

Hiring with a Map

To fulfill their potential, assessments must be measured against a profile of an ideal candidate

I recently bought my own personal co-driver, a GPS. It's great! I always get a kick out of watching it plot me moving along as I drive down the highway. Seeing where I am on a map is fascinating but it does not offer me any real intelligence. However the device quickly converts from a toy into a powerful tool the moment I program it with a destination. When it knows where I'm going it starts barking orders on where to turn, which exit to take, how far I am from my destination and how long it will take me to reach it.

In the business world there are many potentially powerful tools available to us that have limited value until we define what we want from them. Behavioural assessments are a great example. Assessments are well-accepted instruments used in the pursuit of hiring quality salespeople. They help managers go beyond a candidate's résumé to look at their innate traits: empathy, persuasiveness, persistence, patience and resilience (see sidebar).

And it is always enlightening to look at a profile and see a person's natural traits, their personal drivers and to compare those insights with your gut reactions. Yet how does this information benefit the hiring process? It doesn't. The profile alone does not tell you how successful an applicant will be in a role, it simply uncovers an individual's traits. It is like a GPS without a destination.

To fully leverage the power of assessment tools, managers must measure candidate's results against a profile of an ideal applicant. The criteria for success in a specific role already exist within your top performing salespeople. What traits do your most successful

salespeople have in common? What separates them from the B and C players? How do they use their natural strengths to achieve their successes?

David, CEO of an enterprise resource planning implementation firm, struggled to define the makings for success within his sales team. "I hired top quality salespeople, but I witnessed over and over again an inability in most of my reps to get client commitment, regardless of their product knowledge," he explains. The executive invested heavily in training and coaching to equip each of his reps with the knowledge and skills to sell million dollar solutions. Yet only three of his 10 reps were able to consistently achieve quota and maintain sales cycles of less than six months.

In order to develop a baseline and identify any gaps between his A players and the rest of his team, David had each of his salespeople complete a behavioural assessment. He was shocked by the results. "I had only a 12 per cent match between my top three sales reps and the rest of the team," he says. "No wonder these reps were struggling." By combining the assessments of each of his top sellers he was able to determine the traits his salespeople needed to succeed. Based on those attributes he created a benchmark of an ideal behavioural profile.

By defining the gap within his team, David was armed with the information to act: who to keep, who might be repositioned and who to let go. It also gave him a baseline to compare any future candidates to hire against. "I now use assessments to balance behav-

SALES MANAGEMENT

ours and skills to find people that will excel in our business,” he explains. “If a candidate has less than a 70 per cent match to our ideal profile I know that they will face an uphill battle.” Yet a profile match is not enough for David. “We might find a person with a 90 per cent behavioural match, but if they lack the basic industry experience and sales skills they will still fail.”

Building a top performing sales team always comes back to the old accountant’s adage, “If you don’t measure it you can’t manage it.” Behavioural assessments on their own only provide basic information on people – you need an anchor to measure them against.

The 5 Behavioural Traits of Great Salespeople

1 EMPATHY – Knowing what the customer wants

Empathy is the most basic ingredient of successful salespeople. It is the ability to understand the needs of each prospect and to sell them the appropriate solution.

2 PERSUASIVE DRIVE – The hunter’s trait

For the best salespeople, getting a prospect to say yes is their primary motivating force. It is a sense of accomplishment, and it represents victory. Money is not the driver; rather it is the reward for satisfying the salesperson’s persuasive drive.

3 SERVICE DRIVE – The farmer’s trait


Any sale that requires follow up or engagement with a customer beyond an initial yes requires service drive. This is the gratification that comes from receiving compliments such as “thank you” and “I appreciate your help.” High service drive is great for farmers or account managers, because they are motivated to serve customers.

4 PACE – The internal clock

The amount of patience required to sell largely depends on the sales environment. A person with a high degree of pace is patient, methodical and consistent, while a person with low pace is urgent, driving and impatient. A hunting role typically requires people with low pace to keep them looking for those yeses. People selling large enterprise solutions will demonstrate a higher level of pace, be more methodical and detail-oriented.

5 EGO RESILIENCE – Personal self-worth

Selling is a numbers game. As Tom Hopkins accurately suggests, great sales reps learn to love no. Ego resilience is the degree to which a person likes him or herself, and the ability to handle rejection. A person might have all of the skills and attributes for the position, but if they lack the resilience to handle rejection they will ultimately fail.

The traits for success exist inside your organization. It is not about adopting a generic profile as an ideal fit; it’s about quantifying and identifying what sets your top people apart. Just as my GPS has become my co-driver, an assessment tool will steer you to the salespeople that will achieve your sales goals. 

Jeremy Miller is a partner with LEAPJob, a recruiting and consulting firm based in Mississauga, Ontario. LEAPJob helps companies drive revenue and improve sales force performance by getting the right people into the right positions. You can reach Jeremy at 905.281.3090, Ext. 22 or Jeremy.Miller@LEAPJob.com. Visit www.LEAPJob.com for more information.

Hiring for Technical Sales Positions

Hunting for sales reps to pitch complex products involves a balancing act between technical knowledge, industry experience and sales skills. High-tech companies that often have difficulty finding candidates who match their ideal profile should include key areas of compromise in their selection system to evaluate the position’s must-have, preferred and nice-to-have skills, experiences and behavioural attributes. To qualify candidates and quantify talent gaps, build a matrix that compares technical and sales skills and identifies the areas you can live without, train for or outsource.

SAMPLE MATRIX:

Salesperson selling engineering consulting services

Technical Skills and Industry Experience	Position Requirements	Candidate Score	Sales Skills and Attributes	Position Requirements	Candidate Score
Education level: Mechanical Engineering Degree	M	✓	Large account selling: average sale of \$100,000 or more	P	✗
Industry certification or designation: P. Eng	P	✗	Attributes: strong persuasive drive	M	✓
Analytical problem solving skills	M	✓	Attributes: experience negotiation and closing	M	✓
Industry related experiences: 10 years experience	N	✗	Direct sales experience: three-plus years	N	✓
Specific technical skills: six sigma green belt or higher	N	✗	Incentive base compensation: base, plus commission	N	✓

LEGEND:

M Must have

P Preferred

N Nice to have

✓ Candidate met requirement

✗ Candidate failed requirement