

# Finding Salespeople

## How to secure top talent in the modern era

by: Dale Stein, Technology Assurance Group (TAG)

As business owners, we see the world differently. While others can passively listen to casual conversations, we cannot help but notice all of the subtle cues that suggest potential sales opportunities.

For example, someone may brag: “Oh, my buddy from college is running a tech company now. He does something with cryptocurrency or stocks, but every time I talk to him, I swear he’s getting another promotion. The big news, however, is that he just got engaged!”

While everyone else reflexively congratulates the engagement, as business owners, we can’t help but wonder: “Well, does your buddy’s tech company work out of an office? Sounds like the company is expanding. Are there any new locations? How many endpoints are there per location? Is your buddy a decision-maker in the company?”

Even if we do not say these things aloud, we cannot help but notice what others do not. Where another person may only see his (or her) kid’s next baseball game, we see a fantastic networking opportunity. When we book flights, we opt for premium or first-class seats because we understand the potential opportunities that could be discovered from a single conversation with the right person. Whether we like it or not, our instincts are just different.

This came from growing up in a different sales era. For example, back in the 1990s, it was a totally different business world. In that world, if you had the courage to pick up the phone, “dial for dollars,” oversell your product, steamroll over objections and crank up the pressure on prospects, you could succeed by sheer willpower alone. In the glory days, telephone tag was the only strategy that was necessary because everyone answered their phones and returned messages.

Compare that to the modern era. When is the last time your kids, niece, nephew — or anyone under the age of 35 — answered their phones when you called? How often do



they call anyone? What about texting? Have you ever texted one of them and noticed they practically respond before you even finish typing your message?

There are new social norms for communication that will soon become the norms governing the new business world. And we want modern talent working for us — people who understand how to navigate this world so they can contribute to our companies.

Remember when Apple released its iOS 13 update? The vast majority of cell phones got a new setting called “Silence Unknown Callers,” which dramatically reduced the effectiveness of cold calling. With one measly tap, “cold selling” became obsolete.

While courage, communication skills and determination will never become obsolete traits in a salesperson, if your organization is not flourishing in the same way it used to, it might be time to consider how to reinvent your business and,

most importantly, your sales team, so that you can thrive.

The world has changed and so should your approach to sales. In the past, salespeople preferred a higher commission with no salary. They craved high risks and high rewards. Consequently, these salespeople were low risks to us as business owners, because if we paid them a draw against their commissions, we had a very simple way to evaluate

their success. We knew what they were costing us and what performance they were delivering, which made them easy to manage, easy to motivate and easy to adjust. We could make sure their salaries were covered by a sales manager during the “ramp-up period” (their first three to six months) and there were very simple metrics to judge their success.

However, those in younger generations have different values than we do, and while it may be tempting to explain to them why their values are wrong, it is much more effective to adapt to their values, and unlock an awareness of how to attract and get them to work for us. Commission against a draw is not working as well as it used to anymore, so in this article we will look at how to evolve.

New generations require new motivation. Today’s salesperson prefers to be paid a salary with a lower commission rate. For those of us who were groomed in a different era, this seems insane. However, it is a perfect value match for today’s new salesperson.

Ironically, salespeople crave more security than ever before. They are more risk adverse for many reasons. Perhaps it is because they had a fundamentally different upbringing than you did (e.g., participation trophies) or maybe it is because they saw their parents’ retirements get wiped out during the 2008 subprime mortgage meltdown in a mere couple of days. Then, after that “once-in-a-lifetime recession” (which was the most severe since the Great Depression), they got hit with the somber realization that they will be paying for staggering inflation due to the COVID-19 pandemic for decades to come.

Regardless of how they arrived at a different set of values, instead of resenting them, the best thing we can do is to learn how to harness those values for everyone’s benefit. In fact, one advantage we now have due to the pandemic is that we realized that we can, in fact, have a remote workforce that actually performs.

These younger generations are also tremendously talented with technology and they are spearheading a new way of working that is improving the work-life balance for every generation in the workplace. Their fundamental

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motivations: (1) They want work-life balance; (2) They want to make some decent (stable) money; and (3) They want to be appreciated for their contributions to the organization so they derive personal meaning from their work.

**What are the winning criteria to look for in candidates?** We advise hiring candidates who have at least several years of experience in business. They have more momentum and responsibilities that nat-

urally cause them to focus on their careers.

Here is the specific criteria we look for in a candidate:

- Is a college graduate
- Has held a job for at least two to three years (climbing the income ladder)
- Has been out of school at least five to six years, but preferably 10 years
- Is experienced, seasoned and mature
- Can support himself and values independence
- Has high “D” (driver, decisive) and “I” (influential, interesting) personality scores according to the DiSC Profile Assessment (<https://www.discprofile.com>)
- Exemplifies the “seven attributes of successful people,” which should be a requirement for all employees (For more information, see my article, “Hiring & Mentoring,” in the May 2022 issue of Office Technology.)
- Has strong people skills
- Is looking for a mentor, not a manager

We want to attract salespeople who have already benefited from sales training and are demonstrating success in their current roles, but have been capped out at their present jobs. We want to find people who are “bumping their heads on the ceiling.” These people can be attracted by a better opportunity.

Typically, these candidates are not at job fairs but, rather, they are at work. Ideal candidates are typically already working for larger, national companies (e.g., Coca-Cola Co., PepsiCo Inc., Enterprise Rent-A-Car, etc.) where they are in the business of selling to retailers on a regular basis. These are people who are actively managing relationships daily. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule, but the question to ask ourselves is: “Where are these exceptional people spending most of their time?”

**How much do I pay them and what is “the magic number” to offer?** After advising hundreds of companies over the last 20-plus years and overseeing more than \$800 million per year in products and services, at Technology Assurance Group (TAG) we have found that “the magic number” is to find candidates who are being paid 20% less than what we presently pay.

This is a significant jump for them and it creates a ton of momentum right off the bat. This number also gives us the ability to eventually offer them 50% more than what they were being paid at their old jobs, pending their performance and ability to earn commissions. For them, this feels like they have entered a new stratosphere of earning and, more importantly, a whole new future. For example:

- A candidate is earning \$56,000 per year, with upward mobility and the potential to become a manager at his present company making \$65,000 to \$75,000 per year. That is not too tempting for someone who is ambitious.

- We can offer him \$70,000 per year, plus commissions, which could bring him up to \$90,000 per year.

- Additionally, if we provide him with mentoring, flexibility, a career path (in a world where these are going extinct) and personal investment in his success, his incentive to stick around becomes very strong.

In my June 2022 Office Technology article, "Updating Your Comp Plan," I wrote about how to bring a candidate in as an inside salesperson/customer advocate where you can verify/fine-tune his skills through a lot of repetition until

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you are comfortable enough to put him into an outside sales/account executive role. In this situation, he can increase his earning potential with a solid foundation supporting him. ■

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