

RETAIN AND GAIN

The best salespeople are restless and ruthlessly ambitious. So how do you keep them happy, productive and not wanting to wander away?



BY KARA ATKINSON

I believe in the idea of a meritocracy, where top performers are handsomely rewarded, low performers quickly moved on and new blood is sought out. Any organisation can change into a culture of high performance given enough time and the organisational will to let the wrong people go.

Top performers are always in demand. According to US research company Qualtrics, such people are contacted with other employment opportunities on the average of 4.3 times per year. The key question is: How do you keep your high sales performers?

CREATE A ROCKSTAR CULTURE

Salespeople want to work for high-performing sales leaders. People don't work for jobs, people work for people. People don't quit their jobs, they quit their leaders. B and C players don't mind working for other B and C players. In fact, they prefer it, because it allows them to fly under the radar.

High-performing salespeople are a different breed. They are thoroughbreds, and working for B- or C-player managers is anathema to them. They're going to get frustrated and lose their inspiration for their work. They're going to feel held back, and when salespeople built for success are held back, they leave.

This is why getting rid of weak managers should be a new executive's number one mission when taking over ►



the reins of an organisation.

High-performing salespeople will keep you honest. If you want your team to be high-performing, you better bring your own A game, and be constantly improving. High performers will keep you accountable and will call you out on your bull. They will make you a better leader over time, but you need the stomach for honesty.

Hire those who are so good it's almost intimidating. High performers will force you out of your comfort zone and stretch your leadership capacity.

UNCAPPING COMPENSATION IS KEY

While money may not be the number one thing keeping a salesperson on your team – because, let's face it, there will always be someone willing to pay more – it is certainly a high priority. The problem I see with many remuneration structures is that when performance is capped, companies don't offer enough variable compensation to truly motivate salespeople.

If we know that salespeople will leave an organisation for a 15 to 25 per cent increase in annual salary, then why do most organisations insist on 3 to 5 per cent annual salary increases? Instead of giving everyone a paltry increase that will satisfy no one, give your high-performing salespeople the 15 to 25 per cent increase – funded by not giving

increases to the low and middle-of-the-road performers.

Uncapped compensation, tied to performance, shows salespeople that you believe in and value them, and keeps them from being lured away.

PROVIDE A CAREER PATH

Salespeople have an innate need for self-actualisation. Even if they're highly compensated, if you don't provide a career path, they will have a wandering eye. Salespeople get bored easily, and while average and low performers are more interested in long-term stability, true top-performers find monotony, punctuated by an occasional Hawaiian shirt Friday, to be a fate worse than death.

High-performing salespeople want to blow past the basic goals, and to be handsomely rewarded for it, and have the opportunity to be challenged more. Along with challenge comes a clear career path. They want new job titles, new skills and new responsibilities. A 2018 Commonwealth government study said the primary reason people leave their jobs is because of lack of career growth.

With the rise of the internet, and specifically social media, we have a world where the divide between the best and the rest has never been more profound or more transparent. We know who the best are, and good headhunters can

easily find them.

Also, these salespeople have more open access to salaries, market worth and employer reviews than ever before. They know what you're paying, and with unemployment at historic lows, with an economy that's running on all cylinders, competition for talent has never been higher. And it will keep increasing over the next 12 years as 40 per cent of the current workforce retires.

Right now, the good headhunters are:

- Crafting clients' employee value propositions to make them no-brainers, mapping out every salesperson in your city
- Sourcing contact info (social media handles, phone numbers, work and personal emails, addresses)
- And developing a plan of attack to get that EVP out to every salesperson through social media, email, phone calls, texts, direct mail – even smoke signals if need be.

Headhunters have their sights set on your salespeople. Don't give them a reason to leave. When they call, you want your salesperson to say, "Thanks, but no thanks. I've got too good of a thing going on here to give it up." ■

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