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Ready, Set, Sell!

Three steps to shortening salesperson ramp-up time that work

By Jim Peduto

One of the laments I repeatedly hear is, "It takes a long time to learn our industry." That statement is usually made in the context of a discussion about how it takes "a couple of years" to get a salesperson to be productive.

Seriously? The truth is that when properly executed, ramping up salespeople should take nowhere near that long. You can calculate your ideal ramp up time with this free tool: https://knowledgeworx.com/knowledgebase/salesperson-ramp-up-calculator.

Unfortunately, most organizations find that ramping up new salespeople takes longer than it should. The problem is a failure to have a systematic and proven process that identifies elite sales talent and ensures a rapid time to revenue.

Having analyzed 1.9 million salespeople and managers over the past 20 years, I know that shortening salesperson ramp-up time is a combination of three factors.

Select talented salespeople: There is no substitute for talent. Customers expect more from salespeople than ever before. The internet has rendered most traditional sales functions — providing technical information, basic product knowledge and technical specifications — superfluous.

Modern buyers demand a challenging and insightful conversation that compels them to think differently about their businesses. Unfortunately, fewer than one in five salespeople have that ability. The only way to identify candidates that will succeed is to use a sales-specific assessment that is customized to your selling environment and screens every applicant. Then you need to have a structured and measurable hiring process.

Coach relentlessly: The best sales managers coach every day. That's right — they spend 30 to 60 minutes per salesperson, per day. They also have honed their coaching skills so that each coaching session builds a stronger salesperson. If your sales managers have not received formal sales management training, they are probably in the 93 percent of managers that lack effective sales leadership skills. The organizations with the shortest time to revenue have great coaches that build elite salespeople.

Sales-Specific Onboarding: Most organizations do a great job of the initial onboarding. Human Resources ensures that all the forms are completed and that policies are communicated. If there is a pre-boarding program, the first day and week might be well organized. However, successful sales onboarding requires much more.

Both technical product knowledge and sales development should be part of a structured process that occurs over a 90-day period. The days of the "vendor parade" where a new salesperson meets with multiple vendors to gain product knowledge may have worked well 10 years ago, but there are far more efficient and effective options. For example, we have built industry immersion curriculums that provide on-demand learning and superior knowledge transfer.

Learning sales methodologies and specifically how to sell consultatively is another matter. Regardless of experience, always assume that your new hire needs sales training. Only 27 percent of salespeople with more than 10 years of selling experience have strong selling skills. Whether your hire has lots of experience or is new to sales, plan on developing their selling competencies.

Salesperson ramp-up times can be dramatically reduced, but it means excelling at each step. The companies that are committed to the process will build a distinct competitive advantage as they add more elite salespeople who quickly ramp up. **SM**