

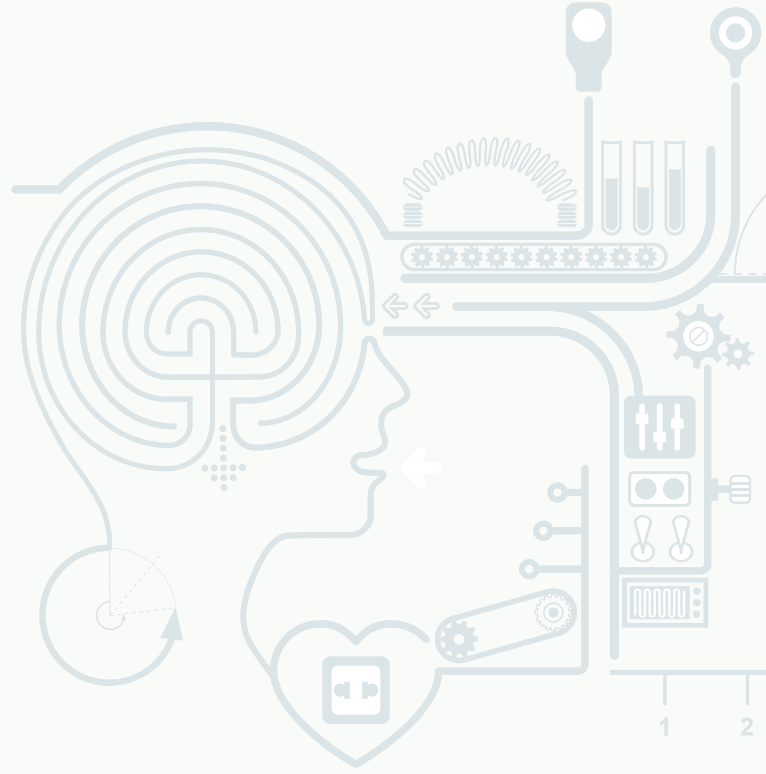
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DECEMBER 2012 | VOLUME 50, NUMBER 12



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# Make Your Sales Team an Elite Force

*Assembling an elite group of salespeople requires more than placing an ad on a job board; it's necessary to make the hiring and interview processes difficult and conduct ongoing training throughout an employee's tenure.*

**BY VICTOR AROCHO**

**I**n every sales team, there are usually a handful of top performers — and then there's everyone else. Imagine how much more successful your organization could be if every salesperson was an elite top performer. Think that's not possible? Think again.

In other areas, we see groups of elite people who band together for a common goal or purpose: Super Bowl teams, Navy SEALs, top-rated college marching bands, etc. In any of these groups, you don't see one or two people doing all the work, outperforming their peers or being the lone superstars. Rather, everyone on the team is an elite member. The group as a whole shines because each member contributes greatly, plays an integral part and gives 110 percent at all times. If it's possible with these groups of people, then it's possible for your sales department as well.

But creating an elite group of salespeople involves much more than placing a help-wanted ad on a job board. It requires a specific hiring process that attracts only the best of the best. Here are the steps to do that.

# Sales isn't an easy profession. So joining an elite sales team shouldn't be easy, either. That's why you need to shift your focus from filling a sales position to building an elite sales force.

## 1. Make joining your sales team difficult.

You cannot create an elite team if becoming a member is easy. Would a Super Bowl team be spectacular if they let anyone with a helmet on the field? Of course not. In order for any team to be considered elite, there must be a stringent process to join the team.

So while you should definitely advertise open sales positions, realize that conducting one interview prior to bringing someone on board is not enough. Rather, you'll want to conduct multiple interviews with the candidate speaking to the sales manager and other executive-level people. The key is to look for people who believe in a team spirit, have a positive attitude and display a keen sales demeanor. Whatever you do, don't have your HR department be responsible for hiring salespeople. HR's only role in hiring salespeople should be to process the paperwork.

Finally — and perhaps most importantly — make sure anyone you decide to bring on board realizes that getting past the initial hiring process is the easy part. Now they must prove they have what it takes to be an elite player. How? By completing step number two.

## 2. Create a six-week intense new hire training program where no more than 60 percent pass.

For every three people who make it past your initial hiring process, only one of those should actually become a

salesperson for your organization. While this may initially sound like a waste of time and money, it's really an investment in making your sales team the best it can be.

Realize that the only time you really waste time and money is when you allow low-producing salespeople (typically people who are not a fit for sales, people who don't like your company or people who have the wrong attitude) to be a part of your organization. The best way to avoid that scenario is to make sure the people who are in the sales role have been thoroughly trained and are the people who really want to be there.

Having an intense training period is the same approach used by colleges and the military. For example, for every 100 men who start Navy SEAL training, only 17 to 20 succeed. That's a success rate of only 17-20 percent! But think about it: Who do you want carrying out the country's most dangerous and most critical military missions? Only the best of the best, right? Well, who do you want being the face of your company, representing your products or services and interacting daily with your clients? Again, only the best of the best will do.

Your intense training program should cover the following key things:

- **Product knowledge:** Go over your products or services thoroughly to ensure the prospective salesperson knows them inside and out.
- **Role-playing:** Go over typical sales scenarios as well as the most

challenging sales situations you can think of. See how the person responds when things go wrong.

- **Sales skills:** Even if the person has prior sales experience, you want to give them all the skills and training they'd need to be successful, and then make sure they know how to implement the skills.
- **Company structure:** Teach them all the parts of the business. Train them on every department so they know the intricacies of the business and understand what happens both before and after the sale is made.
- **Research:** Put them through the tedious information-gathering work. Make them research the market, demographics, competition, etc. If they're not willing to do the details, then they're not a fit your company.

This intense process will weed out the people who don't have what it takes to be part of an elite team. In fact, about 20 percent of the people will drop out by week four. For the ones remaining at the four-week mark, offer them a choice to stay or go, as in: "I'll give you \$1,000 right now for you to leave the training and the company, or you can elect not to take the money and stay." Those who take the money aren't the type of people you want on your elite team. It's better to pay a small price now to find that out than waste a lot of money down the road with a bad hire.

By the six-week mark, only 60 percent of those who started should still be standing



strong with you. These are your elite sales team members. (And if you have more than 60 percent of the people making it through the training, then your training is too easy. Anything that's too easy has no value.)

### **3. Have consistent, ongoing (monthly) training.**

While the intense training period is a one-time thing, all salespeople should attend regular (less intense) monthly training sessions. During these sessions, do role-playing, train on specific sales skills and find out any specific challenges your team is facing.

It's also a good idea to use these ongoing

training sessions to create bonding experiences for the sales team. Have them help each other solve problems, offer suggestions and share best practices. Why? Because the goal is to continually develop a *team*, not an individual. As Tecumseh, the Shawnee Indian Chief, said, "A single twig breaks easily, but a bundle of twigs is strong." By bringing your salespeople together monthly, you're creating a strong and elite sales force that can't be broken.

### **To Be the Best, Recruit the Best**

Sales isn't an easy profession. So joining an elite sales team shouldn't be easy,

either. That's why you need to shift your focus from filling a sales position to building an elite sales force. After all, your sales team really is the face of the company. Shouldn't only the best of the best be representing your brand? The sooner you take this approach to building your sales department, the sooner your company's sales (and profits) will grow. **PS**

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