



Breakthrough Sales Leadership

It's About Your Talent Leadership "Mindset" and Execution!

Part I of a Five-Part Series

By:

John S. Mattone, M.S.,

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Breakthrough Sales Leadership

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In today's global economy, it is critically important that all sales organizations optimize their investment in human capital. The human capital asset—and only the human capital asset, provides any sales organization with any real hope for market differentiation, brand identity and operational success. A sales strategy built to leverage an organization's self-proclaimed excellence in such areas as technology, databases, etc., without adequate attention to the human capital asset—will result in a disastrous, short-lived plan that will lead to doom. All assets, except one—the human capital asset—become commodities. Beyond this, a host of external factors—the aging baby boomer population, job growth, declining birthrates, and worker "unrest" are combining to make it extremely challenging for sales organizations to optimize their investment in human capital. After all, and this is regardless of industry and geography, it is just plain difficult to find and keep sales talent. Shifting world demographics, global supply chains, the aging workforce and global mobility as well as a myriad of internal challenges (i.e., limited resources, skill gaps, turnover, insufficient management skills, etc.) are forcing sales organizations to re-think their approach to talent leadership. The bottom line? Yes, sales organizations need to do a much better job executing their talent leadership systems (i.e., talent acquisition & deployment; talent development; talent benchmarking; and affirmation & differentiation), however, none of this will occur unless sales leaders: (1) possess the belief and "mindset" that talent leadership is the most critical variable in driving their organization's operational excellence and (2) accept ultimate responsibility and accountability for becoming breakthrough sales talent leaders.

Elements of a Winning Talent Leadership Mindset & Philosophy

At the core of creating a winning sales talent leadership mindset is the belief that accurate information drives

effective strategies. In other words, a sales organization that is passionately and diligently focused on the knowledge, skills, and abilities (i.e., competencies) that drive success (both now and into the future) in their various job functions and are likewise passionately and diligently focused on the competencies of incumbents, internal candidates and external candidates, enables the organization to be more strategic and intelligent when making all human capital decisions (i.e., selection, promotion, training, succession planning, performance management, etc.). In this definition, "passionately and diligently" means an unwavering commitment to measure, measure, and measure again. Great sales organizations measure and assess everything: skills, abilities, knowledge, engagement and retention levels, cost-per-hire, ROI, etc. All measurement is directed at providing better information as a basis for improved decision-making. At AlignMark, we like to say: In Talent Leadership, like the field of Medicine, prescription before diagnosis is malpractice. It is not too far from the truth to say that sales leaders are engaging in malpractice when critical, strategic decision-making is attempted without rigorous attention to data, metrics and analytical information. If a sales organization can arrive at a point (through initial belief and eventual successes) where there is "passionate and diligent focus" both on the targets that will drive its future success and the competencies needed to drive that success, much progress will have been made in building this core belief. The journey a sales organization takes to arrive at a strong core belief is also very important. The journey itself coupled with a strong emerging belief that accurate information drives effective strategies provides the foundation for other critical beliefs to emerge and become solidified. These beliefs, as they appear below, are shared by all great sales organizations:

- ▲ Better Talent = Competitive Advantage
- ▲ Talent Leadership "Mindset" is the catalyst for action
- ▲ Strengthening the talent pool is every leaders job
- ▲ Talent "Gold Standard" has been established (be a role model)
- ▲ Leaders must be held accountable for Talent Leadership
- ▲ Real money must be invested in Talent Leadership
- ▲ Talent Review processes are critical

All of these beliefs should be the basis (catalyst) for action—positive action and execution. According to McKinsey’s War for Talent Surveys (200 companies; 1200 respondents), however, we would conclude that the percentage of companies engaged in positive talent leadership action and execution is very small. Indeed, when it comes to talent leadership, most organizations are failing and failure is easily traceable to a weak mindset and belief. According to the McKinsey Surveys, the percentage of senior managers who strongly agreed their own organization . . .

- ▲ Brings in talented people.....19%
- ▲ Develops people effectively.....3%
- ▲ Retains top talent.....8%
- ▲ Removes poor performers.....3%
- ▲ Knows the A, B and C players....16%

The External & Internal Challenges that are Raising the Stakes

Aging “baby boomers” (i.e., Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate in 2010, 24 million people will exit the workforce), declining birthrates, job growth, low unemployment (i.e., a 2006 Manpower Study in which 33,000 employers were surveyed in 23 countries revealed that 80% were having a difficult time locating qualified candidates). Global competition for talent is intense. With the liberation of trade policies, multinational companies moving production to low cost areas and the corresponding growth of global supply chains, globalization has resulted both in socio-economic and cultural challenges. Countries work hard to develop policies to attract talent with the human and technical skills to support their own economic growth, retain talent and even reverse talent migration. However, the need for talent ultimately creates movement between countries. The United States, for example, relies on foreign talent in certain fields (e.g., science and engineering). Clearly, then, the ability to attract and retain talent is vital to an organizations success and overall sustainability.

Beyond the external factors, there are significant internal challenges that make it extremely difficult for HR, senior sales managers, managers and salespeople to believe in and execute winning talent leadership.

Some of the challenges:

- ▲ Undesirable turnover
- ▲ New hire (low ROI)
- ▲ Selection mistakes
- ▲ Limited resources for recruitment
- ▲ Speed/rate of business change
- ▲ Limited time and \$\$ for training
- ▲ Skill gaps
- ▲ Insufficient management skills
- ▲ Legal issues (adverse impact)
- ▲ Work life balance issues
- ▲ Limited/sporadic use of performance management
- ▲ Employee disengagement
- ▲ Poor reward management
- ▲ Bench strength issues
- ▲ Downsizing

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Breakthrough Sales Leadership

The Power of Your Sales Leadership Value Proposition

Part II of a Five-Part Series

By:

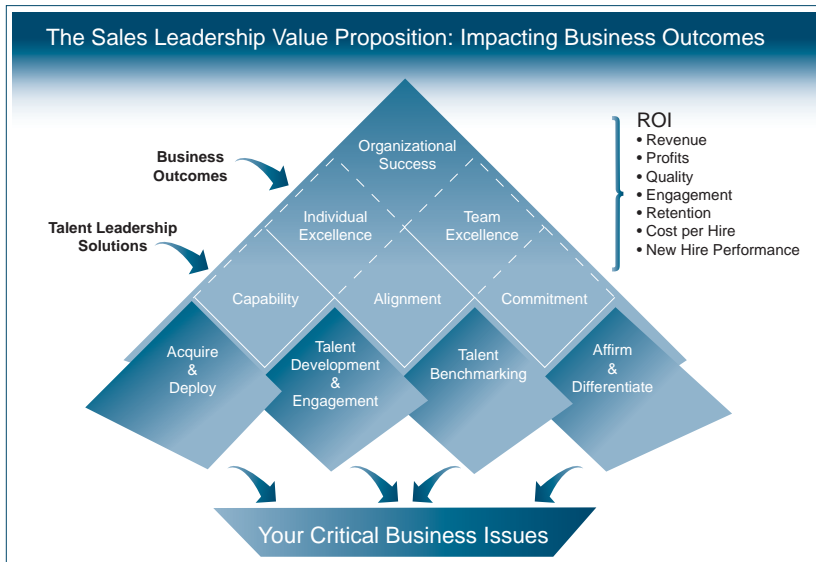
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recommit to give their absolute best. More than anything, a great Value Proposition clearly connects winning talent leadership practices to business and operating metrics. As was discussed earlier, there exists no better way to create the belief in the value of the human capital asset, than by demonstrating the connectedness between winning talent leadership practices and operating success. One thing a great Value Proposition is not is fancy words in a brochure or motivational posters or a loose connection of HR programs and initiatives.

At AlignMark, we believe a sales organization's ability to combat the myriad of external and internal challenges listed in Part I of this Series, is in direct proportion to the strength and vibrancy of their talent acquisition & deployment practices, talent development & engagement practices; talent benchmarking practices, and how well they truly differentiate and affirm performance. A sales organization that utilizes creative recruiting strategies and tactics (e.g., career portals where the CEO or Senior VP of Sales delivers an engaging message to candidates); screens and selects

A sales organization's Leadership Value Proposition is the holistic sum of four critical Talent Leadership practices: (1) talent acquisition & deployment; (2) talent development & engagement; (3) talent benchmarking; and (4) talent affirmation & differentiation and their impact on multiple levels of business outcome, such as: building capability, commitment, alignment and then to higher levels of business outcome such as individual and team excellence, all of which are directed toward driving business outcomes in a positive fashion. Regardless of the exact words used to capture a given sales organization's Leadership Value Proposition, one thing is sure, the elements identified above need to be well thought out, believed in, communicated, executed, and measured—continuously. At its core, a great Sales Leadership Value Proposition encompasses everything salespeople experience and receive as they are employed by the organization—including satisfaction from the work they do, to the culture, leadership, co-workers, compensation, etc. A great Value Proposition always encompasses the ways an organization fulfills the needs, expectations and dreams of both incumbents and applicants and should provide the reason—everyday—why a sales leader or salesperson should

only those candidates who demonstrate they have the highest probability of being successful, staying (being retained), and being committed; provides a rich, engaging, dynamic, compelling learning and performance support environment in which salespeople are motivated and excited to become the best they can be; provides benchmarking and certification opportunities for salespeople to prove—on a continuous basis—that they do possess the knowledge, skills and abilities required for success; and rewards and recognizes those who truly execute, are the foundational steps required for combating all external and internal challenges. In fact, great sales organizations, while mindful of these challenges, are never consumed by them.

A strong Talent Leadership foundation leads to: (1) Capability; (2) Commitment; and (3) Alignment. Great sales organizations excel in creating the belief their salespeople "can do" (i.e., capability), "will do" (i.e., commitment), and "must do" (i.e., alignment) what is required for success—now—and into the future. To put it in different words—when talented salespeople are trained and "nourished" to excel in their work, are

provided a rich, engaging environment in which there is passion and excitement about doing great work and truly making a difference, and they perceive a connection and alignment between their work experience and the realization of organizational goals and metrics—great things happen (i.e., individual and team excellence). At AlignMark, we call this “Pull Magic”—where salespeople are passionate about being “pulled” in a direction of individual and organizational greatness. Most sales organizations, unfortunately, because they haven’t created this type of magical environment, do the opposite, where they engage in “Push” strategies, where salespeople perceive being “pushed” in a direction most likely to benefit the organization—not the individual.

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Breakthrough Sales Leadership

Building a Strong Talent Leadership Foundation...

Talent Acquisition & Deployment

Part III of a Five-Part Series

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Breakthrough Sales Leadership

Building a Strong Talent Leadership Foundation... Talent Acquisition & Deployment

Regarding Talent Acquisition, organizations have a number of challenges to address. According to the Society for Human Resource Management's 2006 Talent Management Survey Report, the number one challenge for call center organizations is building a deeper reservoir of successors at every level. To attract and retain outstanding sales talent, organizations must focus on the "fit" and compatibility of candidates to job requirements and culture. Organizations with excellent reputations and strong brands are, and will continue to be, well positioned to attract top talent. Great sales organizations, as we said earlier, are passionate and diligent—through measurement-- about identifying the profiles (i.e., knowledge, skills, work preferences, personality, etc.) of salespeople—at all levels and positions—who are successful. Once those profiles are identified, they become targets against which recruiting resources are deployed.

Within great sales organizations, it is typical for the HR organization to create and implement sophisticated tools and processes that enable internal client groups to do a better job executing talent acquisition. The use of technology to help sales organization's source and screen talent is becoming more prevalent. Candidates can now visit an organizations' web-site, be directed to their career portal and "click" to watch a video of the CEO or Senior Vice President of Sales delivering a dynamic, compelling recruiting message that both educates and inspires. After experiencing a powerful introduction to the organization, the candidate can select from a menu of available positions. After selecting one or more, the candidate is then presented with a brief "realistic job preview", at which point they can self-select themselves out of the process prior to entering any identification data. If they decide to continue, they enter some brief identification data, and are then presented with a series of questions designed to determine if they are minimally qualified for the position. If they are deemed minimally qualified, they advance to the "work preferences" section, where they

respond to specific elements of the position (some of which may not be appealing, such as: "You will be required to travel 60% of the time"....are you still interested in this position....click "Yes" or "No". A candidate who has entered their identification information, has not been "knocked-out" for not meeting minimum qualifications, has not "self-selected" out because they are not interested in the position, advances to a series of questions designed to capture their education and work experience. At this point, their responses are being scored "behind the scenes" as part of the scoring algorithm. The last section of the technology-based sourcing and screening system may also include simulation questions that assess a candidate's skills. These responses, similarly, are scored.

From a sales organizations standpoint, the deployment of a technology-based system that can accomplish many of the steps discussed above while reducing cost-per-hire, time-to-fill, and turnover and increasing quality of hire, makes this solution a winner. Add the positive branding elements associated with an engaging introduction to improve sourcing and the legal defensibility associated with using a standard protocol to determine minimum qualifications as well as reduced risk of adverse impact (as a result of "applicant" being defined as such later in the process), adds to the overall technical strength of an application like this. Of course, when the recruiting "back-end" is added which enables an organization to extract resumes to databases, track candidates, stay in email contact, schedule interviews, etc., the system becomes more even more robust. It is important to understand, however, that these types of systems—and others, such as: assessment tools, performance appraisal systems, succession planning systems, etc., are the ways in which HR can add value, freeing sales leaders to focus on their day-to-day operational issues., yet, these same tools and processes can, and do, backfire when leaders over-rely on them or the attitude is taken that it is HR's job.

Sales leaders must assume ultimate responsibility for acquiring talent. After all, they are most knowledgeable about the culture of the organization, the work that needs to be executed, and the results required. In fact, sales leaders must assume the ultimate responsibility for "Talent Leadership", which encompasses the four

foundational areas discussed in earlier Part's of this Series. It is HR's job to provide the tools, processes and systems that enable sales leaders to execute—at the highest level—the four foundational elements of Talent Leadership.

To help sales organization's diagnose their strengths and weaknesses in the four foundational areas comprising Talent Leadership, AlignMark has created a Talent Leadership Index. The AlignMark Talent Leadership Index (ATLI) is a powerful diagnostic tool that enables an organizations HR department and its' internal client groups to assess the relative health of their Talent Leadership Beliefs and Practices. With respect to Talent Acquisition, best practices include:

- ▲ Prior to interviewing, candidates are pre-screened to ensure they are minimally qualified for the position
- ▲ Prior to interviewing and/or more in-depth assessments, candidates are ranked on preferred experience and skill information
- ▲ Candidates who pass the pre-screen are able to schedule themselves for next steps
- ▲ Candidates are provided immediate feedback as part of the screening process

Building a Strong Talent Leadership Foundation.... Talent Deployment

AlignMark's three-part definition of "Talent Deployment":

1. Accurately measuring, through assessment, a candidate's deep-rooted skills, abilities, interests and personality factors.
2. Accurately matching a candidate's skills, abilities, interests and personality factors to those positions (and culture) for which there is a high probability of their being successful and staying longer as a result of their being engaged and challenged.
3. Implementing the above steps at each level and position within the organization so that deployment decisions made involving both external and internal candidates are efficient and effective and, ultimately, drive individual and operational success.

Inferior deployment decisions, unfortunately, are commonplace. AlignMark focus groups with CEO's and senior sales leaders clearly indicate the three most troubling deployment mistakes: (1) "quick quits" (i.e., employees who voluntarily leave within six months); (2) "fast fires" (i.e., employees who are involuntarily terminated within six months of their being hired); and (3) "bad hires" (i.e., people who are hired or promoted but do not excel). According to Spherion's Emerging Workforce Study, the average cost to replace a salesperson in the U.S. is 1.5 times their base salary. Those are direct costs. Indirect costs, associated with productivity, team morale and customer satisfaction, are estimated to be 3 to 5 times direct costs. Clearly, deployment decisions are of critical importance.

Back to the CEO focus groups. When AlignMark asked the senior executives how their own sales organizations could best combat the three most troubling mistakes cited above, they responded by indicating the importance of: (1) weeding-out job candidates early in the screening process who otherwise would be likely to burn-out (or not perform well) because they were not suited to the work and/or culture (as a means to combating the "quick quit" and "fast fire" issues) and (2) hiring only those candidates who clearly demonstrate (throughout the screening and selection process) they have the skills, motivation and personality to excel in these roles now—and—into the future (as a means to combating the "bad hire" issue). The focus group work done with senior managers, clearly demonstrated to the AlignMark team, the unwavering commitment, passion and focus that great sales organizations have for providing applicants, new employees and incumbents with real opportunities to unleash their passion and make a difference. This work also reinforced the importance that organizations need to place in building the core of the talent leadership mindset—the belief that accurate information drives effective strategies. It is very clear that no significant progress can be made, by any organization, both in creating a strong Talent Leadership mindset or in the execution of these critical foundation elements, without passionate and diligent attention to continuous measurement of people capabilities, position requirements—now and into the future as well as a commitment to assess the relative "health" of their Talent leadership beliefs and practices.

With respect to Talent Deployment, AlignMark offers

some of the following best practices:

- ▲ Selection instruments yield some kind of “readiness indicator”
- ▲ Selection instruments are valid and reliable
- ▲ Simulation assessments are utilized
- ▲ Assessments can also be used as a basis for development planning
- ▲ Compliant with EEOC/ADA legislation

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Breakthrough Sales Leadership

Talent Development, Engagement & Benchmarking

Part IV of a Five-Part Series

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Talent Development, Engagement & Benchmarking

Effective Talent Leadership results in increased engagement and reduced turnover. Employee engagement, in fact, can make or break the bottom line. Salespeople who are most committed (i.e., demonstrate the highest levels of “will do”), perform 20% better and are 87% less likely to resign. In addition, the foundation for an engaged sales force is established by the quality, depth and authenticity of communication by HR and senior sales leaders as well as the quality of supervisory and managerial talent. The role of the supervisor and manager in fostering a work environment built upon rapport, trust and credibility, in which salespeople and teams of salespeople are coached and developed (i.e., “can do”), challenged and unleashed (i.e., “will do”), to execute work that enables the organization to thrive and succeed (i.e., “must do”), cannot be overemphasized. Inherent in any sales organizations quest to become a great Talent Leadership organization should be their unwavering commitment to measurement—the “checks and balances” orientation implicit in great coaching and performance management, so that salespeople understand and respect that they will be held accountable for having the knowledge, skills and capabilities that do, in fact, lead to superior performance. When sales organizations benchmark and certify knowledge and skill levels—using assessment—not only are they building the opportunity for “course correction”, but also they are reinforcing the importance of accountability and individual and team continuous improvement.

The process of building employee engagement is ongoing. Beyond compensation and benefits, employee engagement is best fostered through a meaningful and enriching work experience. Effective employee engagement—a mixture of tangible and intangible factors—fosters an environment of stimulation, development, learning, support and contribution. However, recent studies in the U.S., have found that less than 20% of salespeople are engaged and 60% are “moderately” engaged and 20% are clearly disengaged. Clearly, the opportunity for HR and sales leadership is to increase the strength of employee engagement. This will require, at a minimum, strong leadership, a sense of

shared destiny, autonomy, accountability and opportunities for development and advancement.

How does a sales organization strengthen their leadership capability as a foundation for creating an engaged workforce? AlignMark recommends the following:

- ▲ Objectively assessing supervisory and managerial skills
- ▲ Leveraging assessment results (i.e., Development Planning)
- ▲ Skill-based training programs that truly “raise the talent bar”:
 - Analysis & Problem Solving
 - Initiative
 - Influence
 - Team Building
 - Situational Style of Interaction
 - Change Management
 - Talent Leadership

While all of these training programs help “raise the talent bar”, the single most important and immediate need—is providing all sales leaders with Talent Leadership training opportunities—where they can begin to shape a more positive mindset and recognize their own accountabilities for being Talent Leaders.

With respect to Talent Development, Engagement and Benchmarking, AlignMark offers some of the following best practices:

- ▲ Managers are held accountable for Talent Leadership
- ▲ Retention goals exist for every manager
- ▲ Training for each individual is based on accurate diagnostic information
- ▲ Learning sessions are brief, engaging and experiential
- ▲ Managers empower salespeople to take charge of their own development

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