

Finding Qualified Sales People

03/07/05

While researching a recent question about business owners pursuing a leap forward, I had the opportunity to speak with a company with a unique approach to high school and college team fundraising.

The owner is growing this business with two partners. Like many owners, he shares with them not just a business relationship, but also a family relationship: They are brothers-in-law. The success of their company represents the future for three-owner families, which makes their desire to succeed all the more important.

He posed this question: "As the owner and top sales person, I have tremendous passion for the service we provide and that really helps seal the deal when I speak with clients. How do I find qualified salespeople who will share my passion and work commitment so that our business with continue to expand?"

Seems like many business owners are looking for passionate salespeople these days, which is a good thing. I recently touched on the important of sales and business growth in the Jan. 31 article.

Passionate salespeople are self-starters who know what they want and are willing to work hard to get it. Finding passionate salespeople in a multilayered process, which includes defining

the sales role, insisting on a rigorous, ongoing search program, aligning compensation with goals, strengthening your sales process and implementing a comprehensive startup training program.

Keep in mind that "trial and error" in sales and sales recruiting can be death, because the company wastes time and resources struggling to get where it wants to go. Finding the right salespeople for your company can have tremendous payoffs – generally more sales results in more money to the bottom line, more resources to fix problems and more funds to cover risks.

What do you want your passionate, committed salespeople to do? Think about what you are good at and whether you need more of the same or a complementary set of skills. If you're good at closing, perhaps you need people to tee up more opportunities for you to close. Maybe you have many leads, but need help closing more of them. Do you need better lead generation or more follow-up with perfectly viable prospects? Always look to hire individuals who are already passionate about what your business does, while you insist on a passion to sell, as well.

If you want to have your pick of sales candidates, get good at recruiting. Most owners look at recruiting as a chore rather than

an opportunity – their loss. Whatever else you do, don't settle for hiring your office manager's nephew or the cousin of a good client, just because someone said they were good in sales. The best way to find passionate salespeople is to let the world know you're looking. Speed up the process by advertising for candidates who are interested in what you do – trade magazines, and other venues your customers look at. Plan to look at various candidates. See two to three times as many candidates as you think you need to. Start looking months before you need to, and don't hire on the first visit.

Make candidates sell you. One of our clients describes interviewing as "putting candidates out on a ledge and seeing if they can et back in, without sweating it." Don't expect poor interviewing skills to magically turn into great selling skills once you hire someone. Hold out for candidates who demonstrate personal passion and commitment, excellent communication and follow-through, a clear set of goals and organizational skills and sincere, lasting interest in what your company does.

What about compensation and goals? Plan out on paper what a person has to deliver. Keep your total sales costs at 10 percent to 25 percent of total company revenue. Write out a simple

Finding Qualified Sales People

03/07/05

compensation plan, then ask yourself if it will deliver the results you want and fix any holes. Don't be afraid to ask salespeople to work on commission – the good ones are confident of their abilities and know they can make more money that way. Remember that salespeople are good negotiators and don't let them negotiate you into something that doesn't make sense for your company. Treat the compensation plan as a contract you'll have to live with – your salespeople certainly will.

How strong is your sales process? If you tell salespeople to go out and call on anyone, promise anything, and get whatever price they think it will take to close the deal, you're open to many variables that might not come back the way you want. A weak sales process usually means salespeople come on board and waste weeks or months figuring things out. Explain exactly what – and how – your salespeople are supposed to sell, and you are more likely to attract and hire people who want to do exactly that.

Once you hire the best candidates, how likely is it they'll succeed? You need information on paper; to quickly get your new hires up and running – with basic knowledge about your company, what you deliver, how you price. You need to ramp up lead generation activities before hiring so that once new candidates are on board they have someone to

call on. Give your new hires a clear set of goals to focus activities, while they get their feet on the ground. Push them out the door week one, don't accept delays. Often the hardest part in sales is getting started, so get over that hurdle right away.

Plan enough time to find, hire and ramp the right people. Avoid settling for less than you want or getting distracted with other responsibilities. Focus on the payoff of where you want sales to be a year from now. Make it your No. 1 job to get the right people on board and you'll hit next year's goals.

Looking for a good book? Try Bill Good's "Prospecting for Sales Success" or David Sandler's "You Can't Learn to Ride a Bike in a Seminar." Both talk about skills necessary for success in sale sand will be part of the training you'll want to have in place once your salespeople start, as well as describing attributes you'll want to look for when searching for passionate salespeople.

Business owners regularly turn to Ask Andi and Strategy Leaders for advice on how to grow profitable, successful companies. They find what they need time after time. Specific advice is available at www.AskAndiBlog.com. Ask Andi is also published weekly in the Westchester and Fairfield County Business Journals and Hudson Valley Business. Written by Strategy Leaders President, Andi Gray, the Ask Andi column is a rich source of advice for owners of established, privately held businesses.

If you are a business owner and you have a question or would like to discuss some aspect of your business, call [1.877.238.3535](tel:18772383535) or send an email to AskAndi@StrategyLeaders.com.