

TARKENTON

IDEAS AT WORK

How to Build Your Sales Dream Team

Takeaways

- The best salespeople are focused on more than just selling
- Focus on vision and sales philosophy over tasks when hiring salespeople
- Everyone in your organization contributes to sales

I've built a lot of businesses over the years, but here's a secret: I don't believe in selling. At least, not "selling" as most people think of it.

I once attended a sales seminar, where they spent hours teaching us all the classic techniques: The soft close, the hard sell, overcoming objections, the whole nine yards. I hated it. Everything was about how to manipulate someone into doing what you want them to do. But I've never been in business to trick people; I believe the mission of business is to *help* people!

So my companies have always approached sales differently from many other organizations. This article's author, Leslie Rae, has been a great partner with us for many years, and she really gets sales. She works with our team to get everyone thinking and acting on the same page in our businesses, and has been a great mentor to many of our leaders. Read this carefully, because I believe you'll learn a lot!



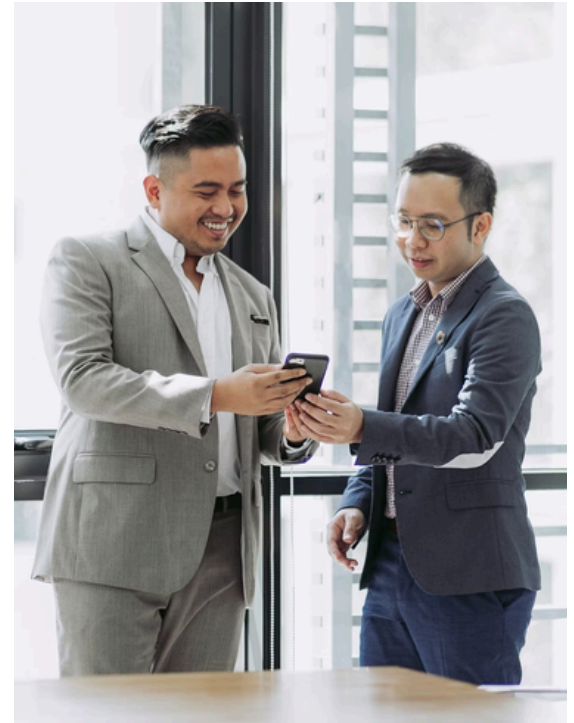
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How to Build Your Sales Dream Team

Like it or not, when you became an entrepreneur, you immediately became a salesperson – taking on arguably THE most important role in your company. And for many business owners that can feel....well, hard. Uncomfortable. Overwhelming.

Even if you love selling, being both a successful business owner and a full-time salesperson is exhausting, and it will take valuable energy away from you leading your company toward your biggest goals. And if sales start and stop with you, your business's growth has a natural ceiling.

So, when it's time to build a sales team, what should you look for? How do you ensure the people representing your company are as passionate, knowledgeable, persuasive, and as successful as you? Or even better?



Redefining Sales

The first step is to reframe how you think about sales. Over time, “sales” has become a negative concept, conjuring up images of sketchy salespeople using high-pressure tactics. In reality, the best salespeople are focused on more than just selling; they are focused on problem-solving and relationship-building. The most successful salespeople know that listening to a prospect’s needs and questions is more effective than telling them about your newest bell or whistle; they know that people are eager to buy if they believe you can solve their problem.

When we advise our clients on hiring salespeople, we tell them to look for people who excel at building relationships. They’re good listeners, good problem-solvers, and good long-term thinkers. Those are the hallmarks of a successful salesperson.

The Interview

During the interview process, here are four core skills to look for:

- **Listening.** Empathy and good listening skills go hand-in-hand when making authentic connections with people and earning their trust.
- **Problem-solving.** Recognizing how your company’s products and services can solve a client’s problem is key, so look for someone who tends to present relevant information in a positive way, rather than from a place of fear.

- **Natural curiosity.** Showing genuine interest in other people can spark relevant, intentional questions designed to identify the best way to address a need or problem.
- **Long-term focus.** You want salespeople who are more invested in how the relationships they build positively impact the bottom line over the long-term, rather than someone singularly focused on the initial sale.

Ask fewer task-based questions, such as, “Have you sold SaaS products before?” or “Tell me about your biggest sale.” Those answers are less important than responses to questions such as, “What’s your sales philosophy?”, “Tell me how you build a relationship,” or “How do you like to be sold to?” Your goal should be to find someone you’re excited to have talking to your potential clients.

As you screen potential salespeople, be sure to share your vision, company goals, and sales philosophy. Doing so will help job applicants assess whether they are a fit for your culture and process.

Understand that finding the right person takes time. You may even find your best candidates are already on staff – or they’re one of your loyal customers. They already love your product or service and believe in the vision; they may just need an invitation to consider a role change.



Everyone Sells

The four traits listed above are important to look for in every person you hire.

This brings us to another “reframing” of how you think about sales: Everyone on your team is a salesperson. That’s right, everyone from the receptionist to the product development team to the accounting staff. Every single person in your organization plays an important role in growing your business. How can everyone be a salesperson? (And how do they get their job done, if they have to be selling too?) It all comes down to how we define “sales.”

Sales happen when a prospect becomes convinced that you can solve their problem. The way each staff member does his or her job has a direct effect on sales, either by:

- **Bringing them in** (closing the first sale)
- **Keeping them happy** (retaining clients and encouraging ongoing sales)
- **Getting referrals** (generating new clients for additional sales)

How your website is designed has an enormous impact on whether or not a prospect decides to take the next step, so your tech team is also an important part of the sales process. How your receptionist answers the phone and handles questions is a huge factor in whether or not a new client or prospect feels happy and confident about doing business with you, so your receptionist is part of your sales team. How an account executive handles issues and solves problems for existing clients can be the difference between renewals and cancellations, as well as driving a stream of referrals, so they are part of sales, too.

Your best “salespeople” might just be the project managers who solve problems for clients every day. They’re the professionals your customers already turn to or rely on, so why not remind them of how important their work is in growing the overall business? Why not incentivize them accordingly? Anyone who has contact with clients should learn how to relate effectively to buyers. Many of these people already have your clients’ attention and trust, so all you need to do is to make them aware of how they already indirectly help drive sales. Selling in these situations looks more like recommending and advising vs. pressuring or manipulating.



We know that everyone is busy “doing their job,” and this approach isn’t about adding time to cold call for leads or screen prospects. It’s instilling the spirit of Everyone Sells within your team so that everyone understands the critical role they play in helping grow the company. Inspire them to embrace the idea that they, too, are selling – and that “sales” is a positive, critical part of the business and one that everyone plays a part in.

Outsourcing Sales

Sometimes it makes sense to hand off responsibility for sales to an outside sales organization, especially if you feel you can scale up quicker than building an in-house staff. The key to success with this route is being clear about how you want sales conducted, with relationship-based selling at the core. Even if the sales team is not technically “your employee,” their conduct and integrity will have a direct impact on your brand. So, take the time to fully vet any outside agency, emphasizing the same traits we listed above. No matter which salesperson a prospect talks to, you want your clients to feel good about every step of the buying process.

The same goes for automating parts of your sales process. As we rely more on software and automation tools, there is a growing tendency to set up sales funnels as a way to pre-qualify potential clients. The downside? Online forms and funnels add layers of complexity that can interfere with making a sale. That distance can discourage or dissuade clients from buying.

Does this sound familiar? You identify a company you want to work with. You fill out an extremely detailed online form regarding your company, your background, and your needs. Next step: a phone call from someone acting as a screener, often asking the same questions you've already answered. The next stage involves yet another meeting or call, this time with a "salesperson," more interested in pitching their product than answering your questions. It takes so long to connect with someone who really understands both the product and your situation, that you give up and move on.

Technology can be a terrific way to save time and screen leads when you make sure your funnel is good at "triage" – getting the right leads to the right person in your organization fast.

Bottom line, sales is the backbone of any thriving business. Building a sales process and team that align with your vision and customer values is crucial to driving revenue, retention, referrals, and reputation.

Investing time and effort into this foundation sets the stage for success beyond mere transactions. It creates a culture where sales means more than just closing deals – it's about nurturing relationships. When every team member feels valued in the process, your business is well-positioned for steady and significant growth.

So, start now. Prioritize relationships over transactions, and you'll be well on your way to significant and sustainable growth.



By: Leslie Rae

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Leslie Rae is the Co-Founder of The SmartBusiness™ Academy, delivering customized training and coaching solutions to help businesses build high-performing teams to boost the bottom line, outsell the competition, and create strong market relationships that sustain long-term growth. With a global reach impacting over 55,000 individuals, Leslie's passion for fostering genuine human connections in an increasingly impersonal world enables businesses to stand out in the market and achieve outstanding results.