result, managers spend weekends or lunch hours sorting through countless resumes, trying to find that elusive candidate who has demonstrated expertise in sales. And if you're one of the lucky managers who has found a salesperson to hire, consider how long it has taken your new employee to get up to speed. And how much of your time has it taken to get him or her there?

If this sounds like your experience, I'd like you to think about an important question: **Is a great salesperson born... or made?**

**THE MYTHS**

We all have the tendency to believe two things:

- ✔ There is such a thing as a "natural" salesperson.
- ✔ Previous experience at selling will guarantee success.

But I propose to you that neither of these assumptions is necessarily correct.

First things first. Is there such a thing as a natural salesperson? Probably. But there are probably 20 times more successful salespeople who had to learn, one day at a time, one challenge after another, how to sell and sell well. I'm one of them, in fact. I actually got fired from my first sales job! I was that bad, and had to teach myself what it took to get better. It is possible to learn how to be a salesperson.

Next. Past experience at sales. I'll give you the key reasons why prior sales experience can be the worst reason for hiring someone:

- ✘ It presumes that the person's previous experience was positive and productive.
- ✘ It assumes that the person has a high level of motivation, drive, and sales skills.

- ✘ It reflects a belief that the person is available for hire because of circumstances he or she had no control over (e.g., downsizing), rather than because he or she simply had average or below average performance.

**THE SOLUTION**

I am challenging you on these assumptions to make a point: If you can't find a salesperson you want to hire, or if you have no budget to hire a new salesperson, why not offer the opportunity to someone already on your team in another area? At my company, we have a history of discovering sales talent in our marketing department. Many of our clients in the financial services industry have had success transitioning underwriters and analysts to sales roles. And just about every industrial equipment company has promoted engineers to sales roles with great success.

Think about non-sales employees at your organization. Who shows commitment to your organization? Who is enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the products/services your organization sells? Who has a personality and approach that you think will mesh well with that of your customer base? Who on your team do you think might have a genuine interest in taking on the sales challenge?

**PERSONAL SKILLS**

Now that you have someone in mind, let's look a little deeper to help you figure out if he or she has the broad base of essential personal skills necessary for sales, including:

**Resiliency** — Have you observed the individual recover quickly from adversity? How persistent is he? Does the person take initiative and handle rejection without taking it personally?

**Flexibility** — Is the person able to readily modify, respond to and integrate change with minimal personal resistance? Can she think quickly on her feet?

**Handling Stress** — Have you seen the individual maintain composure and draw on his internal strength when coping with pressure?

**Results Orientation** — Is the individual capable of implementing the solutions necessary for obtaining desired results? Is she personally motivated to achieve, accomplish or complete tasks or goals?

**Attitude Toward Others** — Have you observed the person develop (and maintain) productive relationships with others based on trust and respect?

If the individual you have in mind has all of those necessary personal skills, you need to look one step deeper: What motivates the person? Why would he or she put the effort into learning what it takes to be a good salesperson, and why would he or she want to sell your product or service in the first place?

**MOTIVATION TO SELL**

Our research has shown that the best, happiest, most productive salespeople are typically motivated by two things:

- ✘ **A need for financial gain and practicality of thought.** An interest in the financial rewards of the work.

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- ✦ **A need for power, influence and personal renown.** A strong interest in controlling their own destiny and the destinies of others.

Does the person you are considering moving into a sales role feel motivated by these two things? How can you tell? Here are a few questions you can ask the individual directly:

- ✦ How important is earning a lot of money to you? What do you consider to be a "lot of money"?
- ✦ Where would you like to be, financially, in five years? 10 years? Why?
- ✦ Would you consider yourself to be a bottom-line, practical thinker, or are you more theoretical? Why do you say that?
- ✦ How important is independence to you? Power? Influencing others? How satisfied would you be with a job if you had none of these?
- ✦ Can you give me a concrete, real-world example of a time you were

able to move a group of people to action, and exactly how you did it.

The person's answers will tell you a lot about how motivated they are by financial concerns and power/influence. Here's a hint: If he or she has trouble answering any of these questions, he or she likely ISN'T motivated by the value it refers to!

I'm aware that what I've been telling you challenges some common assumptions. But if you're still reading this article, you've grasped the concept: Although selling skills are essential, they really should be the least important factor in your hiring decision. Selling skills can be taught and learned by someone whose personality, interests, values, and personal skills are well suited to selling your organization's product or service. Looking within your organization for new salespeople is especially relevant in today's job market, where turnover is typically high, and loyalty is usually low. Just be sure to look for people who have strong personal skills and a sales-focused value structure. 