

Hiring & Retaining Sales Stars

by Grant Robinson

People Values - Business Solutions

If everyone performed like our top performers, how much more comfortable would life be?

To start, we'd no longer have to spend as much time or money replacing, training and coaching our mid to low level producers. Customer service, team compatibility and productivity would greatly improve. We'd also have less stress in our lives and find it easier to take our mind off of work when we're not there.

Most importantly, we'd naturally attain goals and achieve business success. For some, that means to satisfy more customers. For others, it means to sell more advertising. For most or all, this means to increase revenues and boost the bottom line.

Unfortunately, the truth is, not everyone we hire is a top performer, as managers we spend over 60 percent of our time solving people challenges and goals and objectives are not always met.

The 80/20 Dilemma

It has long been accepted that 80 percent of all products and services are sold by just 20 percent of the sales people. At some organizations, the ratio is a little more positive (70/30) but rarely gets any healthier.

The so-called "80/20 Rule" is a challenge to all sales executives who strive to build exceptional sales organizations. Sometimes the dilemma stems from how we train and coach the individuals on our team, but in most cases the problems emerge beforehand.

When people make an honest effort to do a good job and fail, it is usually because they were in a job that they did not fit. Studies have shown, over half of the people working in sales are miscast. They lack the basic qualities required for success in sales and should be doing something else for a living.

Of those remaining, half could succeed in sales, but are currently selling the wrong product or service. This leaves 20 to 30 percent of the salespeople who are in jobs they fit. They are the people who sell 70-80 percent of the advertising space for your station.

Whether there are 10 salespeople on our sales force or 100, research has shown the typical employer may be making three hiring mistakes for each correct one. History has proven, incorrect hiring decisions lead to longer and more expensive training periods, low productivity, personnel problems and ultimately turnover.

History has also shown, when a company hires someone who doesn't fit the position, no amount of training, coaching, goal setting or ultimatums can induce the level of success comparable to those who naturally fit the position and therefore excel.

Hiring More Top Performers

The number one issue facing today's business and the bottom line is recruiting, selecting and retaining quality, qualified employees. Companies that do this successfully have seen higher attendance records, greater job satisfaction, less turnover and superior job performance at every position.

The US Department of Labor estimates, it cost as much as 250% of a new hire's annual salary to replace a manager or account executive when all of the separation, recruitment, lost productivity, new hire, and training are taken into consideration. Productivity gaps play an even greater role of robbing revenues. If a top performer averages \$100K in revenues a month and a low level performers average just \$50K, the company is losing over \$600K a year by hiring just one person unlike their top performers.

When evaluations are done on sales forces, a common trend is found. Top performers, or the 20 percent that sell 80 percent of your product, all have similar qualities that make them successful account executives, marketing reps or promoters. The remaining 80 percent, those who are considered mid-to-low level producers, may be similar to the top performers in one or more of these qualities but rarely ever match the qualities of top performers.

By researching where top performers are similar in the critical sales' qualities of competitiveness, self-reliance, persistence, energy level and sales drive, stations are able to build benchmarks on their top performers. These "Job Success Patterns" or benchmarks can be used to compare every future candidate to your top performer's qualities to measure job match.

By comparing candidates to job success patterns, an employer will have three very important answers before a second interview: can, will and how well will the candidate do the job? By comparing candidates to these benchmarks, it becomes easy to identify where individuals will fit well into positions and where they may have adjustments to make.

The number one benefit similar companies and other stations across the country have seen by building and using job success patterns to screen candidates is, they have taken the guesswork out of the hiring process. With this insight on a candidate's abilities, interests and behavior traits, a sales manager no longer has to base a large majority of their hiring decision on "gut instincts." Until analyzing and specifying, not only in their head but also on paper, exactly what they are looking for, organizations will continue to gamble on the productivity and retention of every new hire.

By hiring people who match the qualities of their top performers, companies have found training programs can be individualized, go much smoother and are less expensive. Rather than spending the next six months, training, coaching and redefining duties to inspire productivity, it comes naturally.

With this documented data, a sales manager will have a "users guide" on every new and existing employee to coach him or her to productivity. This information helps managers develop talent, eliminate barriers and lead their salespeople to success and revenues.

WSAB thanks Grant Robinson for providing this article to the WSAB Bulletin. For more information on building job success patterns to hire top performers, contact Grant Robinson at 877-931-2220 or www.peoplevalues.com. He is the president of People Values - Business Solutions, in Kent.