



The A Player talent strategy

By Mark McCarthy

Last month, I explained why finding and managing talented performers should be at the top of your strategic sales agenda. I could be accused of gross over-simplification with that short article, something that my colleagues and clients would never accuse me of!

But I think it is time to state the obvious: that is, the obvious around sales performance, sales effectiveness, sales methodology, high performance, sales training. I believe us so-called practitioners, find it too easy to thrust upon our clients the latest fad or pseudo research when helping to extract or create the environment for high performance in the sales organisation. True, the client side provides the need. But, as I have often stated to fellow practitioners, do you give the client what they say they *want* or what they *need*... well do you want to stay in business or not? Of course, the propensity is what they *want*.

But I sense a real change about to occur in the practitioner's world driven by the client (sales management and company directors) saying "no more".

Some 4 months ago, I met with a client based in Boston, US, who was about to IPO (initial public offering). The business had grown to \$150m in about 5 years and had developed a real niche and competitive position and it was time to get a return from that investment and more capital. I asked the chief operating officer (COO) (responsible for sales too) and whose background was in sales, what he would do next to drive sales forward to the next level. Expecting to get a

complicated strategy-based reply, instead he said "hire well and you will not have to waste time and money on support resources to compensate on sub optimal sales people."

In essence, what he had learned over his sales career and what he had picked up from very successful business leaders was that talent was the number one item on the strategic agenda. And there was no number two or three! That if you hired optimally (talent), why would you need sales training, assessments, development plans, sales methodologies or even technology; in the powerful and compelling book from Buckingham & Coffman, *FIRST, break all the rules*, this is a clear message.

If you had hired the correct person to do a job, then where is the issue? Selling is not complicated because buying is not complicated; in the b2b context. What makes this process more complicated, is ineffective sales organisations. I did say an over-simplification at the top of this article. But I think the COO above is right. Let me explain further what I think he was saying and why I think the client is moving to a new understanding when it comes to getting the appropriate level of performance from their sales organisation.

The "experts" (the catch-all phrase for gurus, management theorists, Jack and Jill) are now talking about achievement of high performance in yet another guise; talent management strategy. You know... the aspirational call to arms that comes from the HR or Learning and Development departments, usually as thinly veiled training courses or development paths through some curriculum based training events. Training events are seen by sales management as an opportunity to

get the troops off the road and do some socialising and share war stories with colleagues. In my 15 years sales management experience, more is learned through the *bonhomie* in the evening than any classroom event during the day!

So can talent management strategy help sales management increase the chances of meeting quota or achieving sustainable growth? Or is talent management just another one of those HR management catchphrases to help align to the higher organisational goals?!

You don't miss targets or goals (what you have is what you are), but you miss the behaviours/actions needed to meet the numbers you aimed for. This could well be down to the lack of execution and/or doing the wrong things to get the desired result. Nonetheless, business results are a direct result of organisational behaviour... what people do or don't do.

High performance companies* exhibit one fundamental feature that can be easily and clearly defined, that rises above all else and answers the most critical question, "How do these companies do it?" The answer is that they have a disproportionately higher number of A Players than the competition; A Players in sufficient depth, what I call A Player Quotient (ApQ™). These A Players work out "the how" for themselves, their colleagues and the company. They thrive in ambiguity, are highly resourceful, innovative and are receptive to internal and external factors (they adapt). When they believe new skills or knowledge is needed they are self-motivated and directed in their learning. They don't wait for the generic training course!



This article is about...
The role of top grade salespeople in selling

According to Dr Brad Smart (creator of Topgrading™), A Players will not work for B or C managers. Leaders and managers can't achieve high performance by themselves or in isolation. They need others to do it, and ideally A Players and in the sales organisation first and foremost.

Topgrading™ is a robust and reliable method to **finding and hiring A Players**. It ensures you hire an A Player and not their CV or the company they currently work for, or their last sales performance. You may or may not be surprised how many hires are nothing to do with the individuals capabilities, as opposed to what company they previously worked for, the hiring sales manager thinking they must be good if they worked for that company and did that. **An A Player is someone who has 90% chance of doing the job that only 10% of the target population could achieve.**

What I have attempted to illustrate in this article and the previous one, is that required results or outcomes come from the appropriate behaviours and actions of individuals. **A Players** work out what needs to be done; the appropriate attitude and necessary behaviours. Typically, the sales organisation controls organisational performance as it interfaces with prospects and clients in a white-hot competitive environment.

If you could have 75% of your sales organisation as A Players, what would be the impact on your organisation or business? A source of sustainable competitive advantage would be one of them. It is time for sales management to recalibrate their time and focus on becoming talent leaders, this has to be their primary role. And there is a method to support this ambition which will underpin long term high performance in a sustainable, no nonsense way and save you real money along the way.

* Sourced from Double Digit Growth, Michael Treacy; Profit from the Core, Chris Zook, Accenture and Bain.

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About the Author

Mark McCarthy is a founding director of Meta-Lucid Ltd, a firm of performance practitioners specialising in 'transformational' based interventions around talent management programmes that enable people to "think and do" beyond their limits to achieve improved business outcomes and results. Mark has a demonstrable track record over the last 15 years which has involved senior sales management positions in the B2B market place with high profile organisations such as HP, Dell, and Morse Group, executing both direct and indirect sales strategies. He has developed a core expertise in business and sales management processes and organisational alignment models.

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A man is but the product of his thoughts: what he thinks, he becomes.

Mohandas Gandhi

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The mind is everything. What you think, you become.

The Buddha

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Don't worry if you don't know what these Islamic terms mean

Bai' Salam - Salam means a contract in which advance payment is made for goods to be delivered later. The seller undertakes to supply some specific goods to the buyer at a future date in exchange for being paid in advance a price fully paid at the time of contract. According to the normal rules of the Shariah, no sale can be made unless the goods are in existence at the time of the bargain, but a Salam sale forms an accepted exception to the general rule provided the goods are defined and the date of delivery is fixed. It is necessary that the quality of the commodity intended to be purchased is fully specified leaving no ambiguity leading to potential disputes. The objects of this sale are goods and cannot be gold, silver or currencies because these are regarded as monetary values exchange of which is covered under rules of Bai al Sarf, i.e. mutual exchange which must be hand to hand without delay. Except for this, Bai' Salam covers almost everything which is capable of being definitely described as to quantity, quality and workmanship.

Bai' bil Wafa - Bai' bil Wafa is a sale with a right in the seller, having the effect of a condition, to repurchase (redeem) the property by refunding the purchase price. According to the majority of Fuqaha (experts) this is not permissible.

Daman - This is 1) Contract of guarantee, security or collateral; 2) Responsibility of entrepreneur or manager of a business; one of two basic relationships toward property, entailing bearing the risk of its loss.

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