

## Piloting the Hiring of Top Sales Performers

By Don McNamara

Without question the most critical skills in sales management are recruiting, selecting and hiring the best sales representatives. Yet why do so many sales managers come up short in these vital skills?

If your goal is to land a top sales performer, then you might want to compare how flying a plane is like picking a superb sales person.

### **Filing Your Pre-flight Plan**

Whether a novice or veteran you are trained as part of your certification and licensing process that the first step is to file a flight plan. In it you identify your route of travel, time of anticipated departure, time of expected arrival and other pertinent information such as yours and any other passenger names. Candidly is not this the same as identifying when and where you expect to conduct your interviews, as well as when the expected completion and hiring of your identified top candidate will come aboard?

### **Pre-Flight Visual Check**

Good pilots recognize the importance of visually checking the plane. Similarly, before skilled sales managers begin interviewing prospective candidates they know what they are looking for. A well thought out job description provides a good flight pattern for your selection. Ideally it has been tested and verified at least one level in management above you. In the absence of a formal job description, soliciting the input of your MVP – Most Valuable Pilot - already among your flight crew works rather well too. In other words, confidently start the interviewing sequence fully knowledgeable about what job characteristics, “hard” and “soft” skills and experience you are seeking in your candidate. This completes the outside visual check, if you will.

### **Cockpit Check**

Once in the cockpit pilots verify all mechanical and electronic readings. This is analogous to having a planned sequence of questions to ask and responses to elicit. Initially candidates can be asked a series of prequalifying questions during a telephone interview. This step will determine whom among the group of candidates you wish to interview in person. Following both the phone questionnaire and the face-to-face interview with the same questions with every candidate will ensure all have an equal opportunity to respond with their best answers, permitting you to determine the best-qualified individuals. Additionally, using such a Q & A pattern avoids haloing of candidates and is consistent with the flight plan you filed at the very beginning.

### **Taking Off**

Rating the candidates during the flight can be tricky, that is unless during the preflight procedures you build an evaluation grid that you use to score the interviewees and which is used to develop your short list of candidates.

### **Landing-Runway Left or Runway Right?**

Choices are an inevitable part of life and advisedly we recommend you select at least two finalists based on the objective criteria mentioned during the preflight and cockpit check phases. Coming close to the estimated time of arrival without a written offer of employment that you expect will be accepted will cause you angst, not to mention delaying the timetable you undoubtedly committed to your management.

### **Runway Selected**

At this step checkout all finalist references very thoroughly. Have developed a pre-set list of questions that can be posed. Offer penetrating questions like ‘rank David on a scale of 1 to 10 in Salespersonship, personal qualities, work ethic and sales performance to quota.’ A question such as ‘If there is one thing that you could offer that would improve the sales performance of David, what would you think it would be?’ will open up the reference to offer details you might never have uncovered otherwise. The point is use some imagination in this step, as the more penetrating and thoughtful your questions, the better you are able to validate prior assessments you formed during the interview and rating scoring phase.

### **Landing**

Now you have succeeded in attracting the finest candidate you can find in the timeframe previously identified. This is not the time to fall asleep at the stick. Keep your engines running while looking into the details required for a positive introduction of your selectee into your group and which ensures proper assimilation into your team and organization. That means you are the individual doing the introducing. Think about it. If you spent this much time filing a plan, doing preflight checks and succeeded in bringing her down, this is the time to maintain control of the plane. Attention to the details assuring a positive first job experience for your new representative will be appreciated and respected. This is an opportunity to demonstrate your genuine concern for your new team member and identify your new representative as a valuable member of your flight crew.

### **Parking at the Gate**

Before you exit, put together a “Getting Started Plan” for your new representative. In it you should identify all activities, objectives, responsible parties and dates targeted for completion of each. The list needs to be sequentially prioritized with most important activity to least important. As these activities are completed, acknowledge them and use this as an opportunity to discuss the progress your new representative is making. Your positive feedback will energize the new representative and serve to encourage completion of activities even further. This can be compared to going into the FAA office and filing completed flight reports.

A couple of milestones are achieved when you take an active and participatory role in this process. You establish your leadership style and the expectations held for each of you during the start up phase. Secondly, you create a glide path to put your representative on that can be measured and from which both of you are accountable. You can confidently and knowingly

put a “success” plan in place that is realistic, discerned, and from which you can lead from a responsible and authoritative position. Rather than leaving the new individual wandering about aimlessly, you put the new representative on a radar beam so together you can measure progress toward every identified objective.

#### Inside the Terminal

Superior sales management and supervision begins at the time of the initial face-to-face interview. What happens thereafter and throughout your supervision of the representative is directly reflective of the leadership you displayed during the interview phase. Furthermore supervising the sales activities, as well as setting meaningful and cooperative goals for your representative will be smoother thereafter. Delegation and abdication of any of the steps mentioned here is tantamount to an air pocket - that is the bump was felt, checking on the condition of plane and passenger may require corrections that are time consuming. Notwithstanding your new hire attaining quota immediately, it is difficult to imagine any single activity more gratifying than succeeding in bringing aboard another potential MVP. After all, at the end of this and any other flight, your desire is to be fully certified in recruiting, selecting and hiring the top sales performers and leading a squadron of over achievers.

© Don McNamara CMC 2001-2007