

## **THE PERFECT SALESFORCE**

Sales is about people, not process. *The Perfect Salesforce* is a return to people—different types of people that excel very naturally at different types of sales jobs. It's about how to find such people, what conditions and tools they will require from you, and how they need to be managed on a daily basis to be kept happy, motivated, and productive.

Most companies try to teach their salespeople how to become top performers, but in the vast majority of cases this is simply not possible. There is a fine but very definite line between the things people are and are not capable of learning and repeating. Unfortunately, most companies regularly embark on training their salespeople in practices that actually have no chance of ever becoming their new habitual behavior. Just think of those salespeople you have worked with who outsold everyone else, but who never learned any selling process or received any sales training. In fact, most top producers have their own process, their own way of doing things.

Companies that have amassed top sales teams have learned how to hire these natural born salespeople. They have learned what things to look for in candidates—for all different sale types.

They have learned how top salespeople are programmed, what makes them happy, productive, motivated, unmotivated, and so on—and then they turn them loose to do their thing. There are books and consultants and Web sites that suggest you study what it is that your top salespeople do differently so that you may then teach these behaviors to your other salespeople. It seems logical: study exactly what behaviors produce certain results, and then copy them. The problem is that it just doesn't work. A good analogy would be trying to teach an introvert to be an extrovert by simply saying, "just watch the things an extrovert does in a typical day and then copy that." Well, the very things that make an introvert introverted will make it pretty difficult for one to mimic the behavior of an extrovert. The sales talents needed for different sale types discussed in chapter 3 are just as inherent and untrainable.

Many of you have tried this approach. You have trained your salespeople to use the sales techniques and practices of other top performers, whether those top performers came from within your company or elsewhere, and found there was no resulting sustained increase in performance.

*The Perfect Salesforce* advocates that studying top-performing salespeople is a good idea—not so you can copy them, but instead to better understand just what type of people they are, so that you can hire more of that type. Instead of trying to teach a dog how to behave like a cat, you will have much more success finding more cats. A cat will always perform like a cat far better than a dog that you've trained to be like a cat. You *can* train the dog—it is doable—but you'll always have superior performance from a natural cat. The only reason that companies continue to try to create top sales performers through training is they have had very little success in their attempts to hire natural top performers on a regular basis.

There are several reasons for this. The first is that, unfortunately, there isn't only one type of top salesperson. The recipe of talents, characteristics, and personality traits that you will look for differs depending on the type of sale you need them for. Secondly, even if you know exactly what to look for, determining whether your candidates truly possess these qualities is challenge number two. The huge majority of interview methodologies used today do absolutely nothing to reveal a candidate's true performance potential.

And the final obstacle: *most top performers do not even know they are top performers*. Many come from past sales jobs where they were miscast and produced only average results, but then go on to become top salespeople at a new position that ends up being a perfect fit for their particular talent set. This is most common, as people do not understand how to match natural talents to different sale types.

To address this, most companies train processes. We have seen a huge increase toward process in recent years—a natural byproduct of increasing advancements in technology—and I am the first to admit that process has its purpose and its benefits. But there is a growing and largely unrecognized problem with the “process-izing” mentality when it involves human interaction on a daily basis. The more management moves toward process, the more it simultaneously moves away from human interaction. As more and more sales departments become process-ized in the noble quest for constant betterment, they all too often end up creating processes for functions that ultimately shouldn't have them—functions that should be closely monitored and coached and developed through human interaction and in-the-moment judgment, not through a computer program or a flowchart or an e-mail report.

Process-izing removes the need for in-the-moment human

judgment—this is largely its intended function—so that every eventuality throughout a process has been considered and has been prescribed a predetermined action that must be adhered to. Again, process is necessary for a great many jobs. I would not want to trust my fate to a nuclear power plant worker who makes an in-the-moment judgment call on what to do during a containment breach in the middle of the night. I think I prefer that he follow the established process for such an event.

But lines need to be drawn when it comes to working with people. It is realistic to assign a process to something that has a reasonable number of variables. There are really only a handful of variables, or choices that can be made, during a nuclear breach. But where human interaction is concerned, the variables are endless. Trying to establish a set of actions for every eventuality involved with managing people, or selling to someone, is ludicrous. Yet this is where so many companies are inadvertently heading.

A top-performing sales force is 100 percent about leading and influencing other people, about getting all the salespeople doing what you want them to do, at consistently high levels of performance. As you will read throughout this book, the process that your sales manager will need to employ to do this will actually end up being very different from one salesperson to the next. How then could you hope to process-ize one consistent approach?

The same thing can be said for the selling process itself. Isn't it true that clients and prospects rarely respond the way most sales training processes suggest they will? This leaves salespeople to make in-the-moment decisions and judgments—which is the very thing they should be doing. Top sales teams have returned to (or never strayed from) a mind-set of hiring salespeople based on their in-the-moment decision-making abilities—and then they let them do so, rather than overriding those natural talents with a

rigid common process that must be used by everyone. Today's process-driven sales forces make me think of a professional football team spending great time and resources to hire the five best quarterbacks in the world—who all have their own unique style that works for them, honed over many years—only to then re-train all five to do things the same way.

You need only look at your own sales force. I'm willing to bet that you can easily find two very good salespeople whose approaches are quite different (different selling styles, different work ethics)—proof that there isn't only one right process, and that in fact each person finds their own process that works best for them.

The only feasible growth system for a sales force, and the only way to build a sales force comprised of top performers, is to learn the language of selling talents. This will let you cast the exact right talents into each stage of your particular sale type, and then gain an understanding of what specific conditions generate autonomous top performance from these gifted sellers. This is the essence of *The Perfect SalesForce*—and in fact the very definition of a top producer:

### **Natural talent operating under specific conditions**

This definition has been distilled from decades of studying top-performing sales teams, and I hope you notice how different it is from the conventional “hire-experienced-salespeople-and-train-them” model. The reason for this disparity is that I asked a different question than other sales consultants; I was looking for something different. I did not go looking for a formula that would simply raise sales performance—I set out to find the formula for a top-producing sales force, one that is made up primarily of those salespeople that sell four times more than all the others.

Before I lay out the 6 best practices that will build such a team, it will help you to understand the three different fields of study that these best practices all stem from. They are areas that many of you have wondered about, as I have, because of the widely varying opinions that seem to be associated with them. Once I had what I felt were the indisputable facts on these topics, I tested them extensively in the field and only then assembled them into the *Perfect Salesforce* system. They are:

1. The study of **natural talent** or ability—that which you are born with, that which cannot be taught to another.
2. An understanding of **training** as performance enhancement—can you make someone better by a margin that sufficiently exceeds the effort and, if so, how?
3. An understanding of what external **conditions** affect performance.

## 1. NATURAL TALENT

Everyone would agree that talent is important. Well, if it's top performers you want, talent is not only important, it's essential. In the absence of the natural-born talents needed for a task, top levels of performance at that task are not possible. While this may sound obvious to many, I believe it is no exaggeration to say that 95 percent of American companies have no methodology whatsoever for identifying which natural talents their new hires possess or for identifying which natural talents might be needed for the job at hand. As essential as talent is to top performance—and as badly as everyone wants to hire top talent—most companies have no real system for accurately casting talent. They may know what

skills are needed and what knowledge is required—and they generally test candidates quite well for these two criteria. But when asked what talents they look for in sales candidates, most executives' answers are extremely imprecise.

For our purposes, natural talent is best explained like this. If you tried to teach me to paint a landscape or a portrait, I tell you now you would be wasting your time. Certainly as I receive this training I will get better than I was before, but I will never approach top levels of performance. I have the desire, the intelligence, and the same “equipment” as anyone else, but I do not possess the natural talents required to be a great painter.

Now imagine spending that training time and budget on the six-year-old prodigy who lies on the kindergarten classroom floor and effortlessly sketches a picture that resembles a van Gogh. That six-year-old is already better on her worst day than I can ever hope to be—and she hasn't even received training yet. Another good example is having an ear for music. Can you train someone who is clearly tone deaf to sing opera or play the violin? Again, with training the person will develop, but only to a point—and that point will never be anywhere near the point reached when the same training is given to someone with natural born talent.

It seems obvious with painting and music examples, but the line between possessing and not possessing certain sales talents has been considerably harder to identify. This will be covered in chapter 5. For the moment, understand that the inbred talents we all possess are part of our DNA. They cannot be taken away from us and they cannot be taught to another person. Many sales courses claim they can teach anyone to be a top seller. This is simply not possible, as many of you have undoubtedly discovered. New skills and new knowledge can be taught, but natural talent cannot. You must learn how to identify which talents you need for your sale

type, and then have a reliable interview methodology for identifying those talent sets in your candidates.

## 2. TRAINING

Sales training is an ongoing distraction for a great many companies. Does it work or not? Can it raise performance by a margin that sufficiently exceeds the effort for all trainees, or at least most of them, and can that enhanced performance sustain itself at the new, higher level? I have participated in a tremendous amount of training over the years on both the receiving and teaching ends—training that has *not* raised performance in a lasting way. However, I have also seen sales training work phenomenally well at other times. The topic of training is a most elusive one, and it has taken me the better part of thirty years to understand and perfect the training formula.

The answer is training will raise performance to a new and lasting level if and only if all three of the following criteria are met:

1. **The natural talents required for the tasks must be present.** In the absence of talent, even the best training will not raise performance significantly.
2. **The training curriculum must be well substantiated, and must be adoptable by all personalities and selling styles.** In other words, it must be presented as a series of practices that trainees can “mix and match” at will, rather than a rigid, step-by-step selling process. Sales training should be akin to offering tradespeople many different top-notch tools to perform the various stages of their job; different tradespeople will opt to use different tools that they each feel comfortable with. This instead of giving tradespeople one step-by-step



repair process—with only one set of tools—that is to be used on every job.

3. **The training methodology must respect what we now understand about permanently altering habitual behavior.** Sales training is behavior training, as we are asking trainees to suddenly change the way they behave in certain situations—situations that many have approached a certain way for a very long time. Just like a new exercise regime or eating plan, the formula for permanently adopting new selling behaviors must include certain reinforcement practices.

### 3. CONDITIONS

There are eighty years of research available on human behavior, known as *behavior analysis*. The application of behavior analysis in the workplace is called performance management and when I was first introduced to it, I remember being struck with how ridiculous it is that this information is not mandatory learning at some point in our careers. If a manager's job is to get her people to do the things she needs them to do, then the only management training ever needed is an understanding of behavior analysis.

I have interviewed hundreds and hundreds of salespeople. I have worked personally in the field with many hundreds more. Some were top performers, most were average performers, and, of course, many didn't perform at all. My fascination has always been with the top performers, and it doesn't take very long to identify who is happy and who is frustrated. It is both surprising and sad how far off the mark most employers are when it comes to fostering a happy, productive work environment. There are certain very simple conditions required, but all must be present and they must be administered by the right manager.

There are hundreds of workplace conditions that can be examined, some personal, some communal, but the first distinction to understand is that only a few (thankfully) are true *performance influencers*. A performance influencer is one that affects people's ability to consistently perform at the pinnacle of their talent. For example, many company perks could be called influencers—and they certainly serve a purpose—but they are not performance influencers. Offering a new recruit a retirement or medical/dental plan or a company car may well influence their decision to join your company, but you must accept the reality that it will not affect their ability to consistently perform at the pinnacle of their talent. Giving your top performers a membership to that swanky executive club will certainly make them feel appreciated, but it will not affect their ability to consistently perform at the pinnacle of their talent.

As I observed and tested workplace conditions over the years, I noticed that most fall into this category. They may well have an influence on a candidate choosing your company, or on employee retention, but they do not generally have an influence on daily performance. When I speak of the “conditions” you must create for your sales team, I am referring to your arrangement of these performance influencers.

There is one group of performance influencers that we will not cover. There are certain logistical things—tools and technology and such—that can influence performance. For example, if a laptop computer would help your people be more productive in the field, then it must be considered a performance influencer. I call these *logistical influencers* and I believe they are pretty obvious to each company (and I can't do much about them anyway), so I will leave such things to you. If you have salespeople on the phone all day, and they sit in a filthy, dark, run-down setting, I think you know it can affect performance. This book discusses only *psycho-*

*logical* influencers, and only those that are true performance influencers. They are:

1. Your pay plan
2. Your quotas
3. Sales training
4. The salespeople's immediate manager (referred to hereafter as the *sales manager*)

The raw talent you hire is like a seed—it is the starting point of future performance—and a seed needs a variety of conditions in order to flourish: good soil, water, air, sunlight. If you plant your seed in bad soil and you rarely water it or expose it to sunlight, it will not flourish. Interestingly, it will not necessarily die, it will just not do as well as it would under the ideal conditions.

Salespeople too need the right conditions in order to flourish, and if the four conditions listed above are arranged correctly, according to behavior analysis, then they will flourish indeed. However, if they are not arranged just so, performance will remain at the status quo. Every company already has a pay plan in place, as well as some sort of quota system; most implement sales training, and everyone reports to an immediate manager. But these four conditions rarely respect the rules of behavior analysis. In addition, they are typically considered separately rather than as part of a master plan for performance. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 will teach you the correct way to structure these four performance influencers, thereby establishing the ideal conditions for your salespeople to flourish.

Where group performance is concerned, in any industry, sport, or activity there are always two possible management structures. One way is to tell each participant what to do, assigning them tasks and duties and telling them how to do each of their jobs, and

then manage them by making sure they are doing those things properly. If that structure sounds familiar, it is because 90 percent of American companies do this. And if you're thinking that it doesn't sound particularly crazy, you're right, it's not.

The problem lies in the word "properly." With the best of intentions, managers adopting this structure spend the majority of their time trying to get people to do things a particular way. They are policing the activities of the job. And while the ensuing revenues might be good—even very good—they are nowhere near what they could be. This structure does not necessarily put a company into trouble (although it often does); it just limits growth, and by a significant margin.

The second way to structure group performance involves policing results instead of activities. This approach sets the stage for group participation by encouraging everyone to brainstorm creative and better approaches. If you dictate activities, you benefit from the knowledge and talents of only those managers who established your company's selling process. If you create a result-managed environment, you benefit from the pooled knowledge and talents of every member of your sales force, and before long you will sit back and watch in awe as that sales force takes your company in directions you never dreamed of.

I worked with a company called International Profit Associates in the mid-nineties. They are a management consulting firm and very much a result-managed organization. Their astonishing growth landed them at number eight on *Inc. Magazine's* 500 Fastest Growing Companies list in 1996, and again in 1997 at number nine. In 1998, after only eight years in business, this privately held and debt-free company broke the \$100 million revenue mark, and as of 2006 they had seventeen hundred employees, five divisions, and revenue of \$249 million.

The thing that struck me most about IPA while I spent time at

their Chicago headquarters was how autonomous everyone was. There were departments and teams that were busier and more driven than any I've seen, but there was no visible managing going on. The truth is there was managing, just not the kind most companies are familiar with.

Salespeople at IPA know exactly what results are expected of them each period, and these results must be met. These results are known to be fair and reasonable, based on the results of all the salespeople that have occupied these selling positions in the past. Each position has a "correct" result—that is, an amount known to be achievable as long as the correct talents have been cast in the position. In this way, the deliverables, or results, are yardsticks for identifying whether each new hire is correctly cast in the position.

A very aggressive pay plan motivates each salesperson to surpass these preset results—something that happens very regularly at IPA—and all resources and tools needed to reach goals are gladly supplied. But again, the most fascinating thing to watch is the autonomy and unity of purpose. IPA works like an ant colony and (hold on to your hats) everyone is *happy*. Everyone feels trusted, appreciated, and necessary, and everyone knows precisely what they are accountable for.

In this most fast-paced of environments, where a full half of every day's decisions come from new situations that require on-the-spot adaptation, everyone knows they have management's full and unconditional support, and they are encouraged to constantly break the old molds if a better way is suspected.

What I think I enjoyed most at IPA were the squabbles. Every company has its internal squabbles, but in a result-managed environment, squabbles seem to get resolved immediately and without the intervention of any manager or outside party. And it is simply because of the unified purpose, the bigger picture. "There's work

to be done, deadlines to be met, results that we all agreed would be delivered. If we don't deliver 250 more leads by five o'clock, seventy-five salespeople will have only two appointments tomorrow and they need three. There's no time for squabbles, the company needs us." Believe it or not, these words were really spoken.

So let's get going with the 6 best practices and see just what it is that the world's best sales teams do differently.