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Sales Success Can Now Be Predicted

Dr. Michael Santo, CEO of Rembrandt Advantage

Three years ago a Fortune 100 pharmaceutical firm approached us to see if they could better predict sales success. They employed 278 sales representatives in the USA and this division had reached annual billings of $1.1 billion. The first thing we suggested doing was to conduct a Top/Bottom study of their sales force. This is the age-old method for determining what, if any, skills differentiated top sales people from those performing at the bottom of the sales staff. We psychologically profiled the entire sales force and correlated this psychological information against the individual's actual sales performance. As predicted, we were able to identify five key areas of personality, which were held by the top performers and were absent from those performing at the bottom.

In fact, two profiles emerged as top sales profiles. One we called the Entrepreneurial profile, because this personality was high energy, lacked sensitivity to rules and guidelines and was highly driven to persuade others. The second profile, and by the way, the more successful profile, we called the Systematic profile. These people were very tenacious in following through, were rules driven, service minded and received their gratification from educating and helping people rather than through direct persuasion.

In building the most successful profile for a new and ever-changing sales climate, we invited the customer to research with us. After sorting through study materials, we uncovered the answer to the question, "why couldn't sales success be predicted with real certainty?" The answer is the study methodology employed. For years, the Top/Bottom study approach was effective. But why for years and not today? Ask that question today; "has sales changed from 5 years ago to today?" Unless you've been under a rock, your answer would be a resounding - definitely. Looking at what was effective yesterday does very little to determine what will work today and tomorrow.

With this new understanding, we developed a profile that would predict success in today's turbulent marketplace, one full of change. We forged a new horizon - we went to our customer's customers and asked them what they would like in a sales person who would be calling on their account? We visited 100 international, national and regional firms that were either customers of our customer or were firms with whom our customer would like to do business. We asked those customers about the personality they would prefer to work with, what levels of decision making authority they would need, what industry knowledge was necessary, both the client's industry and their customer's industry, and more.

Armed with this information, we constructed a customer-created model. We designed personality scoring to assess against the profile and put a working model in place two and one-half years ago. The results are in, and they are amazing.

If the sales applicant matched the "customer created profile" within a 3% deviation, they inevitably rose to the top of the sales force, with sales equaling 375% more than the average. And as the applicant's profile deviated to a greater extent, there was a corresponding drop in sales performance. In fact, if the applicant's profile deviated from the

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model more than 15% +/-, their sales performance fell to the bottom of the sales force, selling at less than half the average sales production.

Surprised? Yes, we were. However when you think about it, we really should have known the outcome because all we did was ask the customer what they wanted and then gave it to them. It doesn't take genius to understand that! Sometimes the simplest ideas make the most sense.

We then took this "customer created profile" and tested it in other industries. We had to fine-tune the model a bit because customer requirements were slightly different, but the power of understanding the customer and their requirements works just as well for small firms as it does for Fortune 100 firms.

Wouldn't you like to have the sales staff that could perform like these did?

If the sales applicant matched within 3% deviation, average sales were $1,050,000. When deviation varied at 6%, sales average fell to $778,000. At 10% deviation, sales average was a respectable $565,000. At 15%, $290,000. The company-wide average for all sales staff was $296,000.

Sales Production vs. Customer Requirements

Average $296,000 per sales assoc.

deviation from customer created model

3%   6%   10%   15%   all others