



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. It’s a widespread issue for most sales organisations yet very few follow a “best of practice” process.

Let’s firstly be clear about what we mean by the term *A Players*. Dr Brad Smart the creator of *Topgrading*<sup>1</sup> 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, or worse still hang on to 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, usually more often than we’d care to think about.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Brad Smart, Topgrading – [www.topgrading.com](http://www.topgrading.com)

The costs attributed to hiring a bad salesperson are painfully high. In monetary terms alone, Objective Management Group<sup>2</sup> have assessed over 8500 sales organisations and estimate the average loss to a business to be US\$120,000 each time we do it.

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 Collins<sup>3</sup>, 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 7 key steps you should take.

### **Step One – Establish a thorough criteria for what you need**

Please take time to put this together - you may have different types of sales positions each requiring its own criteria. Examples are whether outside or inside sales; level of experience needed; the market they'll be calling on and at what level; the amount of competition and your pricing in the market; the selling cycle; new business development, account managing or farming to grow existing client spend; how they will be managed; work remotely or from an office and how they are remunerated.

### **Step Two – The job advertisement – what is its purpose?**

To attract as many salespeople as possible who have the appropriate experience to be successful. Mercenary though it may sound, it's vital to understand that a strong salesperson will be asking "*what's in it for me?*"

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

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<sup>2</sup> Objective Management Group - [www.objectivemanagement.com](http://www.objectivemanagement.com)

<sup>3</sup> Jim Collins – [www.jimcollins.com](http://www.jimcollins.com)

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? Client feedback supports the successes that can be achieved from bringing people in from outside of their specific industries.

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. I will make a lot of money if I get that job".

### **Step Three – 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 sales candidate 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 Four – Telephone screening**

This should take place at a pre arranged time and not last longer than seven minutes. Take control of the call, explain that you are bringing in a set number for first interviews and that this conversation will determine whether they'll be one of them. Be polite but importantly make no effort to build rapport, no small talk please. Listen for how well they try to build rapport with you remembering that's what they'll need to be doing with prospects. Have a clear set of questions and listen to how well they respond. A good idea is to close your eyes when they're talking – would you want to buy from them, if not your clients probably won't either. Wrap up the call and if they've impressed you enough add them to your shortlist and ask a colleague to arrange the first interview.

### **Step Five – The first interview**

Treat this like an audition – put them on the spot. 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. A client with a very sizeable sales team recently shared with me that he had been trained to make the sales candidate feel at ease in the first interview. I asked whether new prospects are likely to be so easy going. Of course the answer was no and he quickly understood he'd been using the wrong approach.

Instead we need to put the candidate under pressure. Be methodical in your questioning, unemotional and see how well the candidate copes. Does she stay calm and in control or become emotionally involved and start rambling? Does the candidate have the social skills needed to form a relationship quickly and enough bravery to ask some meaningful questions about the position and the company?

It's the ones who can do this whom you will want to be in your company.

### **Step Six – 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.

### **Step Seven – Check the proper 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. Have a list of questions prepared and probe as much as you can into how the candidate really performed checking the response against claims made on their resume, their behaviour, a team player or a loner, whether they achieved sales targets, whether easy to manage or a hand full (stronger salespeople are often the latter!) and whether they would reemploy them.

Only when you're as sure as you can be send out the letter offer.

It's important that all of the above steps are completed in the shortest possible timescale. Good salespeople don't stay on the market for long.

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 Griffith is the most sought after private advisor to CEOs specialising in sales force performance for three specific reasons. 1) He tells it like it is 2) He doesn't play politics and 3) He has an uncanny gift to uncover sales blockages that most CEOs don't always recognise on their own. Having held senior sales leadership positions both in the UK and Australia, Julian has seen the good, the bad and the ugly among sales leaders and why they innocently miss hidden performance blockages within their own sales teams.

Julian is the Managing Director and Founder of The Good Peanut. As a CEO Insider himself, he has witnessed firsthand the key ingredients needed to transform an underperforming sales team into a world-class sales organisation and he and his team work with CEOs intent on building high performance sales teams to drive growth for their companies.

In his book "The CEO Solution", Julian discusses the leverage that you need to optimise your sales organisation's ability to perform at a world-class level, he unmaskes the truth about what is really going on in your sales force and covers specifics such as how you can prevent your sales team from eroding margins in your business in order to "close the deal", together with the beliefs we hold and whether they support or hinder sales performance.

You can contact Julian Griffith on 1300 728 940 or 0416 115266

[Julian@thegoodpeanut.com.au](mailto:Julian@thegoodpeanut.com.au)

[www.thegoodpeanut.com.au](http://www.thegoodpeanut.com.au)

The Good Peanut PO Box 97 Pymont NSW 2009

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