



Round Table Wrap-up

Recruitment of talent: which is more important, domain expertise or sales skills?

Held on Tuesday 5 October, 09:00

Panel:

Guy Lloyd, FF.ISP (Chair)
Daniel Hardy, Royal Mail
Charlotte Davenport, Virgin Media O2
James Shippen, Domino Printing
Robin Slocombe, Schlumberger

Key Observations:

- Domain (industry, product) knowledge is very important for sales success particularly in more specialised areas.
- Sales skills and behaviours determine sales success more than domain knowledge.
- Without sales skills, one will be ineffective at selling (a non-transactional or commodity offering).
- Learning domain knowledge is easier and quicker than acquiring sales skills and behaviours.
- Hiring successful people from the competition is generally disappointing – few perform as expected. Sales success appears quite situational.
- Good sales ability is a better foundation than good domain knowledge.
- Bringing in skilled sellers from other domains brings new insights and ideas.
- Good sales skills are transferable to other domains.
- Excellent sales behaviours are vital, but skills and knowledge also need to be strong.
- Be very careful promoting the intuitive high performers into sales management; it often does not work out.
- The performance bell curve: Drive the top performers; identify the bottom and shift the performance of the middle (60-80%) performers.
- Intuitive high performers are hard to develop further. Help develop the middle tier of performers to lift business performance.
- When recruiting, does the person and CV match? Are they authentic?
- Behaviours are key, curiosity about customers, authenticity, trust, and a team player.
- Business selling is a very complex activity. Needs highly-skilled people.
- Be open to hiring from other domains. The best salesperson will outperform the best product expert 9 times out of 10.
- Companies “buy” the outcome delivered by a product. Being able to describe the outcome in customer terms drives sales success, rather than describing the product.
- Companies need to have a mix of experienced and developing sales professionals; future stars are found in the developing talent.



Conclusions:

Domain (industry, product) knowledge – what you are selling and to whom - are very important. One must know about the customer and how the offering impacts them to be able to sell effectively. However, this knowledge can be acquired reasonably quickly. Sales skills and behaviours (especially) take longer to acquire, probably over years but are more impactful for selling success. Diversity is important. Hire from different domains. Bring in developing talent. This is where future leaders are likely to come from. Sales skills trump domain skills.

Questions explored:

- What is domain knowledge?
- What is meant by sales skills?
- What is harder to acquire – sales skills or domain (industry and product) knowledge?
- Skills, Knowledge and Behaviours – what is the best blend?
- What do you look for when recruiting?
- Are skills transferable to new domains?
- Experience vs Novice
- Not train or develop vs train or develop
- Established ideas vs new approaches