

Strategic Sales Staffing – Sourcing Strategies

In our last article we discussed the importance of documented roles and responsibilities. This is important for your existing sales staff and critical when hiring new sales staff.

Once you determine what it is you are looking for, you must decide where to find it. There are two main methods for your search:

Direct Sourcing – whereby you call or network specific companies that you know have salespeople with the skills and abilities you need; or

Indirect Sourcing – whereby you post or advertise the position and prospective candidates respond to it.

Direct Sourcing, while time-consuming, generally yields better candidates. These “passive” candidates are not looking, are generally successful, and will come to you if they see your opportunity as a better fit in their career development.

Indirect Sourcing, while easier, is even more time-consuming and generally yields weaker candidates. These “active” candidates are generally looking because a) they are currently unemployed, or b) they see the proverbial writing on the wall and know they need to “get out of Dodge quickly” – for whatever reasons. When doing indirect sourcing, it is critical that you use the proper screening tools so you can identify the strongest active candidates.

These are generalities, obviously. Just because someone is an active candidate does not mean he or she is not a good candidate, nor does it necessarily mean you are hiring someone else’s “baggage” or “problem.”

Direct Sourcing Strategies

There are many ways to conduct direct sourcing:

- Use a professional recruiting firm;
- Give incentives to your existing staff for providing employee referrals;
- Ask other business owners which sales reps they like and respect from other companies;
- Attend functions that sales reps attend: chamber meetings, networking groups, associations, etc., and network;
- Conduct web research. Generally, it is easy to find contact information for salespeople on a website. Search out respected sales organizations and see what you can find via the web.

Indirect Sourcing Strategies

Newspaper advertisements are generally not used for professional sales postings. Salespeople today are typically too tech savvy to use anything but internet job boards.

The Internet is a tremendous asset in indirect sourcing. However, it is expensive in terms of time. There are millions of active candidate resumes online and many of them are “salespeople.” When our firm does a posting for a specific type of salesperson, we typically yield 300-500 resumes. That’s a lot of screening time! Generally out of those 300-500 we will conduct phone interviews with approximately 30. Out of the 30 we will generally move about five to an in-person interview. Out of those five we usually hire one. Total “typical” time for one hire is about 80 to 100 hours! That is one reason to consider using a professional recruiting firm.

A Word on Recruiting Firms

Like all professions, there are good and not-so-good recruiting firms. The benefits of using a professional recruiter are saving time, tapping into a network of top-notch candidates, and receiving guarantees that you do not receive when you do the search yourself. A good recruiter will provide all of these, and perhaps more. A weak one will cost you time and provide inadequate candidates or candidate flow. For this reason, it is important that you do not cut costs in this area. A solid professional recruiter will most often not work on a contingency fee arrangement, will not accept anything lower than 20% of the annual pay of the position being sourced, and will not work in a non-exclusive scenario. If you find a firm that will, you could be sacrificing quality for a few saved dollars and this will cost you more time and money than doing it correctly in the first place. If you cannot make this financial commitment, consider alternative sourcing avenues.

Whether you are conducting a search on active or passive candidates, there are strategies to consider. The important thing to take away from this article is to have a strategy for sourcing your candidates and not to approach it in a haphazard or reactive way.

In our next article we will delve deeper into the recruiting process and discuss processes and tools to help you execute your sourcing strategy.

Until then...

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