

How to Attract and Hire the Best Sales People



Predictive Results

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Hiring the right sales people can make or break your business. Sales people to make your company provide the fuel that keeps your company running smoothly. Hiring the right ones is critical to your success!

1. What Defines “Best”

The first secret to attracting and hiring the best sales people is to clearly understand who the best people are when it comes to the specific position in question. Not generic sales roles, but specifically for this job in your company.

To some, the best sales people are the ones who will open more new accounts. To others, the best people are the ones who will treat their customers right and hold accounts longer. Still others see the best sales people as the ones who will quietly do the job with the fewest complaints.

Our first task is to accurately define the ‘best’ person for our position in terms that will allow us to know that person when we see them.

The truth is that the characteristics of the best sales person for a specific job in a specific company are very complex. Think of your job as a missing piece in one of those very complex jigsaw puzzles. The piece that makes it whole has some very unique characteristics that are even hard to describe. No wonder it is so hard to find a good fit!

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Who Defines ‘Best’

If we agree that someone has to define the characteristics of this person, who is that someone? Most would agree that the person’s manager would have a good idea of who would fit the job. After all, a sales manager knows what needs to be done and knows what type of person has worked out well in that position before. They should also know what type of person has not worked out in the past.

But how about the CEO, owner or another senior manager? This person is responsible for the culture and future of the company. This person may be looking for an eventual replacement for the sales manager or a person who could eventually manage a new division. Should their input be included in the definition?

One person we often fail to ask is the sales person who had the job last or another person who currently holds the job. If you ask most front line employees, they will describe their

position much differently than their managers and completely differently from senior management. It might be useful to get their idea of what makes an ideal employee for their position.

And let's not forget Human Resources. HR is charged with building our organizations and should have a clear understanding of what is needed in each position. While their perspective may not be perfect, it certainly provides a critical piece to the puzzle.

So at the very least we have three or four people that must be included in defining the characteristics of this 'best' sales candidate. We call this the **"Requirements Team"** because they set the ultimate hiring requirements. Before we even begin to advertise and attract a group of candidates we must synthesize the opinions of each of these individuals into one clear picture of our target sales person.

Defining the Job Requirements

Now that we have agreed that we are going to take the input from a Requirements Team and use it to develop an ideal model with which to compare our candidates, we need some criteria to work from.

At a very minimum there are three criteria that most organizations include in one way or another as part of their selection process. They include skill, knowledge, and behavior.

Studies have shown a very high degree of correlation between behavior style and sales performance.
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Skills encompass the ability to do the job required. This is the mechanical part. Whether they are learned skills such as those gained through on-the-job training in the trades or academic skills gained through formal education, we must define what is required to do the job.

Knowledge encompasses an understanding of the job on one or many levels. This includes knowledge of the industry, products and territory. It is possible to be skilled at doing a job, yet lack the knowledge that would be required to go beyond the basic activity.

Behavior defines how a sales person will act or react when faced with various situations. Do you need a person who is patient and focused on relationships or assertive and driven? Do you need a person who can multitask or do you need someone who will not become bored when repeating the same task over and over? Studies have shown a very high correlation between behavior style and sales performance in virtually every type of sales.

Skills

Ask each of the people on the **Requirements Team** to make a list of the skills required for this position. This is called a **Skills Inventory**. You might want to include someone

who actually is doing the job or even shadow a current employee and record what they do. It is amazing how often we forget what a person really does in a day. Even if you have a job description you must know that most job descriptions are out of date and incomplete, and should not be used as a hiring document.

Once the lists are completed, they should be compared with an eye for differences. It is important to reconcile these differences and agree on a common **Skills Inventory** before starting the hiring process. There is nothing worse than putting your new hire in the middle of a disagreement on job requirement.

Knowledge

Once again we need your **Requirements Team**. This time the task is to develop a Knowledge Inventory; a list of what the new employee will need to know to do the job. Remember that some things can be taught, but you have to start somewhere. For instance, you can teach a person to demonstrate a product, but you may not want to teach them to read and do math. You may be looking for knowledge of specific systems, machines or industries. You may even want someone who has knowledge of specific groups of people or geographic areas.

As before, once the lists are completed, they should be compared with an eye for differences. Reconcile these differences and agree on a common **Knowledge Inventory** before starting with the hiring process. You don't want to hire someone only to find out they lack the critical knowledge needed to be successful in that job.

Behavior

Of the three criteria groups, behavior is often the hardest to define. Studies have shown that it may also be the highest predictor of success in the sales job. Behavior describes how a person will function in a given situation. It is possible for many people to be technically able to do a job but not behaviorally able to do it in your company or the way you need it done. Behavioral mismatches are leading causes of failure and turnover in sales and sales management positions.

Again, you need to have your **Requirements Team** develop a **Behavioral Inventory**; a list of the behavioral characteristics that will make this person successful. If you do this right, you will hire someone who will not only do the job well but will be happy doing it.

"PI® can be used far more than just as a hiring tool. It identifies individual traits, but also gives you the entire scope of a person's behavior, and a deeper understanding of how to motivate and impact their performance."

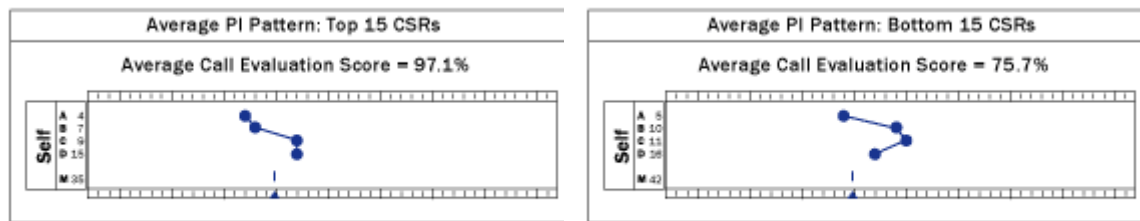
Susan Landgraf
Chief Learning Officer
Message Envoy

We recommend the **Predictive Index® PRO** tool for this task. It automates the process by allowing several people to independently define the job and then brings the results together for comparison. The results can be compared with similar positions at other companies to build a behavioral profile that predicts success in the position. If you would

like to try a PRO, please let us know. We would be happy to make one available at no charge. You'll get great value from it.

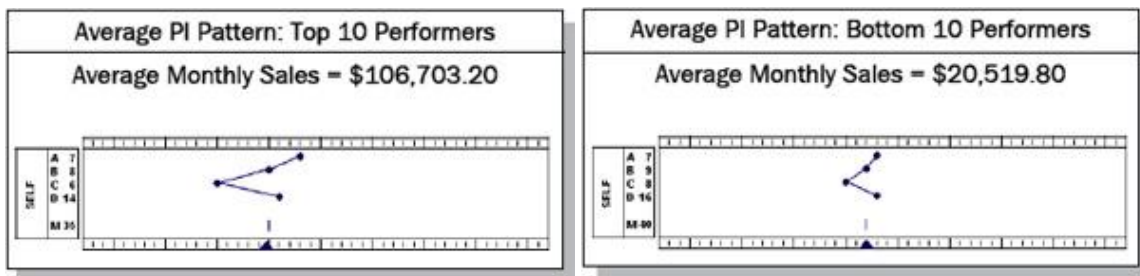
Another approach is to do a validity study. This entails assessing the behavioral characteristics of each of the people who currently do the job and comparing them to their performance data. While this is a big job, you don't have to do it yourself. We do them for our clients at no charge. To make it simpler, we also have a library of behavioral styles that we have developed for specific sales and management jobs over the years. By using this historical data, you can often save time and money and get an equally accurate picture of the desired candidate's behavioral style.

Here are two examples:



This statistical analysis is based upon a PI® validity study conducted with 74 Customer Service Representatives (CSRs). The quantitative measurement criterion is based on average Call Evaluation scores over a three-month period. Note that the top performers achieved on average call evaluation scores that were over 20% higher than the bottom performers. In other words, if the company hires more people like the ones on the left, they will have 30% more happy customers!

The next example is based on a PI validity study conducted with 32 outside sales representatives. The Quantitative Measurement Criteria is based upon 27 months of sales volume.



Note that the top performers (left) achieved over 5 times more sales volume than bottom performers (right), averaging over \$80,000 a month in additional sales. This means that this company can effectively increase their sales by a factor of five every time they hire a person with the top performer profile. They don't need to change anything else except their hiring practice. Not bad for a 5X increase!

If you would like copies of these studies or more information on Validity Studies, please ask. We will be happy to give you complete details.

2. Attracting The Best

Now that you know who you want to hire, you need to find candidates to choose from. Ideally, you want to attract a pool of candidates who are reasonably close to your ideal model. In other words, they fit the **Knowledge, Skill and Behavioral Inventories** that your **Requirements Team** developed.

Make Your Ad A Magnet For The Best

Studies by our company and others have shown that ads written based on the Behavioral Inventory of the ideal client will attract applicants who fit the model. For instance, if you are looking for a person to network in the community and you include phrases like “must enjoy working with people” or “community involvement a must” you will tend to find the right people. Imagine a person who hates networking when they see this ad. They will skip over it, while the person who loves networking will make it their first priority. Your lobby will be full of people who have already preselected themselves. This reduces your interviewing time and maximizes the options you have to choose from.

One of our Chicago clients was getting about 50 responses per week to his help wanted ad. Unfortunately, only about 2 of the applicants were even close to the behavioral style that he needed. We helped him rewrite the ad to match his desired profile and then replaced the ad. The very next week, over 30% of his applicants were close to the desired profile. He now had a large pool of applicants from whom to pick the best.

Look Where the Best Are

It is important to place your ads where the candidates will see or hear them. If you want to appeal to those who are unemployed, the internet or the newspaper is the media of choice. Everyone who is looking for work is looking there.

But what if you want to attract people who are not looking for work? You are looking for someone who is already successful and productive somewhere else and you want to jar them loose from their current situation. In this case, you need a less typical approach. Radio is one great tool since your ads will be heard by people whether or not they are actively seeking a job. **ClearChannel Radio** has a division that focuses exclusively on helping companies use radio to attract the ‘currently employed’.

Another approach is to advertise in traditional media but in a non-traditional way. In other words, place your ad in the general advertising section of a local community paper or shopper’s guide. One contractor I knew placed his ads in local car magazines. He knew the type of person he wanted also read those magazines and he was able to out-flank his competition by using this unique approach. Another company actually

purchased the billboard across the street from his competitor. He knew his audience and he knew where to find them.

The bottom line is this. The combination of an ad written around the behavioral profile and then placed where the right people would see it generated the greatest number of viable candidates.

Network with a Focus

If you take the same approach to networking you will have equally good success. Give your current employees a clear understanding of who you are looking for and reward them for bringing in their friends. You'll be amazed how powerful an army they can be. That same information in the hands of other business leaders can also generate results. I have seen companies who were hiring approach companies who were laying off and almost walk the best people from one company to the other.

It all comes back to the work we did earlier. If you can clearly describe who you need, you can more easily find and attract them.

3. Hire the Best of the Best

Catch the Best Quickly

Once you attract top candidates, you need to make sure they actually fit your criteria and then engage the best before your competition does. A quick pre-screen will help you see who is close and needs your immediate attention.

While resumes are often exercises in creative writing, they do indicate if a person potentially has the skills and knowledge needed, based on their previous experience. A total miss-match goes to the bottom of the pile while a close fit gets a second look.

"Understanding and utilizing the behavioral profile results of PI not only changes the way you recruit and manage human capital, it fundamentally changes the way you approach organizational development in general.

Trey Maust, Co-Founder
Lewis & Clark Bank

A behavioral assessment like the **Predictive Index® (PI®)** can quickly tell you if a candidate has the right behavioral characteristics for success in your company. Since it can be administered on paper or email and takes less than 15 minutes to complete, we recommend that every applicant be given the PI when they first apply. This gives you the opportunity to scan the applicants and quickly bring the best to the top of the pile. As a result, you can often take the best people out of the job search before your competition ever sees them.

Gap Interviewing

Using the process we have outlined, you now have a selection of candidates to interview that are reasonably close to what you need. In preparation for the interview, compare

each candidate with the Requirement Team's ideal profile. Make notes for yourself highlighting the gaps between the ideal and the particular candidate.

What knowledge is missing?

What skills are missing?

How does their behavioral profile (PI®) differ from the ideal?

In your interview, spend your time drilling into those gaps to see if there are any critical pieces missing in knowledge, skill or behavior. If you believe you have a winner, ask yourself this simple question, "What still bothers me about this person?" Tell the next interviewers about your concerns and ask them to drill in on that area. In your next interview with them, drill deeper yourself.

Only when you find no glaring gaps should you begin to spend time telling the candidate about the position. Only now can you start selling the candidate on your company.

When you follow this simple process, you will dramatically increase the quality of your team and the results of your company. As Jim Collins said in "Good to Great", to be successful, "You need to get the right sales people on your bus!"

If you would like help improving your hiring process, including developing your **Knowledge and Skills Inventories** or using the **Predictive Index®** behavioral assessment, please contact us. We also offer training in a wide range of topics including Behavioral Interviewing.

Would you like to see if some of the PI® services might help your organization? If so, please contact us at 904-269-2299 or steve@predictiveresults.com.

"We are all better off because of Steve. His understanding of our business made a huge difference. Steve always challenged us to continually improve and be at our best. I cannot say enough about his contribution to our team and company. It was great working with him."
Asmar Madyun
AT&T

We can often arrange a **free demonstration** so you can see your own profile and that of a few of your key people at no charge. We enjoy sharing these wonderful tools.

Steve Waterhouse
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