

Assessing the Real Value of Sales

Karl Webb, Consultant at Clarendon Executive, encourages businesses to abandon some of the misconceptions around sales professionals and insists that successful selection is based on sound assessment processes.

Working with businesses throughout Northern Ireland and beyond, across all industry sectors, I have learned that there is a common misconception on the real value of sales professionals that has allowed the assessment and selection process to be led astray. Part of the difficulty of recruiting sales professionals it seems, is that it is easy to be seduced by an impressive account of how an individual exceeded sales targets to unprecedented levels and rapidly improved the financial performance of the business. Numbers can be overwhelming and it is easy to allow ourselves to believe that this individual can impact our business to the same impressive extent.

The reality however, is that the numbers are rarely qualified and fail to factor the wider economic climate or the multitude of other activities that may have been more instrumental to the success of the business in a given timeframe. Salespeople are allowed all too often, to build a career on the back of short term 'success' without ever developing the necessary skills and behaviours that are more conducive to sustainable business development. Our research and experience has shown consistently that businesses which focus the assessment on the ethics and cultural fit of an individual are better equipped for long term sustainable growth.

In assessing a sales person you

should of course be concerned with their track record in driving sales against challenging targets. You should obviously assess their capacity to sell your products or services within defined markets and you should be comfortable with their career moves to date. Attributes that you would associate with a talented sales person such as energy, tenacity and drive should also become evident throughout the assessment and there should also be processes in place to gauge their commercial ability.

This, I would assume, would represent the very basics in assessing sales candidates and would be the areas that you expect should

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come as standard in a genuine contender for your sales vacancy.

The more crucial area centres around the individuals ability to 'fit' within your organisation. A sales person should in many ways personify the culture and ideals of your business and therefore your assessment has to explore the candidate's ability to align themselves within that culture.

In terms of winning new business, there is little doubt that the product or service offering has to be aligned

to meet customer expectations and that price has to be competitive but research will always show that customers are more inclined to do business with someone they trust and can rely on to offer an honest service. Having this respect and trust of customers provides an ideal platform for a longer term business relationship. A sound assessment process therefore should examine what behaviours a candidate has used to grow sales and how they have behaved

to generate residual business and strong customer loyalty.

Candidates who can demonstrate a track record of honouring their commitments and being focused on delivery are likely to generate repeat business and sustainable customer relationships. By focusing on the behaviours rather than purely being concerned with the numbers, the candidate is much more likely to 'fit' within the culture of the business and ultimately is more likely to stay with your business,

bringing more stability to the sales team and the business as a whole.

Of course, it is still important to realise that sales people are largely motivated through performance related incentives and this cannot be ignored. It would be futile to suggest that an incentive program should be based purely on behavioural targets, but it cannot be too heavily weighted on financial indicators either. By combining a financial and behaviour based incentive program, an organisation is more likely to be geared towards long term and sustainable business growth.

Your customers view your business through your sales people and therefore it is paramount that you have recruited someone who naturally exudes the behaviours and ideals that your business represents. Assessing this, as well as the standard credentials, is crucial to making a successful appointment.

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