Lose the Gut Hire

Before you bring on a sales professional, use an outside sales tool

STORY BY **DAN STALP** | PHOTO BY **KENNY JOHNSON**

Q: *We have a long sales cycle—anywhere from six to 18 months. Because of this, it takes time to understand the effectiveness of our new sales team members. We know some sales "professionals" exist who are really good getting themselves on payroll only to under-perform until the guarantee runs out. Any advice on how we break this cycle?*

—Rob Hoback, director of sales and business development, MIQ Logistics

A: You are not alone. Many a sales manager has lamented with me months after a seemingly good hire. The person they interviewed for the sales position is nowhere to be found once they came on board with the salary guarantee.

With the longer, more complex sale, it does make more sense to have a higher base. You want your new, qualified salespeople to be able to stay with you long enough to have success. Yet we don't want them to be able to make ends meet on the base salary alone. Ideally there is a shared, uncomfortable feeling between the company and the sales professional when sales are not coming in.

Although I am not a sales compensation expert, I do know that which gets rewarded gets done. I have talked with leaders from organizations whose compensation plans were undermining the performance of their salespeople, and they didn't know it.

Also, many companies who evaluate sales professionals with an outside sales tool before they hire tend to have fewer surprises than those who hire strictly on resumes and gut.

The idea of hiring salespeople because you like them is a fatal flaw for most companies.

When done this way, most sales managers hire to their strengths and their weaknesses. So, if a sales manager is not careful, he or she might have several people with the same weaknesses. This can cause a downward sales spiral quickly.

Lastly, there are many sales metrics that can be tracked before a salesperson makes a sale to indicate they are trending in the right direction. These metrics also allow you to be aware of specific areas in which your sales professionals need extra coaching or development. In my experience, most sales organizations do not track these metrics because they don't know how, they don't think it matters, or they think it's too much work.

This is where the definition of insanity begins to rear its ugly head. Meaning, if I continue to do things the way I've always done them, then I shouldn't expect different results.

Q: *What is the best way to track all my prospect and client contacts, along with notes, follow-up tasks and other types of pertinent information?*

—Greg King, director, business development, Facilities Solutions Group

A: My easy answer: whatever way you will actually do it! For example, whether I manually track this information or make use of sophisticated customer relationship manager (CRM) software, I must have the

discipline first to make either option work for me.

CEOs tend to be really upset when they spend tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars on a CRM program only to have their salespeople not use it. They fell victim to salespeople's or sales manager's excuses: "If we had software, we would track this information." Bull!

So, what follows is what I see people doing to track this information:

Some successful salespeople (mainly in the financial services industries) still use the "one card" system for keeping track of prospects or clients and follow up. Old school? Yes. Does it work? Yes.

Others use spreadsheets that can sort by company names, individual names, follow-up dates, reminders, etc. Again, this works.

Still others use Microsoft Outlook—which for most salespeople is more than enough horsepower to do what they need to do. It also ties nicely with their emails and calendar, which is already in Microsoft Outlook.

Lastly, the CRM programs we tend to see the most (that are not industry specific) are Microsoft Dynamics and salesforce.com. The thing to remember about technology is it will only allow you to do whatever you are doing faster. But if you're not already doing it, it will be of little help to you. **KCB**