

Increasing the Sales and Profitability of Your Sales Organization

Historically, most executives who have a sales organization under their control through a VP of Sales or otherwise believe that the key to increasing sales from the organization normally comes from:

- Developing their soft skills to sell
- Adding new products or services
- Providing additional technical training on products or services sold
- Changing the compensation structure to provide better motivation to sell
- Setting Sales Goals & Profit Objectives

Often, any one or more of the above approaches are deployed with little to no effect.

When one of the above approaches is deployed, it is often a puzzle to management why sales and profits hardly improved, if at all. Thus, the key is that the core sales problem may not have been properly addressed. Salespeople interviewed and hired may not have been the best choice due to lack of aptitudes and behaviors needed for success in sales. Further, the sales trainer/manager who believes that he or she can teach anyone to be highly successful in sales may be seriously mistaken.

Sales come from people who have the aptitudes and behavioral traits at the right levels to be able to sell, the necessary product and/or service knowledge, and the necessary sales soft skills to be able to sell a product and/or service that buyers want or need to purchase. Executives, managers, HR people, and recruiters think they have the skills, knowledge, and ability to identify whether a sales candidate has the traits needed for success. In reality, there are certain critical mental aptitudes and behavioral traits which simply cannot be identified accurately from an application, resume, or interview.

To make matters worse, many hiring decision makers take prior sales experience far too seriously. Having sales experience can mean many things. A couple of years at each prior employer may be explained by the sales candidate as moving up or forward with more responsibility and/or opportunity, when in fact it was moving out when the employer(s) concluded this particular salesperson was never going to make it with them. Products and services go through cycles, and the salesperson's position in the cycle can make them a success or a failure due to the product and/or the market conditions. Thus, prior experience must be more thoroughly investigated than most interviewers are prepared to explore.

Consider the importance of the following critical sales aptitudes and behavioral traits, and whether they can be accurately identified and measured through an application, resume, or interview:

- A salesperson needs to possess the mental level necessary to be able to thoroughly understand the product or service being sold as well as operate on a mental level at least equivalent to the prospect or buyer. A highly intelligent and educated buyer is less likely to take seriously a salesperson that lacks the ability to communicate effectively and on a level mentally equivalent to the buyer.

- Some sales situations require a highly calm and tolerant salesperson who understands that the selling cycle may take as long as two years before any results are forthcoming and that there will be no sales reward for that period. Some situations require highly driven and energetic salespeople who are always prospecting and aggressively trying to present and close, and who are always in need of immediate results and gratification. Thus, it is critical to be able to understand just how a salesperson is driven in this area.
- In today's sophisticated and educated world, buyers expect honesty, reliability, credibility, and will settle for nothing short from a salesperson. Bear in mind that the individual who tends to be less credible is the one who can justify any type of behavior to achieve their goal or objective at the moment. A highly flexible individual is the one most likely to adapt like a chameleon and tell the interviewer or decision maker what they want to hear – true or not. Is an interviewer really able to discern this characteristic in a candidate who is trained to sell them? Does the chameleon sell the interviewer and later display the inability to represent the employer credibly?
- An outgoing and gregarious nature to meet people, develop rapport, and build relationships is certainly a trait that can be well ascertained in the interview. However, an individual who is highly outgoing, gregarious, and certainly “people oriented” may also be the individual who is lacking in dominance to ask for the order or close the sale. To complicate matters, a sales candidate can be well rehearsed to “act the part” in the interview that is highly convincing to the interviewer. However, in the long run of day to day selling, the person cannot keep up the façade in actual selling situations. Thus, in the interview, the employer may be watching an “actor on a stage” playing a part for the moment of the interview.
- Ego is highly important in the salesperson that is going to meet and exceed the employer's expectations. One might think that ego could be readily ascertained in an interview, but the reality is that people who have low egos and self concept are the most likely to cover up their inadequacies by overcompensation and displaying the traits of an individual with a high ego, high self concept and high self worth. People with low egos are normally highly effective as actors and actresses, since it is so easy for them to slip into playing a role and identifying with the role they are playing.
- One of the most critical criteria for selecting a salesperson centers on the issue of being able to identify the level of assertiveness in the sales candidate. It is assertiveness (also referred to as dominance) that is the catalyst necessary to close sales. One of the biggest errors in interviewing that is made repeatedly by executives, managers, and recruiters is becoming sold on the candidate based on the candidate's appearance and a highly personable, intelligent and outgoing nature. Yet even with a great appearance and pleasant, outgoing nature, the candidate may be lacking the ability to close the sale. Lacking the assertiveness necessary to ask for the sale and close deals is the primary reason why salespeople don't succeed.
- Being able to identify the competitive nature of a sales candidate is also important. Some salespeople are individualistically competitive and others prefer being part of a team selling situation. This particular trait in the salesperson and the sales force requires alignment with the sales compensation plan. For example, if the sales compensation plan does not recognize and reward individual performance and the salesperson is oriented to want and need high recognition, then the two are not compatible.

- Interviewing for psychological toughness is not all that hard when the interviewer recognizes the questions and answers that he or she should be looking for. On the other hand, measuring the actual psychological toughness level an individual possesses becomes a bit more difficult. The fact is that different kinds of selling requires different levels of psychological toughness depending on how hard the competitive conditions are, how tough the potential buyer is, and what obstacles must be overcome to make the sale.
- Ascertaining the type of motivation a salesperson responds to is essential. As hard as it is to recognize that there are measurable degrees of motivation in an individual, it is just as easy to accept that people are motivated differently. Human nature itself makes us all different, and those differences appear as much or more in what motivates us than any other behavioral trait. This trait alone makes it very difficult to make a hiring decision based on a candidate's experience, outgoing behavior, and what appears to be a sales oriented nature in the interview. When a candidate is motivated by security, is unwilling to take risks, and is not motivated by incentives, the organization winds up with a salesperson who will do what is necessary to remain secure in his or her job and little more.

As the prior examples have shown, successfully identifying the following traits in a sales candidate is critical:

- Mental Acuity
- Drive
- Integrity
- Ability to meet and deal with people
- Ego
- Assertiveness
- Competitive Nature
- Psychological Toughness
- Motivation

The basic traits that can be identified in an interview are drive, ability to meet and deal with people, competitive nature, and psychological toughness. The most difficult to measure are mental ability and assertiveness. However, even if the largest percentage of these traits can be identified in the interviewing process, it is almost impossible to ascertain the strength or weakness of the traits in the individual. Different measurable levels are highly important in different selling situations.

If we conclude that certain mental aptitudes and behaviors are essential to be successful in selling, then we must conclude that certain levels of those mental aptitudes and behaviors are also critical. That being the case, it is necessary to measure the aptitudes and behaviors and their levels of the sales candidate or sales person and compare them with those required for successful performance of the job. It has been repeatedly proven that the best way of doing this is by setting a standard pattern, often referred to as a benchmark. This benchmark is based on the people currently in sales in the employer's organization who are meeting and exceeding the employer's expectations in sales. Once the benchmark is established, it is important to compare sales applicants and existing salespeople who are not meeting the employer's expectations to the benchmarked aptitudes and behaviors found in the people who are meeting the employer's sales expectations. This comparison will provide insight into who has the traits needed for success in the role and what areas need to be addressed to increase sales performance.

CRI's Sales Achiever assessment has been constructed and proven repeatedly to be highly accurate in measuring these critical mental aptitudes and behaviors and their levels in both sales candidates and the employer's existing salespeople. The Sales Achiever is a validated, non-biased instrument delivered via the web to identify these critical sales aptitudes and traits. With the Sales Achiever, it is easy to have a sales applicant or salesperson take the assessment online in less than an hour. The employer receives a report showing the assessment results scientifically compared to the benchmark of successful salespeople.

CRI (www.criw.com) strongly recommends that an employer not familiar with the CRI process in identifying critical aptitudes and behaviors in sales candidates assess one or two existing salespeople to experience for themselves the accuracy and validity of the instrument, including the uncanny ability (without seeing or talking with the individual) to identify those traits necessary in the sales candidate vs. the job. After trying the Sales Achiever on one or two existing salespeople to measure its accuracy and validity, most employers install the Sales Achiever as a standard part of their sales application process. Many employers also have their entire sales force take the assessment in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the sales force in its entirety or to get a better, more objective feel of how their sales team compares against those of similar organizations that are highly effective. From a training and development standpoint, it makes all the sense in the world for the employer to be able to get a thorough understanding of the strengths and weakness of the current sales team to facilitate the needed training and development to increase sales performance and profitability.

The CRI Sales Achiever takes the subjectivity and guesswork out of the hiring and development process and replaces it with an objective, accurate tool designed to increase sales and profits. We look forward to demonstrating how your organization can benefit from utilizing the Sales Achiever to improve your organization's sales success.

Cordially,

Milt Cotter, Sr. Partner
mcotter@criw.com
(817) 307-7793