

HIRING

The SCIENCE of HIRING

▶ HIRING FOR BETTER SALES AND LEADERSHIP PERFORMANCE



can be arranged and rearranged as needed for whatever position a company is trying to fill.”

“Five to seven years of experience” could mean an applicant is great at what he does, or it could mean he worked for a low-performing culture that tolerated mediocrity. Or that he hates the work but somehow got stuck in the industry. Or that he was kept afloat by better performers around him. In short, experience is an unreliable data point. An example:

Before the real estate crash of 2008, banks were handing out home loans to anyone and everyone. To get by, the average Loan Officer needed to be personable, informed and capable of completing paperwork accurately. After the crash, only the most tenacious and opportunistic survived. What good

was five to seven years of experience in an applicant who lacked the behavioral competencies to thrive in a difficult environment?

Now let’s discuss the importance of performance competencies in manufacturing and wholesale distribution of tools and fasteners.

HIRING FOR TODAY – SALES

It’s no secret that sales under-performance and turnover continues to be a challenging business issue. Many new hires start strong and fade quickly, or they promise to bring loyal customers with them, a result that never materializes.

“Again, it has to do with the over-reliance on resumes and experience,” says Roman. “Data and analytics have revolutionized sports, and I strongly believe that applying similar

science to the hiring process can cut through all the noise and show companies who is truly motivated to sell.”

Caliper maintains a database of job models it uses to compare applicant pre-employment evaluations with proven top performers in similar roles. Because not all sales roles are the same, they created several different sales models. Nevertheless, certain competencies tend to show up again and again in successful salespeople.

Influence and persuasion are often critical competencies — regardless of the industry or the length of the sales cycle — as are relationship building, composure and resiliency.

“These are intuitive ideas,” adds Roman, “but the problem is you can’t see these qualities on a resume.”

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If you’ve been around long enough to make a few observations about life, you’ll probably agree: the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Those in the business of manufacturing, distributing or selling tools, fasteners and accessories should relate. Technology has advanced and materials have improved over time, and consumer trends and needs are always in flux. Yet your customers still expect reliable service and quality products, and these products’ purpose is still to construct useful things. And, as always, you need good salespeople and managers to make the most of your business opportunities in this arena.

One thing that *has* changed for the better is the science of hiring and developing salespeople and managers. Unfortunately, many businesses still rely on out-of-date hiring methods that fail to improve

year-over-year results and do little to build for the future. You know that to stay competitive you have to be on top of the latest industry developments and recognize where the market is going. Why undermine yourself, then, by taking an outdated approach to hiring the people that are so critical to your success?

OVERRATING EXPERIENCE AND UNDERVALUING PERSONALITY

“A lot of under-performing companies have been bringing in new employees the same way for decades, yet somehow expect better results each time,” says Ricardo Roman, director of partner success with Caliper, a talent-management firm that specializes in hiring and development. “Hiring managers and HR people often overemphasize years of experience while ignoring personality, which is the real driver of performance.”

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Caliper, a STAFDA business partner that offers pre-employment assessments to association members at a discount, uses behavioral competencies to evaluate clients’ job candidates. Caliper’s competency library is based upon years of internal research and analysis and has been mathematically validated against the most rigorous academic studies, workforce-development data and job-performance ratings across all major industries, including manufacturing and wholesale distribution.

“Competencies are rooted in observable data and are a much more concrete and scientifically valid way of assessing job-performance potential,” says Amie Mansfield, Ph.D., Caliper’s director of psychometrics. “They’re like building blocks that

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HIRING

The good news for hiring managers is that a scientifically-validated pre-employment assessment can measure them. By evaluating your existing sales team members and applicants, you can see which ones are worth the investment of training and development and which ones are likely to struggle no matter how much time you spend.

Former STAFDA president and current president of Target Building Materials, Greg Drouillard, says, "Caliper's assessment tools have enabled me to make more informed hiring decisions, and knowing a new employee's strengths and potential performance concerns ahead of time also sharpens the focus on coaching and career development."

HIRING FOR TOMORROW – LEADERSHIP

Consider a scenario in which a

company needs to hire a production supervisor. Bill has ten years experience and speaks persuasively and engagingly in the interview. Alan has two years experience and comes across as reserved. Using the traditional resume + interview hiring method, most hiring managers would choose Bill.

Bill struggles, however, and this hiring manager ruefully decides to cut her losses and terminate him. After some more digging, she discovers that Bill depended heavily on the foremen below him to deal with problems and oversee projects, and that he cherry-picked his references (like we all would).

Luckily this is hypothetical, so our imaginary hiring manager gets a redo. This time she takes a competency-based approach. The pre-employment report for Bill shows

his strongest competencies to be relationship building and influence and persuasion. Those may be fine qualities, but there's no scientific correlation between those competencies and top performance in a production supervisor's role.

Alan, on the other hand, scores highly in planning and priority setting, safety focus and directing, competencies that research has unequivocally shown to be important for success in that position. Alan may need training in the specifics, but his assessment spells out clearly why he is worth the investment.

After all, when you hire a supervisor, you are not just filling an immediate need; you may be hiring a future executive, and an HR manager can revisit the assessment results later when that individual is up for promotion. Furthermore, there's no better way to evaluate your pool of high-potential employees than to conduct team-wide competency evaluations.

"We applied a great deal of complex mathematical and statistical analyses to developing these competencies," says Mansfield, "and the result is unprecedented predictive accuracy."

Or, as Roman says more simply, "Why guess when you can know?" **CS**

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