

EYE



SELL IT!

What the salesperson needs to have. What a company can provide. How to create a match that lets sellers sell. This series will improve every sales force. Every one!

By Ira Wolfe

Let's take a few minutes and look at Mike's story. Mike was the classic salesperson. Ever since he was a kid, everyone told him he was a natural salesperson. In fact, Mike's philosophy was that there are no strangers, just people he hadn't met yet. He always had a full plate of activities and seemed to have more customers than anyone else. Dangle a bonus in front of Mike and look out. He liked money and savored every moment he was recognized as number one salesperson.

So why couldn't Mike sell? Mike always sold products. Sure he sold service contracts and add-ons, but his customers understood what he sold. Competition was stiff, but it was relatively easy to compare apples to apples. Mike was also an excellent relationship builder, but most of his business came from customer referrals or responses to direct mail sent out by the company.

Mike's new employer sold consulting services in a high-growth market. Yes, the industry was the same but there were no products. And there were few existing customers. Mike was hired to build a new territory. Yes, Mike was successful in the past but in a different time, a different place, with a different company. But Mike was accustomed to a fast pace self-stop by an office, do a quick demo, and send a quote. If the quote was too high, Mike schmoozed a bit, offered to throw in a free feature or discount, invited his client for a game of golf, and made the sale.

Mike now had to introduce himself, his company and his services to clients who didn't know him, his company or what the company did. Mike had no problem getting appointments. It was at the appointment that Mike hit a brick wall. Mike's goal for each appointment was to get the

to sending a proposal.

The problem was that after 6 months, Mike had a zero acceptance rate, and it was costing the company a fortune. You see, Mike would leave the customer, call his office and tell the technical team to prepare the proposal. Mike, however, had only the most basic of information because with his old company, he was taught by his manager to get the customer on the hook and then negotiate. The proposals, however, were cookie-cutter-like and rarely customized. Many of them were even completed by Mike's administrative assistant.

The consulting proposals, on the other hand, were all customized and took several hours to complete, even a day or two, depending on the complexity. Many of these proposals included proprietary information and knowledge that the customer should have been paying for. Many times the technicians gave Mike blueprints that allowed his clients to go out and get competitive bids.

At each weekly sales meeting, Mike reported that his pipeline was full and several clients ready to "pop" for the big one. But each week seemed to be the same story. Mike reported that one customer just lost a major client and put the project on hold. Another manager was on vacation and couldn't meet until the next month. Another proposal went to a competitor who turned out to be the president's brother-in-law. And still another client didn't realize it would cost so much so decided to do the work in-house.

Selling today is complex. Whether you are selling high margin, customized solutions or high volume, low margin products, selling requires special skills. The skills can be unique for a product, a region, an industry, a niche market and even specific

customized solutions. Is Mike capable of selling concepts and non-tangible? Of course. But it won't be that easy.

Mike was hired based on outgoing, enthusiastic behavior style and experience alone. What managers failed to identify before hire was what other competencies were required to sell for their company. Mike's new managers assumed that a salesperson is a salesperson is a salesperson.

So what are the competencies of high-performers? A competency whatever top performers do to get better results more often than average performers. Specific competencies are essential to perform a job at a higher level than average. Competencies include behaviors, attitudes, motivations, skills and knowledge.

Subsequent articles in future issues will explore how managers are successfully matching and managing salespeople with the right selling skills, behaviors, attitudes and motivations to the right job, at selecting and retaining the right people for their business through the use of behavioral interviewing assessments and training. Specifically we will look at identifying and prioritizing soft skill competencies (the ability to perform a specific or mental task), knowledge (use of information in a particular area), traits (how a person responds to problems, people, pace and pressures), and Motives (the things that cause people to take action to achieve a certain result).

And how do you measure these competencies? The journey begins in the April 2001 Business2Business.

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Mike is a bright guy. He is well liked by his customers and co-workers alike. Mike won top honors in his sales district every year and was in the top five in the country. Mike's former sales managers and co-workers give him glowing references and they all agree they "would hire him back in a heartbeat." So why is it that 3 months into his new job, Mike still has yet to close a sale?

Research indicates that it takes a specific group of competencies to produce superior performance in most positions. The research of Daniel Goleman has gone so far as to attribute the success of managers and professionals to nearly 80 to 90 percent soft skills. Soft-skill competencies, however, are many times overlooked because they are more difficult to evaluate or assess than technical skills or experience.

With the high cost of recruitment, lost opportunities and failure to retain customers, successful companies have begun to look beyond experience and product knowledge. Focusing on the soft skills required in the job and the behaviors, attitudes and motivations people bring to the job is the