

WHERE ARE ALL THE SALESPEOPLE?

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No doubt we all agree that there is an absolute shortage of qualified salespeople today. Why is this the case? Moreover, why are a significant number of new-hires not reaching minimum performance standards, thus causing high turnover rates? What can your company do to improve the success of recruits and at the same time increase retention?

Let's face it - the idea of being a salesperson is not at the top of the career list. When nearing graduation from high school, a young person may think "I am going to apply to art school and become a graphic artist," or "I am going to pursue a degree in computer science and get a job with Google or Facebook." Or perhaps the lofty goal is to go to attend medical school and become a doctor. Who would ever think "I am going to become a salesperson?"

That is not happening. Parents and guidance counselors are not sitting down with their college-aged students saying to them, "You know since you are so gregarious you should probably become a life insurance agent." That is not happening either.

So, who is a sales candidate? Typically, it is someone who has not yet decided on a career path. It is an individual that may consider a job in sales temporary, while they determine what they want to do in the future. This could be like joining the military - gaining experience and seeing where things go and then deciding what to do next. Yes, it is hard to find qualified salespeople today. People don't consider a career in sales because they do not understand the job. The perception of salespeople may be that they are pushy people, calling prospects and asking them again and again to buy their product.

So, a career in sales is not necessarily considered all that great, which impacts recruitment.

Now let's say that you have found an ideal candidate. They seem eager to embark on sales as a career. What's next? The new employee typically receives basic company training. You know the fundamentals - being familiar with the company's offering and when meeting with a prospect, finding the problem or "pain point" and presenting the company's product as the solution. Also, the newcomer learns how to document their activity in a customer relationship management system to keep track of the sales cycle, making sure to record next actions. However, is teaching these steps enough? No, it is not. After receiving this initial training, most novice salespeople do not get enough ongoing, or advanced, training. So, even though they have the job, the

beginner still does not understand what it takes to be successful.

As some time goes by, the fledgling salesperson starts to enjoy his new position and has the desire to be successful. However, adversity comes along – and it will come along. Here you have someone that does not fully understand their job, and they start to struggle, experiencing some setbacks, or other unpleasantness which impacts their job performance. In many cases, this adversity will lead to the bewilderment stage, which then leads to failure. Why? The new salesperson is puzzled about his performance issues and does not understand what is causing him to fail. He is following the processes that he learned during his initial training – he has that foundation. He dedicated the time to learn about the product, he has been meeting prospects and uncovering the need and presenting the company's product as a solution. He has been religiously keeping track of his next actions and yet is still not closing business. He is aware that he is failing. Why is this happening? When the recruit experiences adversity, that is the time he must rely on his initial training. So, the real problem is that this emergent salesperson does not have a strong enough foundation. Why? One reason is that he lacks sufficient knowledge about the sales process. He is unaware that it is the science of persuading another human to take action through the application of sales psychology. It is more than product knowledge, finding a problem and trying to solve it, or keeping track of next steps. These are just some

aspects of the sales process. So, a fledgling salesperson, who is not sure that he wants to be a salesperson for the long haul and does not have a solid foundation in sales, may quit and seek another profession. How can we prevent this from happening when qualified candidates are so scarce?

The following four points can be incorporated to improve the outcomes of sales recruits:

1. Teach candidates the science of sales.

Successful salespeople understand sales psychology and the applied science of sales process. They are aware of behavior and what causes a person to make a purchase and how to translate that knowledge into effective sales presentations that ultimately persuade a prospect to buy. When a salesperson learns sales process, and persistently considers these steps, they are far more likely to be successful than ones that haven't put forth the effort to gain this understanding.

2. Encourage continual learning.

Top producers go beyond just learning about their product, they become experts in their industry and have authority which, in turn, causes the prospect to trust and respect them. Becoming an expert is only achieved when an individual is a continuous learner. As I have said before, successful individuals continue to increase their expertise in their specific field. It is an ongoing process. Again, I have seen many salespeople miss the mark in this area. They gain an elementary understanding of

the industry and product or service and settle in a comfort zone. This deficiency stifles their ability to reach their potential and could disrupt their career.

3. Emphasize presentation delivery performance.

Part of the sales process can become quite repetitive. Although certain products continuously evolve, there are others that may never change. Individuals who sell fixed products realize that they deliver the same presentation repeatedly - just like an actor that gives multiple performances of the same play for perhaps years on end. Over time and applying sales psychology, the sales professional uses this to refine his craft and creates even more effective presentations ultimately closing a higher percentage of sales. For example, my brother Rick has been selling replacement windows and siding for nearly four decades. Can you imagine how many times he has given his presentation? By now, he has delivered it thousands of times. If a newly hired sales trainee understands that repetitiousness is part of the job and accepts it – using it to become much more effective, it will lessen adversity and be viewed as an advantage.

4. Explain the path.

One of the most significant aspects of any job, but especially sales, is its path. Recruits must be able to envision a long-term career to gain a foothold in their position. Having a well-defined path is an area where we cannot give a cursory review, we must help them understand that there are financial as

well as personal rewards in a sales career. When I was a fledgling, young salesperson, I realized this myself. My first day with The New York Life Insurance Company, I approached the General Manager and asked, "Who is the most successful agent here?" Without hesitation, he told me the top agent was Ron Paulseen. So, I marched upstairs to Ron's office and said to his assistant that I would like to meet Ron. When I was granted an audience, I asked Ron if I could work with him. His immediate response was that he did not like to work with new agents. However, I persisted, and he

agreed. He told me to show up for work at 5:00 a.m. because that is when his day began. I worked with him for three years. I watched everything he did and learned as much from him as possible. I was extremely fortunate to have such an opportunity, and I realize that not all salespeople will have that mentorship. However, a newcomer should clearly understand the income potential and lifestyle they will have if they are willing to work hard to learn sales and achieve their personal goals. Yes, new salespeople must be able to look down the road and see the long-term future of their occupation.

Since it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract qualified candidates, it is imperative that we help newcomers build a solid foundation in all facets of sales to increase the likelihood of a long-term career. Assisting a newly hired salesperson in understanding what it takes to have a successful career is of utmost importance. No doubt, young salespeople desire productive, meaningful occupations and as business owners and veterans of sales, we want them to become successful as well. The growth of businesses depends on it.

SALES TRAINING COMPARISON AND RESULTS

