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Would you buy from this candidate for a sales job?

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Recently, I was asked: “Can you tell me what companies should look for when hiring salespeople? I’ve found it’s a lot easier to hire for eloquence than for competence.”

I am a firm believer in hiring people who have a track record of results rather than service/product experience. It is easier for someone to learn about your technology or services/products than it is to learn the underlying sales skills or how to work within your culture.

Salespeople are terminated more frequently for inability to actually “do” the selling than to understand the technology itself. Some salespeople are only good at meeting people and making nice, not actually identifying and closing a deal. Others are so technical they can’t develop trust or communicate well with customers, so their deals don’t close.

I once met a CEO of an information technology consulting firm who emphatically stated there is no such thing as a salesperson who can both identify and close business. I told him he was hiring the wrong people. He also said product salespeople cannot sell services. I disagree.

A true rainmaker rock star will be a “service orientated” employee who views a salesperson as someone offering a service to a customer. If that person has top sales skills, those skills should translate to the new company.

During my career, I sold products and services to both the commercial and federal marketplaces and always was among top 1 percent of the sales force, if not the top salesperson. I have seen the same success with other rainmakers, so I know it is possible.

When hiring salespeople, I recommend the company require applicants to have a college degree; some companies also require a graduate degree for sales. Why? A completed degree shows the person can start something and complete it, which therefore shows perseverance. I love to see that people worked while in school. It

shows they were able to multitask, took responsibility for paying their bills, earned their way and exhibited determination. All those traits are great in salespeople.

I prefer to see college jobs that involve working with the public and are service-oriented. I bartended my way through school. I learned to listen and make people feel important. Ask applicants how they paid for college, and it may prompt an interesting conversation that can help you learn about the candidate.

Salespeople need to be innovative leaders who make things happen, so look for people who have a track record of removing barriers from their life. Those experiences can tell you something about the core of a person, even 20 years into a career.

When reviewing resumes, look for numbers and results. If the person is not bragging about being X percent over quota, look out! You also want the success to be current, within the last five years, because you need to hire people who are at the top of their game.

Hire a candidate who has worked on an individual quota and has had pipeline reviews at least monthly. Confirm that the quota was a quota specifically for that person, not for a group. Look for quota success in more than one job, or over several years. One success does not create a track record.

The past does not predict the future, but it can provide a strong probability if everything else is right for you.

I am hearing from very successful rainmakers who are going back to the basics and hunting for new customers after years of customers finding them. Hire people who are not afraid or too egotistical to make a few calls to prospects who don't know them. Ask how they identified prospects for the business they closed in other jobs.

Don't hire friends! Stick to this rule unless the friendship developed at a time when you witnessed the person's great sales skills. Always hire the sales skills, not just a buddy or "yes" man.

On my Web site, I define rainmakers: "They are genuine, have a natural curiosity of people, ask great questions, great listeners, resilient, credible, persevering, determined, build relationships easily, innovative ... with the guts to identify and close business"

How do you find out if your candidates have those qualities? Talk to them, have other people talk with them. Don't hurry to hire. Take time to get to know them. Hire slow, fire fast.

Observe how they listen to you and others. See if they get you talking by asking questions. Look for someone who comes up with great questions, not someone who does all the talking and does not listen. Follow the 80/20 rule: A salesperson should talk only 20 percent of the time, the customer 80 percent, so your company can learn the customer's needs and write a winning proposal.

Then the final most telling question: "Would you buy from this person?" Listen to your gut answer. If you wouldn't buy from this candidate, your customers probably won't either.

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