



Matt Crabtree



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NEXT MONTH

The Sales Tactic of
Muhammad Ali

Recruitment: Don't believe the hype

Whatever your business, the most significant factor affecting your long term success is your ability to grow your top line by selling more stuff to more people, more often and for better prices. This column aims to deconstruct the whole business of establishing, managing and improving the skills of your sales organisation. In the coming months, sales guru Matt Crabtree will provide a series of practical, relevant and thought-provoking ideas that will help 2007 to be one of your best years yet.

By way of introduction, my name is Matt Crabtree and for the last four years, my colleagues and I have been working with firms large and small all over Europe, helping them to grow their businesses. We help them better engage their people through learning to cut the crap and by instilling the belief that if you want things to be different you're going to have to start doing some things differently rather than just talking endlessly about it...

Round pegs in round holes?

So let's start at the very beginning by examining the bums you have on your sales seats. I don't care how good your products or prices are, what an outstanding leader you are, or what wonderful incentives you offer to your salespeople or channels - if you don't have the right salespeople for your organisation then you are on a hiding to nothing.

In this context everything centres on your ability to make excellent recruitment decisions and find the courage to move people on before they become a liability.

The popular belief is that good sales talent is hard to find. Whilst this is unlikely to make me popular with the recruitment industry (I imagine I'll live) my view is that this is a myth - largely put about by the same recruitment industry! Take a look at your existing salespeople. I'd

like to bet that the most consistently successful in all respects are the ones that you have either 'home grown' or that arrived in your employ by unconventional means.

Sales talent is everywhere if only we could learn to look beyond the traditional confines of agencies 'specialising' in your industry and the gravy train of salespeople shifting from one organisation to another. So where can you look? Assuming that you can break free from the hugely limiting shackles of believing that a salesperson must have experience in your industry, then the world really is your oyster. The most consistently successful salesperson I have ever employed was cleaning the windows of our office block before I recruited him!

Many organisations only interview for new salespeople when they have vacancies. This is lunacy in my view. When I was running sales forces I often had conversations with recruitment agents that went like this:

Agent: Are you recruiting at the moment?

Me: Yes

Agent: Fantastic! How many vacancies do you have?

Me: None

The most successful sales organisations I know are constantly on the lookout for new sales talent whether they need it or not. Having a constant stream of CVs coming across your desk ensures that you never get caught short if one of your people should leave (more about these rotten traitors later this year), means you get the chance to increase the size of your sales force because you have found talent rather than because you have your new budget and is also a very visible reminder to your existing sales force that there are other people willing to take their seats from them should they not perform - always make sure that your sales force know you are interviewing.

The final delusion is the retention of salespeople who long since ceased to perform at the appropriate level. Just because someone has been drawing a salary from you for years does not give them the right to continue doing so if they are not delivering, no matter how well they know the clients and your products and procedures. Whilst loyalty is a laudable ethic, it only works when their loyalty to you is in balance with your loyalty to them. Are you running a business or a shelter? I don't know anyone who says they wish they had taken longer to remove someone from their organisation; however I know lots of people who were subsequently glad to have been 'helped to leave' and find new employment where they were much better suited.

In summary, never settle for sales mediocrity by surrounding yourself with the very best sales talent you can find and never stop searching for new talent.