



VIEWPOINT

Delivering growth: How to identify and recruit high achievers in sales

By David R Ednie, President and CEO, SalesChannel Europe, a consulting and business transformation company specialising in sales performance motivation.

One of the vital signs of a healthy business is top line growth. Who in your organisation is responsible for delivering sustainable top line growth? Ultimately it is the CEO and the senior leadership team, i.e. YOU! OK, fine. Who, then, is responsible for delivering top line growth in the current fiscal year or next half year or next quarter? If your organisation is like most others the answer is the sales organisation. So then the question becomes: How do I ensure that I have enough high calibre, high performers in our sales organisation today to deliver revenue growth next month, next quarter, next fiscal year and beyond?

What do high sales achievers look like? They may well be very different from what you are currently looking for!

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Back in the 1970s their skills were: ego drive and empathy. Ego drive to get the deal done and empathy to understand and act in the customer's best interests. They were great at presenting and closing, they were great persuaders.

Then in the mid 80s we saw the evolution from product-centric to solution-centric selling. Here the key skills for sales success were listening and building trust. High sales achievers were problem solvers. Now in 2007 people who are highly successful in sales use their knowledge of the customer's business in a strategic way.

By being able to anticipate problems, they are a source of competitive advantage or trusted advisors to their customers. They create privileged relationships, typically at the C-level, that transcend the standard sales process. You can spot these people by the visible absence of any obvious salesmanship or typical sales behaviours: i.e. they don't look, talk, walk or think like a "sales person". They have true business

acumen, anticipate changes in customers' business environment and show them things that they didn't see coming. They help their customer through the decision making process by acting as a virtual member of the customer's organization. They think strategically and act as a trusted advisor.

Use the above framework when you are next interviewing for high achievers to help get a sense of where the candidate is in on the sales evolution continuum by asking questions about how they sell: **"Tell me about one of your most important recent wins."** And listen for either of these two extremes:

1 "I sold our virtual private server solution to one customer for 150,000 euros. The competition was all over this account. I had to fight hard internally to get the additional discounts approved that I needed to win the business. In the end we won because of my excellent personal relationship with the purchasing officer." (While a good relationship is important, even vital, the real work in making the sale lies in helping customers determine how and by how much your solution will positively impact their business over time.)

2 "The customer had problem XYZ and I was able to work with their management team to demonstrate that by using our service ABC they could reduce their time to market for new products by accelerating the design development cycle by 24% and improve quality by reducing manufacturing defects by an estimated 38% over the first 12 months of operation. In addition, I identified ways to help them enter new markets with new lines of business, building on their existing core expertise."

If sustainable top line growth is your No. 1 goal then identifying and recruiting high achievers in sales is one sure fire way of getting there. In today's increasingly competitive and complex business environment building a high performance sales organisation is the key to your long term future success.

COMING UP IN 'SEARCH'

"What makes a great VP of Sales" and what to look for when recruiting one.



David R Ednie is President and CEO of SalesChannel Europe, a consulting practice specialising in sales performance motivation, which is all about keeping your team at the TOP!

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EYEON Technical professions in Belgium: what shortage of talent?

This summer, the scarcity of IT specialists in Belgium has continued to make the headlines. Technology industry association Agoria said in May that there were 14,000 vacancies for IT specialists in Belgium that could not be filled, while retail giant Colruyt announced the creation of Colruyt IT Consultancy India to procure for its IT needs, being unable to find suitable candidates for open positions in Belgium. But the shortage of technical specialists on the Belgian market appears not limited to IT specialists alone. Engineers belonged for the first time to the 10 most sought after professions in Belgium.

Agoria believes this scarcity is due, among others, to the prevalent public image of technical, particularly IT, jobs as isolated and austere. However, this perceived image could not be further from the truth. Today's technical experts do much more than just develop engines and software: they develop products that are successfully adding value to their clients' businesses. Experts must therefore understand not only the technology, but also the business models of their clients and the environment in which they operate. They also need to show aptitude for teamwork and communication skills.

"We are witnessing a broadening of the technical profiles sought by our clients," says Christophe Hanin, one of Alexander Hughes' senior consultants, and a member of the Technology Sector of Excellence. "Narrow technical expertise is no longer sufficient and that is good news for companies and candidates alike." But how can Belgium overcome its lack of technical experts? Hanin is confident that Alexander Hughes has the right approach: finding talents in adjacent industries. He explains that experience across several industries has become a key qualification for a technical executive. Looking at it from the right perspective, the "shortage of talent" can be a great opportunity for companies to attract candidates who bring a fresh perspective and additional skills to the business.

Shortage of IT specialists can be an opportunity to attract fresh talents from other industries

