Scaling sales teams: Recruitment & onboarding for success

4-min read

In addition to improving the effectiveness of their sales teams, our clients are always focused on how to grow those teams as efficiently and successfully as possible. Sales recruitment and onboarding are necessary on the agenda, especially in growth sectors such as software and tech, as companies look to make every person count.

Recruitment against core competencies

When you want to grow your sales team, have you set out what success looks like for the specific role in question (AE, SDR, BDM, AM etc.)? Have you captured the behaviours and profiles that are required to succeed in your organisation and on the team? Companies who have a clear set of **core competencies** defined in a **competency framework** are able to recruit against these specific behaviours and profiles, increasing confidence and the likelihood of a successful hire.
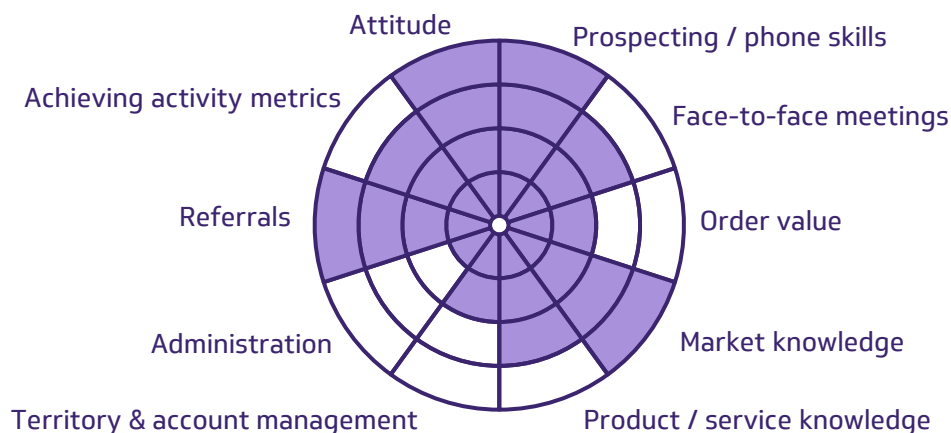
Sales culture

While corporate culture is a topic of interest in most organisations, sales culture is just as important. With the right approach to recruitment, you can bring in talent that contributes to the culture you want to build. For example, you might look for individuals who embrace a "hunter" mentality to drive proactivity in an established "farmer" climate.

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Celine Grey, Senior Sales Enablement Manager, has highlighted a debate on "culture-fit", where new individuals are assimilated into the existing culture, vs. "culture-add", which promotes team diversification.

We spoke more to Celine in our podcast, click here to listen.

For those interested, Matthew Syed's Rebel Ideas: The Power of Thinking Differently is a great read on the subject.

Onboarding for success

Of course, recruitment is just the first step. Successfully growing your sales team also requires a structured onboarding process if you want to make sure your initial investment pays off. A clear roadmap for after they join can be an attractive feature for potential employees and can have a dramatic impact not only on their initial success in role but also on their long-term contribution to the organisation.
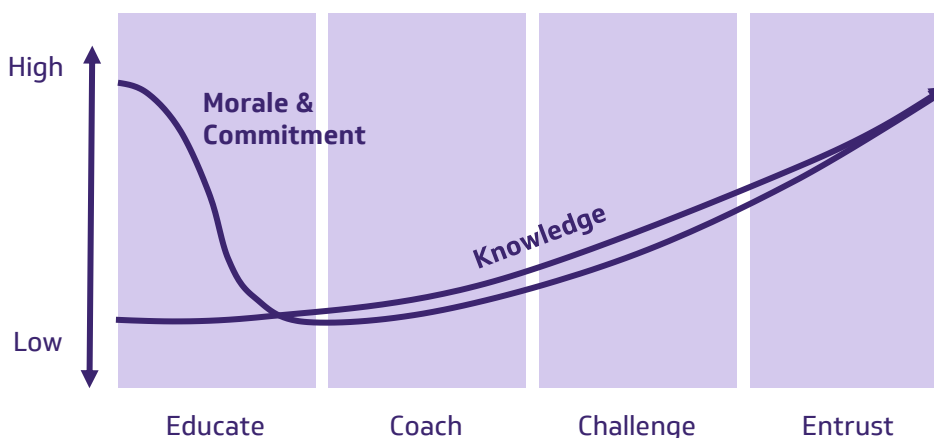
The Harvard Business Review has noted that:

> "Organisations with a standardised onboarding process experience 62% greater new hire productivity, along with 50% greater new hire retention."

Celine adds that:

> "Sales onboarding is not about knowing everything there is to know in 2 or 3 weeks. It is about knowing enough to reach 80% performance and learn the rest on the job."

As a salesperson, it is critical that onboarding includes learning the ecosystem within which the company operates (the industry, market, personas), as well as a consultative sales methodology and product training based on customer benefits. Along with these building blocks, a key part of onboarding is connecting the tools, processes and people.

The competency framework highlighted previously now becomes an effective onboarding tool, used for coaching specific behaviours relevant to the individual and role. Along with ongoing coaching, it is also important to identify which tasks are better learnt on the job and include exposure and shadowing in the onboarding process.

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Timing

Depending on who you ask, onboarding can last anywhere from 2 weeks to 12 months. The reality is that there is no one size fits all, and it should be tailored to your organisation, the role and the individual.

As you establish your own timelines, here are a few ideas to think about:

1. What is the average time to performance (target) for new starters?
2. What are the milestones that need to be hit pre and post achieving target?
3. What levels of competence do they need to exhibit at each stage to lead to success?

You need a solid set of metrics against which you can measure progress and evaluate a new hire's success. Established metrics will also help you gain visibility over how each onboarding stage impacts milestones. Celine highlights examples such as: time to first outbound, time to target / ramp time, conversion rate, time to 5 x pipeline.

Along with these metrics, sales managers should be conducting regular performance reviews, using the competency framework as a guideline, to ensure all new team members are supported in their development.

Sales process

One of the greatest tools you have in your onboarding arsenal is the opportunity for new team members to learn through osmosis and observation (social learning). However, this will be far more effective if it's accompanied by a formalised sales process that provides clarity on what is expected and when, linking relevant tools and templates. The same idea applies from a leadership perspective, where a structured approach to performance management that relies on an established sales process provides a necessary backdrop for "walking the floor" to observe and support, whether that's a physical sales floor or through call shadowing.

CSO Insights have pointed out that having a defined sales process lowers sales turnover and delivers faster ramp / onboarding times. At SBR, we have seen a 50% reduction in ramp up time for clients where a sales process is already in place.

When developing your recruitment and onboarding strategy, consider the value and impact on sales performance of reduced ramp up time and increased employee engagement. How are you enabling, measuring and supporting this?

To discover more about onboarding & sales recruitment, let's talk growth.

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