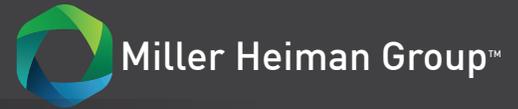


# HIRING SALES PEOPLE: THREE KEYS TO GETTING IT RIGHT



***With 70 to 80 percent of the total cost of sales tied up in personnel, pressure to hire salespeople who fit and can be trained to excel within your organization must rank high in every talent management strategy. Ramifications of getting it wrong spread beyond lost revenue. Your company's credibility and your personal reputation are on the line.***

The monetary impact of getting it wrong includes actual losses in revenue generation, wasted salary for the salesperson, plus the loss of production during ramp up. Sales force churn also creates customer uncertainty, potentially lowering customer confidence, and can impinge upon your company's overall reputation and credibility.

Specifying skills, experience and education in employment notices sets minimum salesperson qualifications—and is all many companies want to know. This strategy leaves out the crucial cultural and attitudinal factors that ultimately determine a new hire's long-term success with your, unique, sales organization.

Organizations generally are clear on the salesperson's actual duties, however many lack clarity and consensus on the attributes and personality traits needed to full fill the role.

Research from the firm Leadership IQ shows that 46 percent of all new hires fail within 18 months. The failures usually are not related to skills, experience or education. When someone is fired, it is often related to attitude factors, according to the Workplace 101 Blog,

published by Profiles International.

While most organizations have a recruit-hire-train process, getting it right takes strategy, self evaluation and commitment. "Employees who are a better fit to their position are 2.5 times more productive," according to Bobby Pruitt, Vice-President of Enterprise Solutions at Profiles International. "These employees also stay longer, foster a positive environment for others and are more engaged in the success of the company."

As the world of complex B2B sales becomes more intense, competition for top talent is increasing, and will continue to increase in the coming years. In the United States alone, Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts a 15.6 percent increase in new wholesale and manufacturing sales positions will be created over a 10-year period, a net increase of more than 223,000 jobs. Industry experts believe that trend will extend worldwide.

## **One Size Does Not Fit All**

Attitude, aptitude and cultural fit share importance in determining who succeeds. Those attributes vary widely by company and industry.

"One of my clients put their top three performers in each division through psychometric and personality tests and found key trends and traits," said Phil Biggin, an Miller Heiman Group Sales Consultant. The testing showed that different personalities and traits worked better in some geographic regions than others, and some were better with large accounts and others with new business.

"This led that company to completely transform their recruiting process," Biggin said. "The biggest change was that the company stopped putting a timeline on recruitment." Instead, they continually searched and only hired salespeople with the traits they knew would fit their organization in each sector.

This change will work at most companies.

"Not everybody who is fantastic at selling is right for your company," said Chris Ainslie, an Miller Heiman Group Sales Consultant. In a previous role as a vice president for a global company, Ainslie oversaw a staff of 4,800. "I've done my fair share of recruiting. Some were pretty good, some were awful," he said.

A sales leader's "gut feeling" about a candidate may prove accurate, but as many organizations have found out the hard way, that feeling isn't always reliable. Adding one of the myriad sales performance assessment tools to the hiring process provides depth and analytical accuracy to evaluating a candidate's basic qualifications.

Miller Heiman Group research, powered by CSO Insights, shows that the vast majority of World-Class Sales Organizations use assessment tools in their hiring process. An assessment tool such as Predictive Sales Performance<sup>SM</sup> (PSP) can identify the behaviors driving the success of top performers. Savvy organizations then hire salespeople with similar attributes.

Ainslie's former company conducted a campaign on *Facebook* to hire 200 new salespeople in a three-month time span. They used *Facebook* to attract a younger demographic. They whittled about 4,000 applicants down to about 300 to interview through a company-derived process. Most applicants were in their twenties, and had held one or two sales positions. Of the 200 final hires, "about 170 were spot on, 30 were not," he said. Ainslie is convinced that if his company had used an assessment tool, it would have saved time and money.

"In hindsight we should have used a screening tool,"

Ainslie said. "Getting 30 wrong was expensive. A talent assessment and insight tool would have picked up the lack of sales traits."

Companies worldwide face this, and other, challenges in their attempt to "hire right in the first place."

### Common Missteps in Hiring

**Error:** Hiring from only one source. Many organizations repeat the mistake of always looking for salespeople from the same vertical and from their direct competitors. Instead of hiring people who can sell, they seek people who know their product or industry.

Too many clients are blinded by certain backgrounds, so they go for the lesser candidate that comes from the 'right' vertical. That's kind of playing it safe in wanting them to produce revenue quicker because they know the product, but in the long run they lose out because they can't sell.

**The Fix:** Hiring people who know how to sell first and foremost. People with the right characteristics and



capabilities can be trained and educated in product features.

**Error:** Lack of clarity on salesperson attributes. Organizations often lack, or fail to develop, an ideal salesperson profile – one that weighs attitudinal attributes and personality characteristics along with work and education histories.

**The Fix:** Examining the work and personality attributes shared by the top performers in your organization, then leveraging that information when developing an ideal salesperson profile can greatly increase success rates of new hires. “Defining what you want in the person is absolutely essential,” said Miller Heiman Group Sales Consultant Bob Thorpe. “You need people first and foremost who are capable of selling. Many companies often promote from (the products side) and a lot of the time these people never grasp it. They just aren’t great salespeople.”

**Error:** Corporate neglect. Many companies expect salespeople to “figure it out” on their own.

“I am working with a client from India who admitted to me that part of the cost of failures by individual salespeople lies with the company’s leadership because in the last two years they’ve brought people onboard, but not trained them. It’s a two-way street,” Biggin said.

**The Fix:** Organizations should evaluate their corporate role in sales performance and consider when they last invested in professional development for the sales force. World-Class Sales Organizations invest in both new-hire training and in ongoing professional development. In addition, these organizations make it a management priority to become actively involved with their sales team to offer the advice and resources needed advance sales opportunities.

“The return on investment in training is ongoing. When a company becomes known for its commitment to professional development and its excellent sales organization, it becomes part its DNA. That DNA will

## Revealing Interview Questions

### 1. What made you successful in your past job?

- a. *If the answer is: “I’ve been lucky” or “I had a good territory” be cautious.*
- b. *The better answer: “Well, I do certain things that most salespeople don’t. I always force myself to do a specific amount of prospecting work. Every Monday morning, I call at least four or five potential customers from a list that our marketing department sends us every month.”*

### 2. Under what circumstances would you walk away from a sales opportunity?

- c. *If the answer is “never,” then walk away – this is not a customer-focused person.*
- d. *The better answer: “If we aren’t a good fit with the customer, then I move on because my experience is that it’s just not worth the hassle of trying to force a square peg into a round hole.”*

### 3. Describe to me the process you follow to reach out to a new client.

- a. *If the answer is: “I cold call or email to let them know of a new enhancement or product offering that has a new benefit.” This “it’s about me” answer, does not focus customer issues.*
- b. *The better answer: “I study problems within an industry or vertical to see what is happening from the client’s perspective and then I set a meeting to determine if they are realizing the same things.”*

attract top salespeople who will want to work for a company that will permanently train, coach and add value to them," Biggin said.

### Long-term Benefits

Experienced, tenured salespeople are a vital asset of any enterprise, clearly outperforming those with less experience. To many customers your salesperson is the source of knowledge that they need to make a decision. Defining the skills and approach that works for your company is absolutely essential to your success – as is recognizing that your “ideal” salesperson may not be the top performer at your competition’s business.



When personality, cultural and attitudinal fit are part of the hiring equation, and an organization makes the commitment to train its sales force, it sees much lower

turnover and increased success.

Companies that understand the unique characteristics of successful salespeople within their organization, and build those specific best practices into their hiring and training structure, increase the potential for successful revenue growth. When combined with other fundamentals such as instilling a strong sales process and commitment from management, an organization can propel itself to world-class status. ■

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### About Miller Heiman Group

Miller Heiman Group empowers people across the entire organization to perform at peak potential by bringing game-changing insight to sales performance, customer experience and leadership and management. Backed by more than 150 years of experience and performance and built on several well-known brands such as Miller Heiman, AchieveGlobal, Huthwaite, Impact Learning Systems and Channel Enablers, we offer more sales- and customer service-based solutions than anyone in the industry. This allows companies to build and sustain successful, customer-focused organizations that drive profitable revenue and top-line growth on a global scale. To learn more, visit our website, and follow us on LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube or Google+.