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More Salespeople Cannot Fix a Broken Sales Process

Why understanding the real barriers to revenue growth should come before your next sales hire.

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When sales performance falls behind expectations one of the most common responses is to recruit more salespeople.

The logic is understandable. More salespeople should mean more conversations more opportunities and ultimately more revenue.

And sometimes that s exactly the right solution. But before increasing headcount there s a more important question businesses should consider:

Is the challenge one of capacity capability or process?

If your sales team is consistently converting opportunities the pipeline is healthy and demand exceeds the team s capacity additional headcount can be an excellent investment.

But what if conversion rates are inconsistent sales processes could be more effective or the team needs stronger leadership and development? In those circumstances adding more salespeople might simply make an existing problem more expensive.

And importantly the sales operation doesn t have to be broken for there to be significant opportunities to improve it.

Capacity capability or process: understanding the difference

Before deciding to recruit it s worth understanding where the real commercial constraint lies. Capacity: Your sales operation is performing effectively but there simply aren t enough people to capitalise on the available opportunities. Additional salespeople may be the logical answer.

Capability: The business has opportunities to grow but the existing team may lack certain skills experience or leadership capabilities needed to achieve its objectives. Process: The sales operation is functioning but there are opportunities to improve qualification conversion forecasting sales and marketing alignment or the consistency of execution.

These challenges aren t mutually exclusive. Many growing businesses experience a combination of all three.

The important point is that each may require a different recruitment strategy. Sometimes the answer is additional salespeople. Sometimes it s stronger leadership specialist sales enablement or a different type of commercial appointment altogether.

And sometimes the most effective first step is improving the processes and performance of the team already in place.

Five warning signs that recruitment might not be the immediate answer

Before approving additional sales headcount I d encourage commercial leaders to consider five potential warning signs.

1. Your top performers are responsible for a disproportionate share of revenue

Most sales teams have a range of performance levels. That s entirely normal.

However if a relatively small number of individuals consistently deliver the majority of revenue while others struggle it s worth understanding why.

Are your strongest performers following a more effective sales process? Are they better at qualification discovery relationship building or managing complex opportunities? Or are they benefiting from stronger territories established relationships or more favourable accounts?

Understanding those differences can reveal opportunities to improve the wider team s performance.

It can also help identify the skills and characteristics to prioritise when recruitment does become necessary. Rather than simply adding more salespeople perhaps the greater opportunity is to develop existing team members and recruit individuals who demonstrate the attributes of your strongest performers.

2. Your sales process exists but isn t consistently followed or optimised

Most established sales businesses have a CRM some form of sales methodology and documented processes.

But having a process and consistently executing it are two different things.

If salespeople approach qualification differently opportunities progress through the pipeline without clear criteria or forecasting relies heavily on individual judgement the business may lack the consistency needed to scale effectively. Equally the processes might be working reasonably well but have evolved organically as the business has grown.

There s nothing inherently wrong with that. However what worked for a team of five may not be appropriate for a team of twenty.

Before recruiting more salespeople it s worth asking whether the existing processes are sufficiently effective repeatable and scalable to support them.

3. Marketing is generating leads but sales conversion isn t improving

This is an area where I believe businesses can overlook a significant opportunity.

Marketing might be doing an excellent job of increasing awareness generating enquiries and creating opportunities.

But if those opportunities aren t converting into revenue where does the responsibility sit? It might be lead quality but it could equally be slow follow up inconsistent qualification poor discovery or a disconnect between the audiences marketing is targeting and those salespeople are equipped to convert.

Sometimes the issue isn t either department individually but the alignment between them.

Before increasing marketing spend or sales headcount commercial leaders need to understand where the breakdown is occurring. More leads and more salespeople don t automatically translate into more revenue.

4. Your sales managers spend more time firefighting than developing people

Effective sales management should involve far more than monitoring activity and chasing forecasts.

It should include coaching developing capability improving execution and helping individuals become more productive. If managers are constantly stepping in to rescue opportunities dealing with performance issues or compensating for weaknesses in the sales process there s a risk that adding more salespeople simply increases their workload.

Equally in growing businesses the sales management structure may not have evolved at the same pace as the team.

An excellent salesperson promoted into management doesn t automatically become an excellent coach or leader. Sometimes the next investment needs to be in sales leadership enablement or management

capability rather than additional frontline salespeople.

5. You re unclear about what success looks like for the next hire

This is perhaps the most important warning sign.

When a business decides to recruit the conversation often begins with a job title.

We need another Account Executive.

We need a Sales Manager.

We need a Sales Director.

But what specifically is that individual being recruited to achieve? Generate new demand? Improve conversion? Develop existing accounts? Establish a repeatable sales process? Coach an underperforming team? Scale an already successful model?

These objectives require different skills experience and approaches.

The right candidate for one challenge can be entirely the wrong candidate for another.

A successful appointment starts with a clear understanding of the commercial outcome required not simply an agreed job title.

Understanding what a business needs not simply what it asks for

We recently worked with a growing professional services business that approached us looking for a sales leader to help develop its new business function.

The business was performing but there were opportunities to improve its sales processes develop the team and create a stronger foundation for future growth.

Their initial thinking was to appoint a sales leader who could take responsibility for managing and developing the function. However through discussions about their commercial objectives existing team and stage of growth we identified that a traditional sales management appointment might not be the most effective solution.

Instead we recommended a player manager someone who could lead from the front actively contribute to new business generation coach and develop the team and help refine and optimise sales processes as the business grew. This changed the recruitment brief and the profile of candidates we needed to identify.

The client wasn t wrong to recognise the need for stronger leadership. But the right solution was more nuanced than the original job title suggested.

They knew what they wanted. Our role was to help them understand what they actually needed.

It s a good example of why the most valuable recruitment conversations often happen before a job description is written.

Recruitment should be part of the growth strategy not simply a response to vacancies

This is where I believe specialist Go to Market recruitment partners can add considerably more value than simply identifying available candidates.

A good recruitment conversation shouldn t begin and end with a job description.

It should explore the business s growth objectives current commercial performance the maturity of its sales operation and the capabilities required to move forward. That means asking questions such as:

• Where are the biggest barriers to achieving your revenue targets?

• Is the challenge generating enough opportunities converting them or both?

• What separates your strongest performers from the rest of the team?

• Do your existing managers have the capability and capacity to develop their people?

• What would a successful appointment actually change over the next 6 12 months?

The answers can fundamentally change the recruitment brief. As we explored in our previous article The Five Most Expensive Sales Hiring Mistakes Technology Founders Make hiring decisions made without fully understanding the business s needs can prove costly.

And occasionally asking the right questions might reveal that a business should address something else before recruiting at all.

That might not be the answer a recruitment company is expected to give but it s often the right one.

The right hire should improve more than your headcount

If you added three more salespeople tomorrow would they be joining a commercial operation that gives them every reasonable opportunity to succeed?

Would they have clear processes effective leadership appropriate support and a realistic opportunity to achieve their objectives?

Or would they encounter the same challenges that are limiting the performance of your existing team? These are important questions whether your sales operation is struggling performing adequately or already achieving its targets.

Because even successful sales organisations have opportunities to improve.

More salespeople can accelerate a successful sales operation. But the right people in the right roles can also make the entire operation more effective.

The opportunity lies in understanding which investment your business actually needs.

Before adding headcount test the assumptions

Use Certus's free 12 question GTM Hiring Risk Assessment to examine the role objectives and conditions for success before making your next appointment.

Explore the assessment

What's next for your team?

Got a plan in mind a few ideas or just a question? Let's talk it through.

Contact Certus info@certusrecruitment.com