



THE GOOD PEANUT

“HOW TO HIRE ONLY “A PLAYERS” INTO YOUR SALES ORGANISATION AND AVOID ANY MORE COSTLY MISTAKES”

A report on professional selling by Julian Griffith

***“What’s the most powerful leadership skill you can have? Hands down, it’s the ability to produce high-talent teams. Nothing else even comes close.”
Price Pritchett, Ph.D.***

Whilst I look forward to sharing some great ideas with you to help you build a world class sales organisation, I am mindful of how ineffective we can be at attracting and retaining top quality salespeople.

Let’s firstly be clear about what we mean by the term *A Players*. Dr Brad Smart the creator of *Topgrading*¹ sums it up as follows: *“These people represent the top 10 percent of the talent available at a given salary level.”*

It can be easy to fall prey to a misplaced acceptance that traditional ways of attracting and hiring sales candidates, though hit and miss, are part and parcel of running a sales team and that it’s okay to hire the candidate based on the belief that he or she is, in our opinion, simply the best available person at the time.

We could never accept our finance, HR and IT departments filling their offices with 3 out of 4 staff that underperform. Yet we do just that with our sales teams. Research shows that only 6% of salespeople can be judged elite, they’ve been shown to produce up to 250% more than average whilst a further 20% are strong performers producing up to 120% more.

Consider what a sales team made up from high performers only would do for you.

The message is clear. Improve sales talent and better results will inevitably follow. Carry on hiring then firing non-performers and things won’t be like they’ve always been, they’ll get worse as your clients expect more from your salespeople and the gulf between what they’re looking for and what your salespeople are offering gets ever wider.

Whilst none of us have intentionally gone out to recruit an ineffective salesperson, most of us have done it at least once, maybe more.

The costs attributed to hiring a bad salesperson are painfully high. In monetary terms alone, Objective Management Group² have assessed over 8000 sales organisations and estimate the average loss to a business to be US\$150,000 each time we do it.

¹ Dr Brad Smart, Topgrading – www.topgrading.com

² Objective Management Group - www.objectivemanagement.com

So wouldn't you think we'd all be looking to radically improve the way we recruit our salespeople? Well yes, invariably business leaders will want better performers but are not aware of the best way to go about it. Few employers really know how to ensure they attract and recruit only the best salespeople.

Dramatic improvements can be made quickly but it does involve ripping up the old rule book and radically changing the way it's done.

It is worth it. If you've read my research paper *"Taking the lid off your sales organisation"*, you will recall that the effectiveness of our salespeople in the field is far and away the largest reason why our customers buy from us and not our competition.

So let's examine the changes we need to make. Why we need to make them are summarised by Jim Collins³, the author of Good to Great, when he writes.....

"Those who build great companies understand that the ultimate throttle on growth for any great company is not markets, or technology, or competition, or products. It is the one thing above all others; the ability to get and keep enough of the right people."

Let's face it the salespeople in your organisation are not like any other group in the workplace, they are different. To succeed they face and must overcome different challenges from the rest of your staff, yet most companies follow basically the same routine when hiring salespeople as they do when filling other roles.

Okay, I've probably rammed my message home by now, what should we be doing so differently?

Allow me to share with you 5 key steps you should take.

Step One – The Job Advertisement – What is its purpose?

To attract as many salespeople as possible who have the appropriate experience to be successful.

But most companies' advertisements look and read the same way; they describe the company, the opportunity and the job just like everyone else. Then they list a whole load of requirements, some necessary and some not.

Is a university degree really required? In many cases yes but for many sales positions probably not. Proficient in software packages ABC and XYZ. Maybe she's great at ABC and can easily be taught XYZ. Is specific industry experience really needed? Would it be better to employ a mediocre salesperson with all the experience (or is it just years?) gained from working with your competition or a potential high flyer, willing and able to learn the product?

So don't limit the size of the suitable candidate pool by putting obstacles in the way of an applicant if they're not really needed.

Make it sound exciting to the right individual. Think what you actually need this person to do for you and list the criteria. Then describe the opportunity in words that will lead the right people to say to themselves; "That describes me, it's what I'm good at. I know I can sell that type of service to these buyers in those sorts of organisations in this market place."

³ Jim Collins – www.jimcollins.com

Step Two – Screen all the applicants before you do anything else

Now you might be thinking “we’ll be inundated with applicants and have a mountain of resumes to work through”. Don’t worry, in fact you’ll have the opposite!

I did suggest it’s time to rip up the old rule book, let me explain. You have clearly set out a thorough set of criteria for the sales position. How the individual will work, the level of supervision, marketplace, remuneration, percentage of new business etc.

Before you start pouring through any resumes ask all the applicants to complete a screening specifically tailored to that role. A few may balk at this – that’s fine, you’ve already filtered them out. Those who do complete are objectively evaluated against your specific requirements for the position and you can then be presented with an objective shortlist of recommended candidates. Now you can take a look at their resumes.

Please note. A candidate’s resume is invariably embroidered with exaggerated claims and at best will tell you whether that person *can* sell. You need to be sure they *will* sell your product or service in your marketplace.

Step Three – Check references

Sounds obvious, but supplied referees are bound to give a positive reference, that’s why their names are on the resume in the first place. Instead ensure you speak with previous employers, ideally the CEO or business owner.

Step Four – The first interview

Treat this like an audition. What’s the biggest challenge a sales person faces? Building rapport with new prospects, all too often they can be hostile, time poor and regard the salesperson’s visit as an inconvenience.

Wouldn’t it be valuable to measure how the applicant behaves in this environment? Of course, yet most interviewers make the mistake of allowing the candidate to be far too comfortable and help them build rapport. Instead develop an interview process with challenging questions that recreate real selling situations and allow you to gain this vital information.

Step Five – The final interview

By now you will know which candidate you want to hire. This interview can be spent talking about the company and position in more detail. Now is your opportunity to build genuine rapport and sell the opportunity to the candidate. Remember you’ve identified and picked a winner. Make sure you get them onboard before somebody else does.

Allow me to close with a quotation from Somerset Maugham.....

“It’s a funny thing about life; if you refuse to accept anything but the best, you very often get it”

About

The

Author



Julian is the Managing Director of The Good Peanut and is committed to helping businesses build elite sales teams, made up from only top performers who will drive growth for their companies.

He has witnessed both as a client and then advisor the remarkable transformations that can take place once a business commits to and implements change within their sales organisations.

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