SANDLER®

HIRING, ONBOARDING, AND RETAINING

Talent in a Hybrid Workspace

Why do good salespeople leave a company?

HINT: It's not always about the salary.

Introduction

The hybrid work environment is here to stay. A recent research report from Accenture, *The Future of Work: A Hybrid Work Model,* showed that **63%** of high-growth companies have already adopted a "productivity anywhere" workforce model. Another key finding: **83%** of workers *prefer* a hybrid work model.

Smart managers learn to look past cyclical shifts in the economy, so they can spot the structural changes that really matter. In the process, they can put themselves and their organizations at a competitive advantage in an often-overlooked area: competing for talented workers in an unstable and increasingly mobile job market. They know that their responsibilities don't end when a top performer accepts an offer and schedules a start date. They also know that retaining great employees (such as top salespeople) for years requires just as much skill and effort as hiring them. This is why smart leaders are adapting to the new realities of the employment market. They know there is no point in creating a "revolving door" situation in which they hire and develop talent that ends up going to the competition!

What follows are some proven best practices that will help you hire and retain sales talent in today's hybrid work environment. The tips shared here can easily be implemented in remote, in-person or hybrid settings.

But first, let's address a question that leaders too often skip over: **Why do good salespeople leave a company?** It's not always about the salary; many other factors can cause key employees to start searching for another job.

While each employee situation is unique, there are some problem areas that tend to come up again and again, causing a top salesperson (or some other important employee) to become dissatisfied and ultimately resign from a company. These include:

- Ineffective onboarding
- Hit-or-miss training
- Poor indoctrination into the company's culture and processes
- Sporadic or nonexistent evaluations and feedback

Now that you know some of the common problem areas to look out for, it's time to examine the best practices that will make it likelier that you attract, hire, and hold on to the very best sales talent.

SALES LEADER BEST PRACTICE #1:
KEEP THE TALENT PIPELINE FULL

Don't wait until you need to hire before you start searching for talent. Aim to spend at least 10% of your time recruiting. Connect on LinkedIn with former colleagues, college classmates and other business associates in your network of relationships. Let them know the type of talent your company needs, and don't be afraid to ask directly for referrals. Consider inviting select employees to refer talented friends and associates to consider applying, so they can interview and perhaps join your company's team.

> **Remember:** A-list players want to be surrounded by A-list players!

SALES LEADER BEST PRACTICE #2:
EMBRACE ASYNCHRONOUS INTERVIEWING

Managers and candidates alike can benefit from the flexibility of asynchronous video interviews. Send a promising candidate a brief list of questions, then ask them to record their answers and give them an easy-to-use platform for sharing their video with you and your team. They can complete the recording at a time and place that's convenient; you and your team can review it when you're not busy with something else. If the asynchronous interview goes well, you can move on to a scheduled conversation.

SALES LEADER BEST PRACTICE #3:
CONDUCT MULTIPLE INTERVIEWS ... AND STANDARDIZE THOSE INTERVIEWS

If a hire is worth getting right (and it is), it's worth getting more than one interviewer involved in the process. Keep the interview process simple; don't add needless layers of complexity; do get more than one person's perspective before you commit to a hiring decision.

Remember: Diverse and inclusive teams perform at higher levels than teams composed of employees with the same skill sets and capabilities. That means you want to strive for an interviewing process that erases any possible bias so candidates can be evaluated on their abilities. One good way to move closer to the achievement of this ideal is to **create a standard questionnaire that each person on the hiring team can use with each candidate**. Provide a scoring matrix for each team member to rate the applicant's responses on a predetermined scale – e.g., 1-5 with 5 being the highest. That way, when the team members meet to discuss the candidates' qualifications, they can compare their scores on the answers that the candidate gave on each question. If each team member asks different questions, the process becomes completely subjective, and there's no meaningful basis for comparison. (Side note: Before the interviews begin, you may need to get feedback from multiple internal people about the questions that should show up on this document. That's a good thing!) You can easily create multiple questionnaires for multiple-interview situations.

SALES LEADER BEST PRACTICE #4:
USE APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENTS

Knowing about someone's education and past positions held is not enough. Consider having candidates who pass the first round of resume review take a relevant behavioral or psychometric assessment before you schedule time to meet them in person or via phone or videoconference. The assessment you select should help you to align the candidate with the predetermined criteria of a job profile you are seeking to fill. If a relevant assessment tool indicates that the potential for a good match is poor, politely disengage; don't interview the candidate. They are unlikely to be happy in this job.

There are many good assessment tools on the market, including:

EXTENDED DISC
This suite of online DISC assessments identifies an individual's hardwired DISC style. The results are tailored to your company's unique needs and preferences based on a wide selection of job roles. Sandler and Extended DISC have been strategic partners for over 10 years.

HARVER
Harver assessments help you hire the right people, drive career growth and develop future leaders by identifying 32 different behavioral competencies and where each person ranks for them. These competencies can then be used to determine suitability for job fit, performance improvement plans, future training and advancement potential.

SALES LEADER BEST PRACTICE #5:
BE TRANSPARENT WITH CANDIDATES ABOUT YOUR HIRING PROCESS

Top-performing workers will appreciate getting details about your company's hiring process in advance, so they know what to expect. Let them know (for instance) if they'll be given some real-world scenarios to consider and asked how they would handle problem that connects to that scenario. Let them know, in broad terms, what steps your organization will be taking to identify the right hire. If your company gives a psychometric test or other assessment, let them know what will be happening ahead of time, and share the results with the candidate when they're available.

There aren't many things in life more stressful than a job interview, and you don't want your best candidates to feel blindsided or tricked. Even if they don't get the position, you want them to tell others about the great experience that they had interviewing with your company.

SALES LEADER BEST PRACTICE #6:
ONBOARD EFFECTIVELY

Onboarding sales talent has never been more important, given the tightness of the current labor market. Yet, as Sandler VP Bill Bartlett points out, **the most effective, proven strategies for shortening the runway to success for new hires remain largely unknown and unimplemented.**

Here are Bill Bartlett's five keys to effective sales onboarding. We make a point of sharing these five keys with our clients – and indeed with leaders of any organization that makes attracting and retaining the best sales talent a priority. The onboarding process that results can be easily executed using remote workplace tools like email, text messages, and Zoom.

- **Preparation.** Most sales leaders do not prepare any onboarding process. They just react once the person has been hired. This is the single biggest mistake, and perhaps the easiest to rectify. Allocate the (minimal) time and bandwidth necessary to set up a personalized onboarding plan before the salesperson's first day on the job. The tips that follow will point you toward what you should be preparing.

- **Identify and discuss the top ten behaviors this person will be responsible for executing consistently.** Don't focus on outcomes. Focus on behaviors. The top ten behaviors that salespeople execute on a consistent basis are the key to sustained success; it is imperative that each new hire understand what these behaviors are and what their impact will be on the bottom line. In most situations, these behaviors are:

  - lead generation
  - building relationships
  - qualifying opportunities
  - making presentations
  - servicing customers
  - account management
  - territory development
  - refining and executing the behavioral plan
  - continuous education
  - execution of the organization's selling system

- **Set up a coaching cadence.** We recommend following what we call the Rule of 20-90. That means we spend the first twenty days onboarding someone with daily one-on-one coaching to establish a consistent model of behavior, and then do weekly coaching check-ins for the 90 days following. Note that effective coaching is always a safe, one-on-one conversation focusing on how the salesperson can achieve their most important personal goals. Coaching is never conducted in a group setting.

- **Set weekly goals.** The process of setting goals is one of the keys to helping the salesperson maintain a strong sense of self-worth. We recommend helping the salesperson to focus weekly on developing three new professional goals and two personal goals, and to commit to achieving these each week, as part of the coaching process referenced above.

- **Build a "feedback loop" for new hires.** This means following a coaching model. There are four steps in the Sandler coaching process. Each of these steps must be executed in order, in a sequence that builds from what has gone before.

  - *Assess:* In this initial step, the coach diagnoses the current business situation, evaluates the salesperson's competency, benchmarks the timeline for success and establishes the specifics of the coaching relationship.

  - *Establish*: During this step, the coach works with the salesperson to set expectations for the coaching process as well as create the goals that will be used in the measuring of success.

  - *Define:* In the third step of the coaching process, the coach explores new behaviors. This means sharing feedback and working with the salesperson to better utilize existing skills in need of improvement. This focus on behavior modification is the result of awareness garnered from the Assess phase.

  - *Execute*: This step involves the execution of the new behavior plan, as well as the corresponding skills.

These coaching steps –*Assess, Establish, Define, Execute* – repeat in order, indefinitely, for as long as the coaching relationship continues.
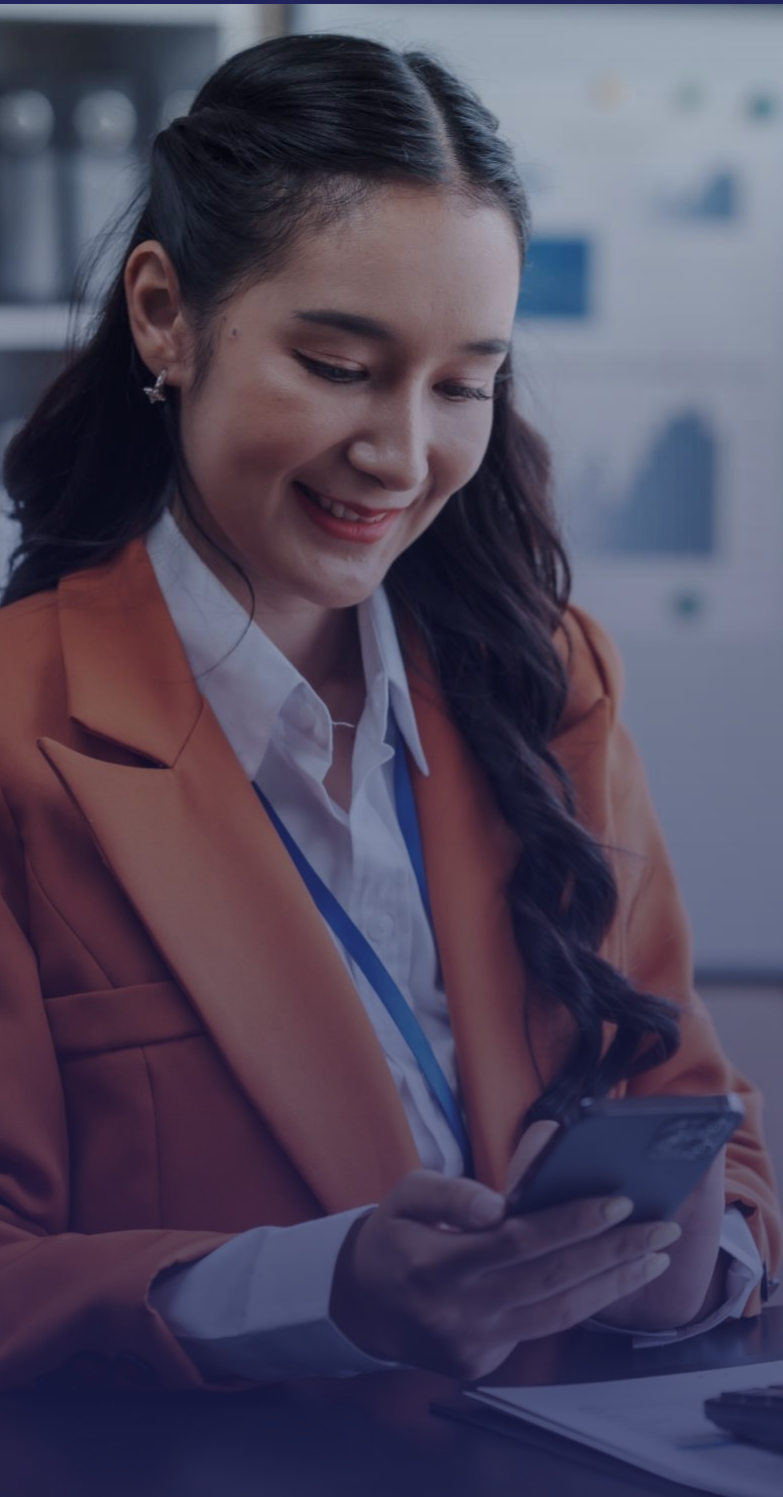
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THE BOTTOM LINE

If you set aside time for planning … if you identify the most important behaviors … if you follow the 20-90 rule … if you set clear weekly goals … and if you follow a clear coaching model, *there will be good outcomes.* You will onboard new sales talent in a way that optimizes the odds of success in both the short and long terms. And you will hold on to more of the best salespeople.

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