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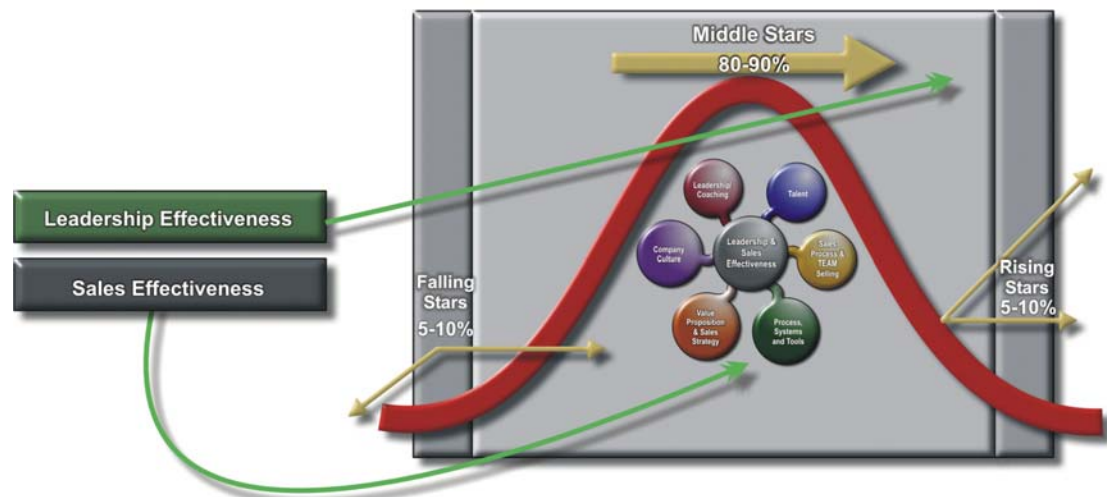
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Sales Talent: Shifting the Performance Curve

Achieving tangible business results through the performance and productivity of people (especially salespeople) can be very difficult. There are challenges and opportunities in maximizing the value of one of the most valuable assets in your company: your salespeople. Shifting the performance curve of your sales people can drive greater business results quickly and upgrade your overall talent.

Most companies have a distribution of sales talent that looks like a standard bell curve: granted there are many factors but usually there are a small number of both high and low performers with a majority of performers who fall somewhere in the middle. These middle performers represent the largest group (and greatest opportunity) to drive change and achieve significant results that close the gap between middle and star performers. World-class sales organizations recognize this distribution of talent and develop sales effectiveness programs that affect behavior change with measurable business metrics within each of the following three segments. While there are numerous factors that can help shift the performance curve, these three areas tend to show the quickest and most dramatic returns:

- Attracting top performers to upgrade the talent within your sales force;
- Developing new hires quickly; and
- Boosting the skills of your existing sales force in a fast-changing, dynamic and competitive environment



Case Studies

- Developing a Winning Sales Culture

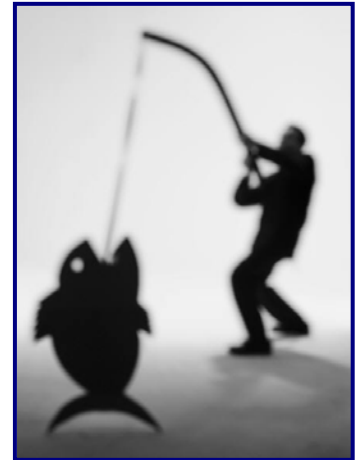
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Attracting Top Performers

Recruiting high quality sales talent is universally viewed as the most important attribute to achieving world class performance; however, a tight labor market for top sales talent compounded by many companies increasing the size of their sales forces this year requires a more rigorous approach to recruiting. New methods and channels will be required to attract sales talent in today's competitive market. Innovative approaches such as identifying passive candidates through online recruiting strategies and advanced search techniques can yield a greater candidate-to-hire ratio, increase the quality of hire, and reduce the time it takes to find the right candidate(s) by as much as 20%.



Developing New Hires

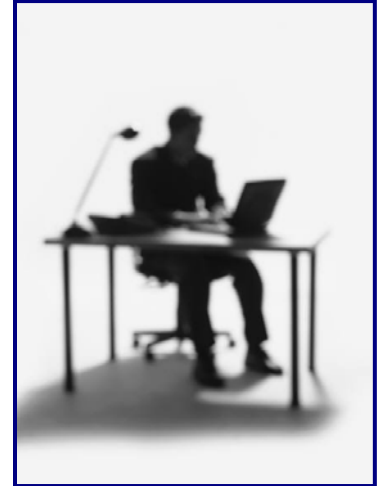
Once hired, a new sales person needs to be productive as soon as possible. A commitment to intense on-boarding or induction programs can help new hires effectively interact with clients and produce results within few short months. The induction should go beyond "features and functions" product or service knowledge to include the specific business issues a product or service solves and the economic value it creates for the client. The induction should also include a selling toolkit complete with specific messaging that helps new hires have relevant, compelling discussions with clients and prospects. And finally, there should be a certification process along the way with a significant graduation exercise at the end. One company that instituted such an induction program shortened the sales cycle significantly. Prior to launching the program, the shortest selling time of a new hire was typically seven months or longer. After completing the course, 39% of the new "graduates" achieved sales success in six months or less.



Boosting Existing Sales Skills

How can you increase the effectiveness of your existing sales force? For starters, skill gaps can be successfully addressed with targeted orientation sessions (instead of expensive training events) by utilizing your sales managers as coaches to support sales representatives in the field. The effectiveness of this approach is based upon business outcomes, not inconsequential metrics like attendance or testing normally associated with training events. Orientation sessions are much more affordable using technology to hold "webinars" than flying in salespeople from across the country for a two or three day training event with little accountability. Using meaningful content within the framework of a sales coaching program will solidify learning and change behavior through activities that will drive

greater business results. The results are measurable and can be significant. For example, a company that adopted this method increased their total contract value by 41% and reduced their sales cycle by 25%. There are no silver bullets to obtaining and developing high quality sales talent. It can be difficult, time consuming and complex at times, but the payoff can be high for companies that are dedicated to developing a high performance sales culture.



Questions for the Author?



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About CornerStone Services

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