

What to look for when hiring for the sales team (in 2018)



I've enjoyed the privilege of working in the sales profession now for 36 years, my first ever sales job commencing in September 1982. Some things haven't changed even a tiny bit over that period of time, and one of these is the perennial Sales Management challenge of hiring the right people into the sales team. 36 years on, making the right hiring decision 100% of the time is just as tricky now as it's always been.

One thing that *has* changed is the nature of the people in the pool of candidates available to select from. This is not to say that the people in this pool are better or worse than those who were in it 36 years ago; they are though different. Logically therefore, it makes no sense to be making hiring decisions in exactly the same way as my first ever Sales Manager Russell did, when he hired me back in 1982.

This edition of *21st Century Sales Management* aims to provoke some thought about what these changes are, and about how this should impact on your selection process...

Some thoughts on the selection process...

You may or may not have already received in-depth training on how to manage the Recruitment & Selection process. If you're a Sales Manager and this hasn't happened, then don't ask for this training – **demand it!**

The logic behind this assertion is simple: there's only one person who is going to enjoy massive success if exactly the right person is employed in the sales team, or massive stress and a lack of success if the wrong person is employed in the sales team. And that's the Sales Manager. It simply makes no sense to either have little or no idea & understanding about what accepted 'best practice' is, and/or simply delegate everything to your colleagues in Human Resources (HR). By all means, HR is a fabulous source of advice, guidance, help and support; the Sales Manager though **should be responsible for the entire process.**

This doesn't mean to suggest that the Sales Manager *does* everything. The Sales Manager is responsible for the sales that their team generates, but that doesn't mean that they do all the selling. They ensure those responsible for the selling do the right things, in the right way, at the right time, with the right prospects and customers. In

About the author

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just the same way, because the Sales Manager is the expert on what the role of salesperson is all about, it should be they who ensure that when HR is involved in the process, then they do the right things, in the right way, at the right time, with the right candidates for the role. Without an understanding of the process HR follows though, it's rather difficult to inform and influence it.

There is insufficient space in this short article to review the entire Recruitment & Selection process. The two points which are important to include in this article are...

- 1) The term 'Recruitment' refers to the activities which result in the identification of a list of people (candidates) who might be able to do the job. The term 'Selection' refers to the activities which identify which of the candidates can do the job, the degree to which they can do the job, and so who the most appropriate candidate for the vacant role is. 'Recruitment & Selection' therefore includes both of these activities.
- 2) A key step in the process is the development of the 'Candidate profile'. This is a description of the theoretical ideal person who is going to excel in the role. The Candidate profile includes 'Basic requirements' such as a requirement for a driving license or ability to work in a Windows IT environment, and it will also include a list of both the 'Essential' and 'Desirable' skills and qualities, such as organisational skills and tenacity.

So how have things changed?

Every generation is different in some way to the previous one. And as already emphasised, this does not mean 'better' or 'worse', but it certainly does mean *different*. I also don't mean to suggest that everyone from a given generation is identical to one another – again, far from it. Or indeed that those born from the 1st January on a particular year when it's said that one generation 'starts' are noticeably different to those born 31st December the day before! It is true though that each generation band does have some notable characteristics.

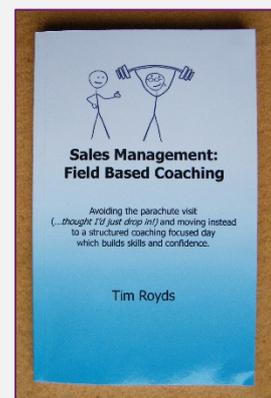
"Sales Management: Field Based Coaching"...

...is the **fourth** in the nine book "Sales Management..." series and is now available via Amazon (see bit.ly/LinkToBooks).

For a brief introductory video to this book see bit.ly/Book4Intro.

"...written in an easy to read and comprehensive text that describes the steps that all sales managers, I mean sales coaches, can follow to be really effective"

Colin Hurst, Steering Group Member, Healthcare Learning Professional Network (UK & Ireland).



Those born between roughly 1981 to 1996 are branded 'The Millennials', and will today be aged between 20 and 37, so likely to make up a significant portion of the pool from which candidates can be selected from for the sales team.

The good news is that this generation is more tech-savvy than any before it. I came across a lovely phrase when researching on this topic, which describes Millennials as "...digital natives in a land of digital immigrants"! So accessing and using technology to support the sales process is what this generation does naturally with little or no prompting or encouragement. This is very different to when I was first appointed as Sales Manager, and the more traditional members of the team I managed really didn't like the first laptops we were ever provided with!

The instant access to Google, instant access to information, and ease of access to on-line data that we enjoy today via both desktop and handheld devices has certainly made life easier. But for Millennials, this is not 'easier' - it's normal. This has helped to drive another recognised characteristic of this Group: they tend to be impatient. Rapid access is normal... slow acquisition is not normal. Some commentators have labelled them the "We want it now" generation. It's been argued that this generation have also been influenced by how they have been managed and rewarded at school, where rewards and recognition have been provided for simply participating rather than for only winning or achievement, which exacerbates further the desire to 'want it now'.

Both of these characteristics – tech savvy and impatient – are arguably positive, since they can drive a desire to utilise tools which support the sales process and a drive to achieve now.

But... any strength is a strength as long as it *contributes* to success. If any strength becomes 'overdone', it no longer contributes to success, but can *hinder* achievement of success. Think of it this way... you plug your iPhone into a sound system, and as long as the volume is set right, you hear enjoyable music. Crank up the volume too much though and the music turns into an uncomfortable noise. This is exactly what can happen when strengths become overdone.

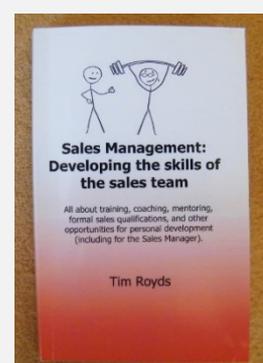
So 'tech-savvy' when overdone can turn into over-reliance on technology, and an inability to do anything other than conduct a search on Google or interrogate the CRM database. Well how about picking up the phone, speaking with the PA of the prospect that's being targeted, or walking around the industrial estate looking to see what potential prospect companies are there that you don't already know about? Impatient can mean limited or no investment in the building of relationships with important stakeholders in key accounts as it doesn't make sales happen *today*. Or investment in networking activities as that's unlikely to provide instant gratification.

Comment: Lots of discussion about how to grow salespeople once the right people have been appointed to the team in the book **"Sales Management: developing the skills of the sale team"**

"...provides a practical and accessible manual to help busy Sales Managers achieve results and increase & enhance the skills of their people..."

(Debbie Carter, Editor, Training Journal)

Buy now at: bit.ly/LinkToBooks



And this is what I'm aiming to provoke some thought about in this article. Does every generation have the ability to overdo the characteristics they have, so they turn from strengths to sales disablers? Absolutely. Are some of those related to Millennials different to those of previous generations – yes, I'd argue that they are.

Impact on the Selection process

When defining the Candidate profile for the vacant role in your team, it's obviously important to include the 'classic' skills and qualities that drive success in sales such as tenacity, results orientation, and communication skills. Additional to this though, I'd propose that in 2018 it's important to include 1) Ability to not over-rely on technology, and 2) Patience / tenacity. Because the danger is that if the candidate doesn't have these qualities, then they will be technology disabled rather than technology abled, and have limited ability to deal with the longer-term issues associated with complex selling environments.

Once that these qualities have been added to the Candidate profile, then the Selection process can be designed to look for evidence demonstrating that the candidate has these qualities, and the degree to which they have these qualities. The most obvious way to do this will be the designing of specific questions to tease out this information during interviews.

This is really important for Sales Managers who are also Millennials – as you may not previously have regarded 'tech-savvy' and 'impatience' as anything other than characteristics that everyone has. That may be true (at least of Millennials)... but have you considered the impact of these characteristics if they are out of control?

It's also really important for Sales Managers who are of a generation different to the Millennials – have you considered the relevance of these differences between you and the Millennials for your selection process?

Summary

One of the key challenges of Sales Management hasn't changed at all over the course of the 36 years I've enjoyed the privilege of working in the sales profession: Hiring the right people into the sales team.

Since the Sales Manager's success relies on the quality of the salespeople employed in the team, it should be the Sales Manager who manages and influences the process, though HR can support its implementation.

Every Generation has different characteristics and strengths. Every Generation has the ability to 'overdo' their characteristics and strengths so they no longer enable achievement, but hinder it.

Two characteristics strongly associated with the Millennials are 'tech-savvy' and 'impatience'. It makes good sense to look for evidence during the Selection process

that candidates have the ability to ensure these characteristics become sales enablers rather than sales disablers.

This is relevant to all Sales Managers, be you a Millennial or of the generation before or after this...

Next edition of 21st Century Sales Management...

...will be available during November, subject TBA (and do get in touch if you'd like us to consider a particular Sales Management topic)