

When to promote

How to evaluate internal candidate for leadership position

It's a common scenario: A sales leadership position became available and you are considering promoting one of your top performers. It makes perfect sense. But something deep within is saying, "Are you sure this is a good idea?"

In an effort to convince yourself that this is the right move, you say, "A person who has been successful in sales naturally possesses the talent to help others achieve a similar level of productivity."

Maybe ... maybe not.

Top performers have a proven track record of individual success, but their ability to inspire, coach and develop others requires a very different skill set. War stories abound about the top performer

capabilities. Have that person interview for the position just as you would with an outside candidate. When I worked at Nabisco, this was common practice. Every candidate interviewing for a sales manager position, whether they were a current employee or not, were required to meet with at least three additional corporate leaders – the VP of Sales, VP of Human Resources and the Executive Vice President – in addition to the normal interview slate of leaders. Following these interviews, each candidate's competencies, values, experience and capabilities were reviewed with the goal to substantiate this question with facts: "Does this person possess the knowledge, experience and

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who became a sales leader and when making a sales call, inevitably took over the meeting because the account executive didn't handle the prospect they way he or she would have.

The result: the account executive felt invalidated and the trust between the two was permanently compromised.

Prior to promoting a top performer who doesn't have proven leadership experience, take a moment to assess the individual's potential competencies and/or

competency to be successful in the role and thus, contribute to the advancement of our corporate goals?"

There were five core areas that each candidate was measured and evaluated against in an effort to answer that question. These include:

1. Can this candidate shift from thinking tactically to engaging strategically? What evidence did you uncover to substantiate your position?



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A top performer who excels at the tactical level, may not enjoy the same level of fulfillment when managing others. What evidence exists to support the notion that this individual can make the necessary shift from managing their own day-to-day responsibilities and embracing a more strategic thought process that includes helping others grow and develop? Is the candidate ready-now or is training needed to advance his or her success?

2. Has the candidate demonstrated that he or she is able to eliminate barriers to success using a collaborative approach (vs. hostile) and will defend the team?

Being a leader requires that you defend your team and absorb conflict publicly, and condemn in private. A significant percentage of top performers possess a strong competitive spirit and support a healthy ego. Deflecting praise and supporting direct reports may not be a natural instinct for new managers.

Internal negotiations that result in eliminating barriers to sales success is an ongoing responsibility shouldered by virtually every sales manager. Being respectful of others in this process is essential to build a cooperative work environment. Which candidate scored high in this area and why?

3. Ability to work collaboratively - building respectful, trusting relationships with team members and colleagues.

Sales interacts and is dependent on most departments within a company to effectively service customers. How well will this candidate mesh with the different department managers? How will this manager respond when accounting miscategorizes a supplier payment - it was supposed to be credited to sales commissions but was credited to advertising? Does the candidate possess the inter-personal skills needed to develop collaborative and respectful relationships at all levels within the organization?

4. Ability to assign responsibilities and coach/mentor to success.

How will the candidate assign work and follow it through to completion?

Consider the following scenario:

Manager: "(Team member), I need you to do A. This needs to be done because of B. The deadline for this work to be completed is C. Let's review a few of the special details ... is there anything that I can clarify for you? Let's plan to reconvene and debrief your progress next Wednesday at 9 a.m."

Employee: "I'm on it!"

Manager: "Great. If you need my assistance at any time, it will be best if you emailed me as I am traveling for the next five days."

Team members benefit from understanding what work is expected of them, why the work is important, and when the work should be completed.

Once the project is assigned, establishing follow-up check-in points reinforces the importance of this work and that you are available for assistance if roadblocks should develop. This sounds easy. But with the frantic pace of business today, best practice isn't always common practice.

Can the candidate effectively develop team talent? How will the candidate embrace team members who don't possess

the skills, knowledge or expertise required to meet the stated performance expectations?

Does the candidate recognize and have the capability to adjust his or her management style to effectively leverage each team member's individual motivations and skill sets?

5. Learn, unlearn, relearn.

How well does the candidate respond to change? Adapt to new opportunities? Change course when a better, more viable option is presented?

What evidence is there to confirm that the candidate embraces learning from all sources including his or her sales team (proving that he or she is not a "know-it-all").

Adaptability and the ability to unlearn and relearn is the new norm for renewal to happen. What evidence do you have that the candidate embraces this process?

The case for careful selection

These five qualities are essential characteristics that all sales leaders must possess. Top-performing individual producers aren't all naturally hard-wired to be top-performing leaders.

Using these five core questions as guideposts, and adding your own unique blend of questions, will better equip you to decide if a potential candidate is ready to lead now, better-suited for some limited managerial role or perhaps has a skill set and disposition that will only thrive in an individual contributor role. ■

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