

Leading light

By Julia Payne



The sales operation at my firm has performed pretty well, but we seem to be finding it increasingly difficult to secure the deals, particularly the big value deals. How can we improve our sales function and get some better results from our people?

We often hear clients talk about the characteristics they look for when recruiting their sales people, but recent research that we've done suggests that having one set of attributes to recruit and promote against could be a recipe for disaster.

Improving sales performance today is a complex business. It's not just about pushing products and services, but increasingly about selling 'solutions'. These two aspects require very different approaches. Our research shows very clearly, for example, that outstanding 'product' sales people do not make outstanding 'solution' sellers. This has major implications on how businesses organise, recruit and develop their sales forces.

The first question we must address is "What is 'solution selling'?" In a recent survey of 40 IT software resellers, over 90% believed they sold solutions to their customers. However, we found only about 15% were engaging customers with good 'solution selling' with questions like: what are you trying to achieve in your business over the next three years?

This pattern is consistent across industries including pharmaceutical, financial services, transport and utilities where we see businesses historically good at driving sales performance, now struggling to get the same sales force to engage the customer in a more sophisticated way.

The second question we must then answer is "What makes an outstanding 'solution sales' person?" Until now, many people have believed that since both tasks are about selling, you simply need

to find people that have an aptitude for selling and good sales skills to succeed. On the contrary, it appears from our analysis that perfect 'product pushers' and successful 'solution sellers' actually have very different personalities and skills. So different, in fact, that 'product pushers' might actually be very bad 'solution sellers', and vice versa.

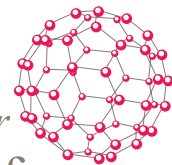
The research is very clear; outstanding product sellers have great skills in building confidence, persuasion and presentation backed up by good product knowledge. On the other hand an outstanding solution seller has extremely high empathy and team skills coupled with broader thinking capability and commercial awareness.

The third question then is "What are the implications for sales growth in business?" To remain competitive, businesses need to act fast. The 'frontline' sales force must look and behave differently to improve sales. The trick is focusing the right sales people on the right market. Get the product sales people continuing to sell where appropriate and develop the solution sales

capability by identifying, recruiting and developing those most likely to succeed in this more sophisticated market. Do not take your best product sales person and push them to the solution sales market. They will probably fail and leave.

The great news is there are now reliable tools guaranteed to identify who's who in your sales teams and to help you select the right person for the right job in the future. So there really is no time to waste if you want to see future sales success.

For more information visit www.chpd.com



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News

'Presenteeism' going unrewarded

Employers are warned to recognise staff that put in extra hours, or face high employee turnover rates.

New research from international recruitment company, Robert Walters, reveals that working longer hours without recognition is fast becoming the norm for a lot of employees around the world, with only 31% of bosses rewarding their staff for overtime.

Andrew Chancellor, Managing Director of Banking & Financial services at Robert Walters, said:

"With the increasing shortage of skilled staff around the world, employers should be thinking about ways to reward and retain staff.



Motivating and encouraging hard work is a great way of getting the best out of employees."

The research also found that as well as the 69% of employers that don't recognise overtime, there are a few employers that do reward the extra efforts their employees make - nine per cent offer time in lieu, career recognition and progression. Just 11% offer overtime pay and one per cent give gifts, such as dinner or theatre vouchers.

There is good news for UK workers as, along with Japan, we are most likely to reward overtime with pay, compared with Australia and New Zealand bosses who offer time off in lieu.