

thinktwice[®] Today

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October 2006 — Selecting Sales Talent

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ASK THE COACH

Q: Because I'm under pressure to fill an open sales territory, I'm afraid that I'm "overselling" the job. Can I be honest with candidates about the job's downsides without scaring them away?

A: In the long run hiring the *wrong* salesperson costs much more than having the open territory. Be honest about the characteristics of your open sales position, including the challenges. The *right* candidate – the one who will thrive and stay motivated long term – will enjoy those challenges. Think about:

- What is a typical day like in this position? Is the selling mostly by phone or in person? How much cold calling is required?
- What has made salespeople successful in the past in this job? Where have people failed? Share this with candidates.
- What is the biggest challenge of working in this sales territory? What type of a personality will *love* that challenge?

-Mary Altuvilla is a TLG Associate specializing in sales training, coaching and selection.

How to Make Sales Simulations Pay Off

A client told us about a near hiring disaster:

"We were ready to offer our open sales position to Lisa. She'd worked for our major competitors, had a decade of industry experience and was a top revenue producer in her former job. She dazzled us in her interviews – she was polished, professional and said all the right things. Then we put her through our sales simulation..."

"We asked her to analyze prospect and market data, then roleplay a sales presentation to that prospect. She choked. In fact, she told us that she couldn't complete the presentation. After some probing, we discovered that she'd been successful in past sales jobs by building relationships with existing clients in mature territories. But we needed someone who could analyze data, dive deep into accounts and make presentations to prospects. As much as we wanted her, she just wasn't the right fit."

A great sales simulation shows what a candidate will *actually do*...

What makes a great sales simulation?

A great sales simulation shows what a candidate will *actually do*, not what they *say they'd do*, if you hire them. A simulation puts candidates in a situation that mimics, or simulates, what they will typically experience in the job. Examples include: case studies, roleplays or sales presentations and in-basket exercises.

Whether you're developing your sales simulation in-house or using a consultant, make sure you follow these guidelines:

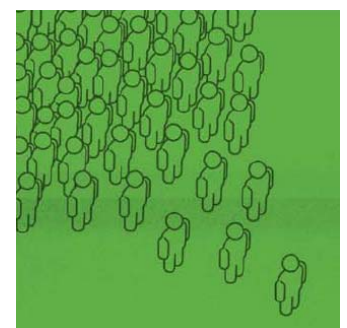
- **Tie simulations to sales competencies and behaviors.** Designing a sales simulation is like designing a house. Simulations require strong foundations, built specifically to draw out the behaviors that are critical to success in the sales job. This helps ensure that your simulation provides accurate feedback on the behaviors that correlate to sales success.
- **Keep it legal and consistent.** Remember that selection is an HR process that has legal implications. You must be able to demonstrate that every sales candidate is assessed based on the same criteria, at every stage of the selection process. Always administer your sales simulation the same way, for each candidate. Don't be tougher on one candidate over another – and definitely don't "wing it".
- **Customize it.** The more your simulation reflects the reality of the job, the better. If you buy an "off the shelf" sales simulation, invest in tailoring it to your organization's needs.
- **Train your assessors.** Knowing what you're seeing or hearing during a simulation – and knowing how to categorize and assess it – is one of the most difficult parts of using simulations. It's easy to get caught up in the details of a candidate's sales presentation, or get "wowed" by a candidate's strong impact. The people observing, assessing and scoring sales simulations should have training and practice in what to look for, and how to know behaviors when they see them.

Sales simulations are powerful tools that, if designed and administered properly, can prevent you from making big hiring mistakes that cost you time, dollars and customers.

— Phyllis Roteman, President, The Loyalty Group

Interested in learning more on how you can use sales simulations in YOUR organization?

Click [here](#) to learn more about The Loyalty Group's **Sales Selection in Action program**. Improve the caliber of sales talent you hire, consistently and efficiently, with training, selection systems and tools for sales managers and their HR partners.



Don't Shortcut

Shortcutting your sales selection process saves time in the short term, but it costs time, dollars and clients in the long run. [Is your company making costly hiring mistakes](#) by taking these shortcuts?

- Thinking short-term.**
 Managers often forget about the future and hire for today's needs. As positions open, take time to ask, "What new skills or traits does our sales organization need? What will make salesreps successful as our company grows?"
- Lacking different perspectives.**
 Sales managers who make hiring decisions on their own, or fail to seek diverse perspectives on candidates, are likely to make hiring mistakes. Get different views by inviting other sales managers, HR partners or non-sales managers to participate in the selection process.
- Ignoring red flags.**
 In a rush to fill openings, overzealous managers may ignore red flags in the hiring process. Pay attention to clues candidates give you and take time to pursue them. For example, does the candidate treat your assistant rudely? Do you detect a hint of defensiveness when you present him with tough questions?
- Inconsistency.**
 Are sales managers showing up for interviews at the last minute, without taking time to prepare and coordinate questions? Do managers cut interviews short or treat candidates differently when they "sense" that the candidate isn't a good fit? These hiring inconsistencies can cause your organization legal issues, and leave candidates with a poor impression of your company.

— Mary Altuvilla

Are Your Sales Recruitment and Selection Processes Aligned?

"I'm not getting the quality of candidates I need." That's a common complaint of managers. Often the problem is that the two partners in hiring top sales talent – recruiting (attracting top candidates) and selecting (assessing candidates and making a decision) – are not dancing to the same tune.

In some sales organizations, sales managers are responsible for both recruiting and hiring. In others, sales recruiters bring applicants to hiring managers. However your sales organization handles it, these two processes must be aligned.

Use this checklist as a test to see if your sales recruitment and selection processes are in sync.

Do recruiters and sales managers work as partners? According to a 2006 benchmarking [study](#) by SHRM, the top challenge for 64% of recruiters was the lack of responsiveness and feedback from managers about the resumes provided by recruiters. For 38% of recruiters, the top challenge was hiring managers who were unsure what skill sets they were looking for. To prevent these misunderstandings when new sales positions open, schedule a meeting with everyone involved. Clarify roles, expectations, timelines for hiring, criteria for recruiting and screening, etc. Make sure your recruiters and hiring managers start on the same page.

Do your recruitment messages accurately sell the position? Regularly review your recruiting messages and ads, to ensure that you're "selling" the open position to the right people with the right information. Many companies use the same generic sales ads over and over again, without ever updating them. Ask, "What has changed in this job since we posted this ad?" "How strong were the quality of applicants we received with these recruitment messages?" "Do our

recruitment messages sound like every other sales job description?" Look for generic-sounding job criteria, such as "self-starter," "closer" and "aggressive." What do those terms mean in *your* open sales job?

Do you prioritize needs? If you have a long laundry list of things you expect from sales candidates, you may never find the "right" person. Or you might screen out candidates who, with a little training, could be your next sales superstars.

Decide what [sales competencies and behaviors](#) are "must-haves" versus "nice-to-haves", at every step of the recruitment and selection process. This gives everyone involved a clear set of criteria against which to measure candidates. Challenge your assumptions about what candidates *must* bring to the job. Think about what is trainable and what isn't. For example, you can't train someone to love cold calling. But you can train someone who loves cold calling to get better at it.

—Mitzi Chollampel is TLG's Manager of Customer Loyalty

"New Cars Smell Funny Very Often"

Click [here](#) to learn how this phrase relates to SALES PROPOSALS in The Loyalty's Group's *Sales in Action* training. Your salespeople and their managers will be challenged to hunt for untapped budgets, dig for new opportunities and sell smarter!

Coming Next Month:

Succession Planning: Who Should Lead?

- Four critical skills for tomorrow's leaders.
- The new generation of leaders...who are they?
- Who shouldn't lead others...and what are their options?

Click [here](#) to figure out the average cost of a bad sales hire in your organization.