

To Promote the Best Salesperson to Manager or Not...That is the Question

A client company had recently terminated their sales manager and was contemplating what to do.

Opportunity

Client Co. had a dilemma because their sales group had struggled for years under the guidance of an ill-equipped manager. They had a superstar salesperson in another group who was interested in the position, but company management was concerned about losing his sales production. This employee was their top salesperson for several years running, and he had not previously managed salespeople. Additionally, what if he didn't work out as a manager for the company? They would have to eliminate him.

Approach

We shared with the company's management team that being a great salesperson does not necessarily indicate the individual will be successful as a manager. In fact, it is unusual that a superstar salesperson would possess the skill sets required of an effective sales manager, but it does occur periodically. We began the engagement with a thorough, objective and data-driven process to evaluate the potential of the individual, not as a salesperson but as a sales manager. The intention was to determine if he could actually become a leader and coach and help stimulate this floundering unit. We evaluated his strengths that support sales management, his weaknesses that might neutralize those strengths, and his specific management skill sets of coaching, holding salespeople accountable, motivating, mentoring, and recruiting.

Recommendation

Based on the analysis, we recommended the promotion, under the condition that the individual was fully committed to this new role and would not expect to return to his sales role if it didn't work out. Additionally, we provided coaching support to the rookie manager, as well as a recommendation to follow specific, analytically-based and objective hiring process to assist him in his recruiting and hiring efforts to improve the sales talent in the unit.

Results

There were four major results from these efforts:

1. In the first 3 months as a fully functioning sales manager, the unit was tracking significantly above the prior year's sales. They sold 522% more in his second 90 days in charge than the same period in the previous year and he had 50% fewer sales representatives.
2. Initially, the manager played a significant role in those closed sales, helping salespeople close business and actually closing the business for them. After the initial 3 months, the salespeople were able to close on their own.
3. Sales are now tracking higher than both the collective group's production and the manager's sales results prior to his move.