Finding the right sales professionals to work for us has always been and will always be one of the biggest challenges of managers and business owners. Some of the changes that have occurred since Gen-Xers and the early Gen-Yers joined the workforce have complicated things even further and the selection game (and the retention one) is now full of new rules. The good news is that if the task is now more complicated, the solution is incredibly simple. It’s called ‘Planning.’ Talented sales professionals don’t just fall into our hands. We need to have a solid recruitment and selection strategy. What follow are some of the key steps and activities that we can plan for to ensure we hire and keep the best.

No best practice, or rather business imperative, has been consistently the same over the years and as important for a large organization as it is for a small operator, like building a strong sales team. Arguably, this is the most important aspect of a company’s success and yet it is still one of the most challenging. Why it is so difficult to find the right people and what can you do to succeed?

**Recruitment**

Recruitment is the process by which we seek to create a pool of suitable applicants from which new sales professionals are selected. A proper recruitment strategy and plan requires a very proactive approach, meaning that we need to plan for it.

**Have a Constant Stream of Applicants**

If you have a small staff and somebody leaves without giving notice, you need to be able to replace them quickly to avoid being short-staffed. However, you don’t want to hire them quickly and bring people on board that are not qualified for the job. That’s why you should always strive to have a stack of current applications available (no more than 6 months’ old) and you should even consider meeting essential destination for software sales people.
with some of the strongest applicants regularly even if you don’t have anything available at the time when you are meeting them (be upfront, though, with them and tell them that you are meeting with them in case you will need them in the future).

**Identify the Best Source**

In order to determine the best recruitment source, you first need to familiarize yourself with the job description and job specifications (each position at your company or store should have a job description). This information will tell you the characteristics of both the job and the people who will fill it. So, for instance, if you are hiring for a roadman responsible for selling sports uniforms to coaches and schools, you will not only need to make sure that you seek individuals with a past experience or studies that reflect great communication and interpersonal skills (job requirements), you should also identify where (best source) to look for to increase your chances of finding the right individuals for the job.

- **Students**
  They are most definitely one of your best recruitment options in this example, and pretty much in general in retail. This is not just because most of them want and need to work, but because they can in many cases relate and identify with the product, the brand and the experience very well being users themselves and can be therefore more effective salespeople. Never underscore the importance of finding individuals who are truly passionate about the job, your company, your brand and your products. If you manage to find these people, your success is almost guaranteed, as they will see their job as an opportunity to turn a passion into something profitable. Advertise open positions in student newspapers, or place a notice on dormitory or student union bulletin boards. As well, consider contacting department offices within the school or the Placement Department to find out if they have work-study or internship programs.

- **Personal Friends and Colleagues**
  Ask your own personal friends and acquaintances if they know of anyone who would be great to work for your store or business. Referrals are an incredible source as they yield a lower possibility for turnover and more likelihood of better performing employees.

- **Current Employees**
  Promote a ‘recruitment culture’ within your store and company and encourage your current staff to be recruiters of talent themselves. This is a great way to attract suitable candidates as your current employees tend to refer their friends, who are likely to have similar work habits and work attitudes. Offer a bonus or incentive for recruiting new people. This way, you not only ensure that your employees feel motivated to fulfill the recruiter role, but you also have a way of thanking them for their efforts (bonus should be paid after a 90-day trial period with the new hire).

- **Permanent Recruiting Brochure**
  Professionally printed material that publicizes the benefits and opportunities of working for you should always be available at the store. Small wallet size cards highlighting the company’s positions, culture and benefits, the requirements of the jobs and providing directions where and
how to apply can be very effective. Make them fun and catchy so potential candidates will notice them and will be more inclined to take and use them.

- **Sports Events and Functions**
  By attending events such as soccer, softball, little league games, etc. and by networking amongst the people you meet there, you increase your chances of meeting with the right individuals who are your target audience for your hiring activity (remember to bring your wallet size recruitment cards to give to them).

- **Sports/Professional Magazines & Professional Sites Ads**
  Written/posted ads can reach a wider audience and they are the most familiar form of employment advertising. For highly specialized recruits, ads should be placed in professional (sports) magazines.

- **MySpace (Outside-the-Box Recruiting!)**
  Well, this might be the future!! More than 80% of the site’s registered members fall into the core demographic of 16-to-34-year-olds, a large number of whom are college-educated professionals with as much as 13 years of work experience. Retail workers are a diverse group, and MySpace offers access to hundreds of thousands of retail workers from top brands. For example, retail giant Best Buy has a member-supported group on MySpace full of current and past employees. There are also special-interest groups like softball and skiing, which are great sites if you run a sporting goods store or ski resort.

‘Sell’ the Company (and the Brand)
No recruitment strategy will ever work unless you sell your store, the job, the brand and the company. Emphasize your benefits (health, flexible work hours, part-time, vacation pay, etc.), any kind of educational assistance programs available, the training available, growth opportunities, and the culture of the company. Yes, money is very important, but candidates are more and more interested in learning and growth. Without these no money will keep them in place and no money will motivate them to do a good job for you.

**Selection**
Selection is the process of deciding which recruits should be hired. Selection is a formal, in-depth conversation conducted to evaluate the applicant’s suitability for the job. Basically, the goal is to answer the questions:
Can the applicant do the job?
Will the applicant do the job?

How does the applicant compare with others who are being considered for the job?
Selection interviewing is not just asking questions. Selection interviewing involves a series of steps that need to be followed in logical sequence. In a word, it requires careful planning.
• **Step One: Prepare for the Interview**

  **Review the Job Description**
  Review the job description to identify the job objectives – specific responsibilities, tasks, duties, and outcomes that the employee is expected to produce – and the knowledge, skills and personal traits that are required to attain those objectives.

  **Review and Screen the Candidates’ Applications or Resumes**
  The screening of the application forms and resumes is done by comparing the information they contain – skills, knowledge and experience – with what you require for the job (as you find it in the job description for the position available). If they match, you will want to see the candidates. If they don’t, you will file those resumes for future uses (other job openings). It is a good practice to sort the resumes into three groups:

  - **Yes candidates**: you want to see them
  - **Maybe candidates**: you will only see them if the yes candidates do not fit your needs
  - **No candidates**: their resume does not match your requirements for the job and therefore you don’t want to see them.

  **Prepare Information about the Job to Exchange with the Candidate during the Interview**
  Store/company history, business, culture (you give the applicants information that keeps their interest in working for you high without overselling it – career opportunities, training opportunities, fun and casual, work environment, etc.); job responsibilities, duties and the skills you want; performance standards; hours; location; pay; benefits; introductory period; vacation time; working conditions.

  **Arrange a Suitable Place for the Interview Free from Interruptions and Schedule the Appointments**
  You need to make sure to allot plenty of time for the interviews. It can take anywhere from 15 minutes to 1 hour or more. You don’t want to rush. Allow about 30 minutes between each candidate so you can review and summarize your notes and have a break and clear your mind.

  **Prepare an Interview Schedule**
  If more than one person is to interview the candidate, make sure that everyone is present to interview when a candidate comes in for the first time.

  **Develop a Schedule for the Interview Process**
  If possible, communicate the schedule to the applicants prior to their arrival. Let them know what to expect by listing all the steps in the process: Type of interview, time,
Be Prepared That Not All Candidates will Show Up/Be Prepared to Hire Immediately
If a candidate has great references and your gut says this person is right, then it is wise to make an offer immediately. You don’t want to lose a great candidate.

Prepare the Interview Questions
Based on your list of requirements for the position (as in the job description) you can create your interview questions aimed at determining to what extent the candidates possess the required competencies and if they will be able to achieve the position’s goals.

- **Step Two: Conduct the Interview**
  Step two consists of conducting the interview, including:

  **Open the Interview**
  Establish rapport; provide an overview of the interview process.

  **Ask Questions and Take Notes**
  Gather information. Make sure to use open-ended questions (how, what, when, etc.), and always follow up a yes or no answer with an open-ended question (i.e., “Tell me about a time when you were able to sell an item that was a lot higher in price than the customer’s original request. What happened? How did you manage to do it? What was the customer’s response?”). Ask the same questions and record responses systematically to have a reliable base for comparison. Also, ask contrary evidence questions or questions that ask the applicants to give you examples of times when they were not able to perform a certain task (i.e., “Tell me about a time when you were not able to answer an objection. What happened? How did you feel about it? What did you learn from it?”).

  **Give Information and Answer the Candidate’s Questions**
  “Sell” the position, the company, the brand and the product.

  **Close the Interview**
  Thank the candidate for his or her attention and interest. Indicate what the next step will be and the time frame within which it will occur. Ask for references. Tell each applicant that no employment offer will be made until satisfactory reference checks and a drug test are made (when applicable).

  80% of the interview time should be devoted to asking questions. No matter how long the interview will take – 1, 2 or 3 hours – the percentage of time devoted to each task should not change. For example, in a two-hour interview we would still spend 80% of our time asking questions, which is equivalent to 96 minutes (80% of 120 minutes).
• **Step Three: Evaluate Your Notes and Compare Candidates**  
  Complete an evaluation form or firm up your notes, noting specific information about the candidate wherever possible. Rate the candidate. This is crucial. You may not trust your memory to recall the detail of the interview at a later point in time. Don't make any notes about the applicant that could be discriminatory.

• **Step Four: Project a Professional Image**  
The image created during the hiring process tells a lot about your store and company's values and culture. Pay attention to the image you create to attract the best and most highly skilled job candidates. Link the hiring process to your company values. For example, if you value "customer first" and "employee empowerment," be sure to demonstrate that in your hiring process.

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**...AND Don’t Forget the Baby Boomers Retirees**

According to AARP, the nonprofit membership organization for people age 50 and over, there’s been a 40% increase in job-hunting retirees and a 20% increase in companies seeking such experienced workers in the last three years.
• **Why?**
  Young workers need extensive training, close supervision and seasoning that comes only with time and experience. Whereas, retirees are ready, skilled and willing to work right away.

• **Who are They?**
  Many of these individuals are early retirees, or workers who lost their jobs due to mergers or downsizing. The majority of these people want to work, many of them can’t afford not to. And they bring years of experience, skills and knowledge to the workplace.

• **Why Do They Want to Work?**
  According to an AARP/Roper Report, when asked about retirement plans, 80% of 60-year olds said they plan to work at least part-time during retirement. They want to be active and productive, not idle; they enjoy a heightened sense of self-worth; they take pride in their work; and they enjoy working with others.

• **What Are They looking for?**
  Flexible work schedules and assignments, opportunities to learn new things and the ability to advance.

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