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**IMPORTANCE OF EMPLOYEES RECRUITMENT
AND SELECTION FOR A SALES REPRESENTATIVE
POSITION WITH EMPHASIS
ON THEIR CHARACTERISTICS**

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Recruitment is often misconcepted as a transparent and simple personnel activity and some companies underestimate its importance. That is why the practice often witnesses non-differentiated human resources selection procedures regardless the position which is to be mastered. This paper deals with problem issues of selection and recruitment of sales representatives with special emphasis on their characteristics and is accompanied by a research having taken place in early 2011 and focusing on recruitment of candidates for sales representatives positions with the aim to obtain customer's views of sales representatives characteristics.

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Introduction

Every company wishing to keep its share on the market must thoroughly define and assure its goals and visions and possess sufficient tools to reach them. One of the resources directly connected with meeting the company goals is qualified and motivated employees in an optimum structure and optimum number [1].

The objective of this article is to identify and discuss aspects concerning employees' selection and recruitment. The selection and recruitment process should be always paid an utmost attention, as it is very time-and-finance consuming and, in case of mistake, it might also cause big losses in the future. Some professions, however, require special care and discretion, which applies, e.g., to a position of a sales representative. Selection and recruitment processes of appropriate sales representatives should be carried out extremely carefully, as there are a lot of average sales representatives but only very few excellent ones. Also the difference between an average and the best sales representative can be significant [2], and what is more, the sales representative is expected not to be only a good employee of the company but an acceptable partner for a client, too. The article also includes basic results of research relating to employees' selection and recruitment to a position of a sales representative.

Recruitment and Selection of Employees

It is evident, that the progressive development in technologies, information and globalization makes human resources the most important competitive advantage [3]. Considering their creative, intellectual and working abilities they represent one of the crucial factors for acquiring the competitive advantage and belong among the essential sources for the future company success [4]. Employees are a very important group of stakeholders participating in the process of meeting the company goals [5]. Thus, it is necessary to approach this potential with respect and consider current professional and motivation preferences [6]. The employee's behaviour can be influenced by various ways [7] and it is desirable to start as early as at the first contact with the employee.

An inevitable prerequisite for successful recruitment procedures is a carefully carried job description analysis and precisely defined qualification standards necessary for future employee's functioning in the position. It is strange that numerous companies have not prepared their job descriptions and they still recruit candidates for them. Another frequent phenomenon appears to be failing to offer a vacant position to current company employees. Some companies prefer to opt for outer sources and recruit employees via job offices, schools, other companies, commercial job agencies etc. They believe this brings about new approaches, creativity, experience free of "in-house-problems" and a direct

opportunity to match the position with the candidate. However, also the inner sources, i.e., the current employees possess certain advantages. Their induction and orientation period is shorter and simpler than with outer sources, they know the company and its culture and they do not have to adapt to new circumstances. The disadvantage of this selection procedure rests in generating another vacancy. This option, however, strengthens employee's loyalty and efficiency as they realize the employer cares about their satisfaction and career development.

The recruitment procedure itself consists of several successive phases:

- identifying recruitment resources,
- recruitment method selection,
- specification of documents required from the candidates,
- formulating and announcing the job position offer,
- processing documents of the candidates.

As soon as the delivery of candidates' documents closes, the selection of employees starts. This process may open with a pre-selection based on candidates' documents, which helps us exclude those who have not met the particular job requirements in terms of knowledge and skills, or as the case may be, those, whose employability is not in compliance with the Labour Code. According to the character of the vacant position the selection process may consist of several levels, in certain cases complemented with testing (concerns testing of knowledge, skills, stress management, assertiveness etc.). In any case, the selection process should comprise a personal interview with a candidate, during which we can obtain a comprehensive picture of the candidate personality. It is also necessary to bear in mind that the employee selection is a double-side matter affecting both the company and the candidate. The aim of both the sides is to get to know each other in the best possible way to arrive at the best choice. The company wants to acquire the most suitable employee and the employee strives to find the best employer.

As with all company activities, acquiring employees is operated within financial limits set for recruitment costs. These costs must correspond with these activity outcomes [8]. Only when the recruitment and selection procedures are well prepared, it is possible to reveal what the candidate expects from the position, what she/he is going to offer to their employer and also whether the employee's expectations are realistic or not. This may prevent from consequent disappointment and undesirable job turnover [9]. An indispensable part of the recruitment and selection procedures must be, therefore, a clearly formulated company offer. Not only money, but also non-financial stimulation is highly important for company employees [10].

Personal Selling

One of the marketing mix instruments, besides public relations, sponsoring, promotion, direct marketing, fairs and exhibitions, internet communication etc., is also personal selling.

As well as the perception of general marketing has been changed in course of time, also the viewpoint of personal selling has evolved during its long-run. It has moved from the former pushy hard-sell approach of salespeople, whose only interest rested in making a deal, to the current concept, when they care for building long-term relationships with customers.

One of the personal selling tasks is to help customers get acquainted with a product or service, inform them about it, make them buy it, or eventually provide them with after-sales service.

Personal selling possesses a great advantage, which is interactivity, i.e., face-to-face communication helping to eliminate misunderstandings between a salesperson and customers and inform most and best about the product or service. Another significant asset is feedback that helps the company to adjust the offer of current products and development of new products. Personal contact with customers, e.g., based on visiting the clients, creates a positive climate for building long-lasting relationships with customers. Another asset of the personal contact brings about the opportunity for a good sales representative to get adjusted to a momentary situation, which turns the personal selling into a very good communication tool. Another task of personal selling is to give a presentation of a company, to build its image. Individual sales representatives may present a company in different ways, which may issue in distorting the company image.

The disadvantage is, that the personal selling is relatively expensive, especially in terms of training and acquiring highly qualified sales representatives and in terms of the company's lack of control over their sales representatives' activities.

There are various definitions of personal selling. De Pelsmacker and co. defines the personal selling as a „double-side communication face-to-face, the content of which is to provide information, show, keep or build long-term relationships or persuasion of certain people — members of a specific part of society” [11].

Nagyová defines personal selling as an “interpersonal influencing process of presenting a product, service idea etc. carried out by a seller in a direct contact with a customer” [12].

Boučková *et al.* states a definition of personal selling as a “mutual communication between a buyer and seller” [13].

This could be followed by other examples. The definitions mostly share one feature which concerns communication skills between two or more people (aiming

to sell a product or service), and at the same time it points out building long-term relationships with their customers. It all depends on sales representatives.

Today's sales representatives must always be professional, ready to solve certain problems as soon as possible. It is not always easy to find an optimum way of communication with a customer because even nowadays lots of customers see sales representatives only as disturbers of their privacy. That is why a potential success or failure in personal selling depends always on individual sales representatives.

Recruitment and Selection of Sales Representatives with Emphasis on their Characteristics

Probably the most important question related to the recruitment and selection of the sales representative is — what should a sales representative be like? Kotler [2] refers to various researches, the results of which show that to recruit and select a good sales representative is very difficult. One of the researches argues that a good sales representative is enthusiastic, resistant, initiative, she/he believes in themselves and is committed to their job considering it a part of their life-style, is customer-oriented. Another research implies that a good sales representative is independent, motivated and excellent at listening. Another study states that a sales representative should make friends with customers, should be resistant, enthusiastic, polite, helpful and first of all honest. The sellers should also be internally motivated, disciplined, hard-working, build strong relationships with customers. Especially the sales representative's ability to identify customers and provide them with the right information leads to customers' stronger engagement and consequent benefits [14]. The studies also prove a good seller must be rather a team player than a soloist. Company executives and human resource managers seem to face a challenging task.

An essential step during the recruitment procedure should be (as with acquiring any other employee) analysis of the business position, characteristics of the most successful company sales representatives and definition of the most important specific features for a given line of business. It is highly important to consider what the position requires for and what type of person should be looked for it. The sales representative position needs a certain amount of planning and administration, includes extensive travelling. The sales representative will cooperate with purchasers on different levels of management and can often be rejected etc. A successful representative should cope with all the situations.

We already know the sales representative position is very demanding and it will be certainly difficult to acquire a suitable person. Where is it possible to find the candidates meeting the requirements in terms of their traits and professional qualities? The new sales representatives can be acquired on the basis of references

by current sales representatives and HR agencies, advertisements, web search, at schools etc. A very efficient way of getting sales representatives is their takeover from other companies, as they do not need any further training and can start working immediately.

The recruitment procedures often lure a lot of applicants for this post as the sales representative position is viewed as an attractive job in the labour market. The selection and recruitment procedures may be very varied both from the point of view of its nature and time. It is, however, important not to save here, as it does not pay back. The selection mostly starts with an informal interview, various other tests may follow and finally a selecting interview takes place. This last step is indispensable for the sales representative's position. Some companies (e.g., IBM, Gillette etc.) use formal tests measuring the business capability, analytical and organizational predispositions and skills, personal traits and further characteristics. Besides the testing itself, an inevitable part is played by such things as references, information from previous employers and reactions of the applicant during the interview.

Careful selection may substantially help to increase the performance of the whole sales department. Bad choice may lead to unstable performances and to the increase in costs. Losing a sales representative causes losses implied by selection and recruitment procedures, training a new employee, lost business costs and decrease in the whole sales team performance.

Survey of Customers' Opinions on Sales Representative Characteristics

A survey in early 2011 searched for opinions of general public on the ways of selling with special attention paid to a sales representative's traits. The survey was carried out among 67 randomly chosen respondents — customers on consumption market. The respondents were choosing from multiple choice based answers, were offered an opportunity to add their own comments and to choose even more than one answer.

Introductory questions in the survey concerned preferred promotion methods, advertising media and promotion techniques. Based on the respondents' opinions in terms of promotion methods we can derive that the mostly preferred are the company websites (58 % respondents ranked them first), closely followed by promotional gifts and billboards. As to the advertising media, the TV prevailed (54 % respondents voted for it), followed by outdoor advertising, advertising in shops and means of transport. More than 80 % respondents stated discounts suit them most of promotion techniques, the second place took gifts, followed by vouchers.

When deciding what sales methods the customers prefer the personal selling ranked second. In personal selling there are several methods of communicating with customers. It may be a personal presentation, personal sales at exhibitions or business appointment. In any case, however, customers (according to the

respondents) prefer demonstrations and samples in a form of gift samples (72 % of the survey respondents confirmed).

All respondents are sure the selection of a candidate for the sales representative's position is very important (100 %). Among the personal characteristics which address the customers most during the purchase there were pleasant behaviour (60 respondents, i.e., 90 %), professional approach (47 respondents, i.e., 70 %), helpfulness (44 respondents, i.e., 66 %), consideration (35 respondents, i.e., 52 %), appearance (25 respondents, i.e., 37 %) and company loyalty (5 respondents, i.e., 7 %). It is obvious that traits listed by the respondents are listed also in the previous part of this paper, which only confirms the argument stated in literature. The respondents' views are demonstrated in Fig. 1

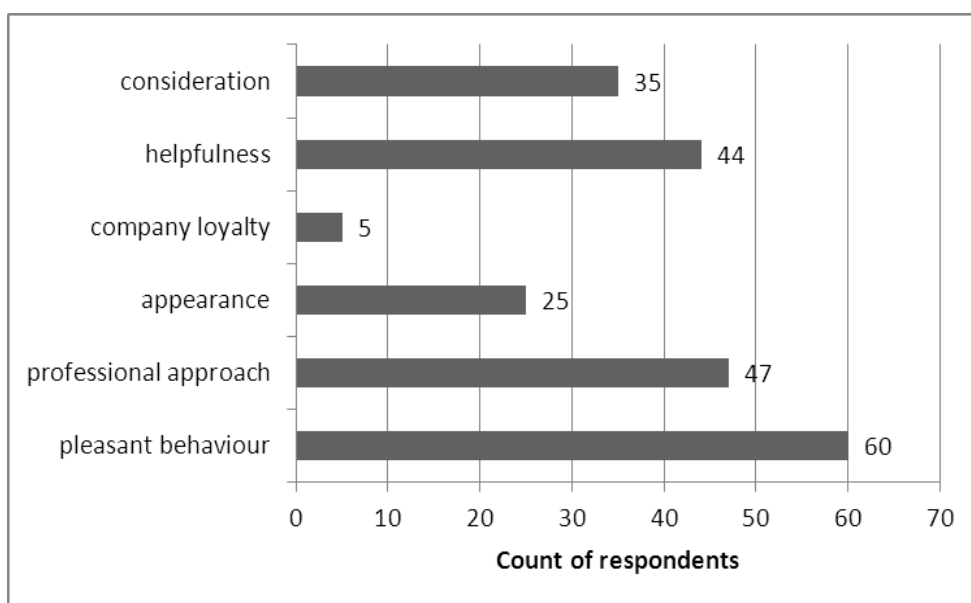


Fig.1 Preferred traits of a sales representative (our research)

Our survey showed current customers do not consider the personal contact with sales representatives unusual or unpleasant. On the contrary, they realize advantages the personal selling provides, they welcome an opportunity to get familiar with the product by multiple senses even before they buy it and to get afforded a qualified demonstration and familiarization with the product via professional, helpful and pleasant personal sales representatives.

Conclusion

The process of selection and recruitment of employees undoubtedly belongs among the most important personnel activities because a successful employee selection defines a success of the company itself. The position of a sales representative belongs among the positions where a mistake in selection of an employee is

crucial. This position calls not only for a hardworking, loyal, dynamic employee, but also for a helpful, sensitive, considerate partner listening to a customer. That is why it is difficult to acquire such an employee, to train them and keep them. The importance of the right choice of a sales representative is perceived also by our respondents — customers, as it is obvious from the survey. The list of traits of the sales representatives appealing to them is not certainly complete, but it is obvious the success rests primarily in pleasant and professional approach, helpfulness exercised during the purchase, willingness applied to meet customers' requirements, which are most visible qualities in sales representatives' work.

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