

**SPECIAL
REPORT:**

BRAINSHARK®

How CSOs Can Win the War for Sales Talent in 2019



“

TALENT



IS EVERY
SALES LEADER'S

**TOP
PRIORITY,**

BUT NO ONE'S

JOB

Jim Ninivaggi
Chief Readiness Officer
Brainshark

”

Introduction



Finding and keeping the right sales talent is a universal challenge for sales organizations across industries. In fact, 84% of today's sales leaders don't think they have the team to succeed¹.

"Talent is every sales leader's top priority, but no one's job," says Jim Ninivaggi, chief readiness officer at Brainshark. "Not a lot of companies think about the sales talent lifecycle as a process, the way they do lead generation or the sales cycle."

Research has shown that when sales organizations are confident in their talent, good things happen: higher percentages of reps make

or exceed their goals and achieve higher win rates of forecasted deals.

But in today's market, with baby boomers leaving the workforce and a huge wave of millennials now firmly established, **the time is now for sales leaders to step up and own their sales talent strategies.**

In this Brainshark Special Report, we'll explore the biggest challenges for CSOs, CROs and other sales leaders and how **sales enablement and readiness** can support a better sales talent strategy in 2019.

What's the Deal with Sales Talent Today?

Sales leaders across industries don't deny that talent is a challenge. So why is finding and retaining sales talent so difficult?

Evolving Job Expectations

The influx of millennials has created a new generation of sellers with different career expectations. This generation applies for and accepts jobs expecting that they will be supported differently from day one.

“Sellers look more carefully at companies before they join, and they want to see that they're going to be enabled from an onboarding perspective and an ongoing perspective, which puts a lot more pressure on sales leaders to think

through how they're going to do that,” says Phil Harrell, service director of chief sales officer strategies at SiriusDecisions.

Sales leaders should view hiring as if it were the beginning of the onboarding process, where they are assessing candidates' readiness in terms of the **competencies, behaviors and traits** that are critical to the role. Adapting to these new employee expectations is a critical part of competing in the market and attracting top candidates.



You cannot
hire experience
& expect full
competence

Heather Cole
SiriusDecisions

Experience Isn't Everything

Traditionally, it's not unusual for companies to evaluate candidates primarily on experience (number of years in sales, industry background, etc.). But by placing an over-emphasis on experience, key competencies and behaviors might go overlooked.

“It is common for companies to hire for experience and assume competence that will directly translate to their new role. I can't tell you how many times I've heard the chief revenue officer say, ‘we hire somebody based on experience, so we don't have to invest heavily into onboarding and other development programs,’” says Heather Cole, service director, sales enablement strategies at SiriusDecisions. “The real truth is, you cannot hire experience and expect full competence in any role. It's a very limited perspective and an unrealistic expectation.”

When hiring, it's essential to look beyond experience to identify key competencies that can be developed through onboarding, coaching and practice. Narrowing your focus

only to sellers with experience in a specific industry, for example, not only limits the pool of talent available to you, but also sets a lower talent bar for the candidates you hire.

Lack of Effective Readiness Programs

Even if you make the perfect hire, that person can only succeed if they're supported with the skills and information required through effective sales readiness strategies. This includes everything from onboarding and continuous training to manager-led coaching and peer-to-peer learning programs.

But, according to [CSO Insights](#), nearly half of organizations say **onboarding programs need improvement** or major redesign and 60% rely on informal or random sales coaching approaches. This can lead to lower win rates and poor quota attainment; both contributing factors to reps leaving companies sooner than expected.

Onboarding, in particular, is a make-or-break time to ensure that new reps succeed. CSO Insights also found that poor onboarding increases turnover rate by 80%.

Sales leaders should work more closely with the sales enablement department and other stakeholders to determine the readiness of candidates earlier and more accurately and continue that assessment throughout the talent lifecycle.

Assessing the Readiness of Existing and Future Talent

Another key to developing a sales talent strategy is to understand the readiness requirements of your current and future sales team across all roles.

Paula Shannon, a global sales executive with over 20 years' experience, says talent is like your overall business and sales strategy: you need a clear vision.

"If you don't know what you have or where you're going, how can you have the proper talent strategy?"



Role Definitions

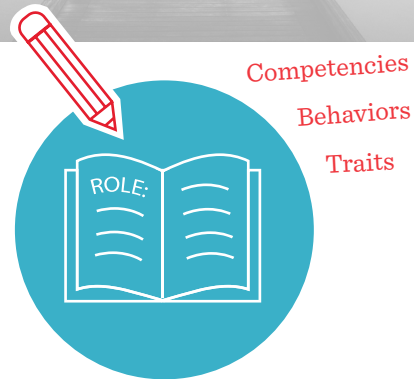
Start by taking stock of every role in your field force. Develop a clear definition for each role by outlining 'what good looks like' in terms of key competencies as well as the attributes and behaviors that will lead to success.

"In my experience, one of the greatest obstacles for sales leaders, chief revenue officers and sales VPs, is that sales roles aren't properly defined and there's a tremendous amount of role corruption,"

Shannon says. "When roles are not clear, when jobs are comingled, you have mediocrity, you don't have excellence."

CSO Insights advocates for this approach as well, using the term 'success profiles:' "a data-driven assessment process to determine what attributes are associated

with success in your specific sales model (e.g. cognitive skills, learning propensity and interpersonal relating approaches) to



"There's a tremendous amount of role corruption"

-Paula Shannon
Global Sales Executive

ensure your profile narrows in on the specific traits that differentiate high from low performers."

Role definitions should be used throughout the hiring and interview

process and inform your job descriptions – and they can always be updated as roles evolve and change. Based on interview questions and exercises, you can see if the candidate maps to the competencies, behaviors and traits of the role definition.

Assessing Existing Talent

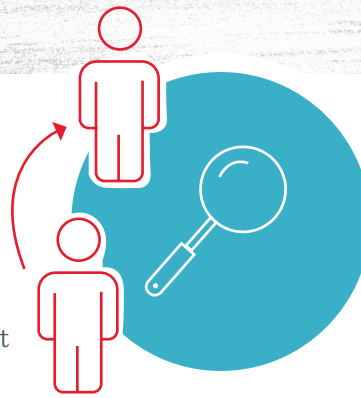
Next, determine if your existing talent is in the right roles or performing to expectations.

Conduct a competency-based talent assessment, which involves evaluating salespeople's competencies, behaviors and traits and seeing if they align to the definitions of each role. This can be done in a variety of ways, through behavioral assessments (The Predictive Index, for example), profiling and more.

"Once you do [an assessment], you build muscle and some capability in yourself as a leader and the team and you can use that assessment in your interview processes and recruitment and really ensure that you upscale your talent," says Shannon.

Remember: just because someone isn't succeeding in a role, doesn't mean they

aren't of use somewhere else in your organization. If they exhibit traits and competencies that would make them a better fit as a customer success manager, for example, then consider moving them over.



"You have to force yourself to assess and cull the sales team constantly"

-Paula Shannon

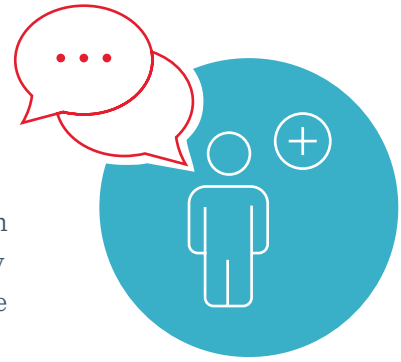
"Some people are very good resources in the wrong roles, and they might have a chance to be reassessed and migrated into another role that's a better fit," Shannon says. "You will also find people that are not at that A or B level in terms of keeping and promoting them. You have to force yourself to assess and cull the sales team constantly and be honest with yourself. If you do not have the top tier talent, then you need to make a change."

Assessing Future Talent

Leaders should view the sourcing and recruitment process as if it was a sales process; don't wait for candidates to come to you, you need to create your own pipeline of candidates. (See below)

Once you have a serious candidate that you want to bring in for an interview, this is when the onboarding and assessment process begins.

For example, if "strong written communication skills" is a key competency for a role, have the candidate write a prospecting email to determine their readiness in that area. You can create similar exercises based on the other competencies of the job, as outlined in the role definition.



New Ideas for Hiring & Interviewing



Nurture top talent:

"Identify industries and companies where you admire their people and feel there's a fit. Approach recruits like leads. You can engage those identified candidates with content so if and when they're ready, you're at the top of the list."

– Jim Ninivaggi,
Chief Readiness Officer,
Brainshark



Always have benchwarmers:

"Always be very clear at the end of the interview about what you loved about them and what they could do better. Keep them up to date when milestones happen, whether you get new funding or have social events. Make them feel good about their experience with your company."

– Jeff McDonough,
Owner & President of Ship.Boston,
a sales recruitment firm



Ask about the real world:

"Put candidates in situational questioning where they are asked about different scenarios and asked to provide real life examples. It shows you if they have the experience or if they're making it up."

– Colleen Honan,
Chief Sales Officer,
Brainshark

Sales Talent Retention via Readiness and Development

It's not enough to hire the right sales talent – you also need to keep them. Many sales leaders now have a (not so) secret weapon: the sales enablement team. While sales enablement is a stakeholder in the pre-hire part of the talent strategy, they're also heavily involved with the new hire experience through training, coaching, career development and areas that impact employee retention.

A Fresh Approach to Onboarding

While onboarding is obviously critical to fostering sales talent, it's also the area many companies could stand to improve on.

Brainshark's [Agile Onboarding Methodology](#) breaks the often months-long ramp process into shorter time periods of training and coaching, focused on building proficiency in key competencies through sales activities, such as a prospecting call. For example, a new rep may have 2 weeks to complete training and

assessments (i.e., quizzes or video coaching activities) and earn a certification before their first prospecting call. After completing the call, they'll begin training for the next activity in the sales process.

These shorter training "sprints" can enable you to course correct more quickly if a new hire is struggling during training and address potential issues early on.

"The first couple of months should be intense with onboarding and assessments to ensure you've made the right hire. Companies that do that effectively ensure that reps are ready before sending them out to buyers," says Ninivaggi.

Of course, just because onboarding ends, doesn't mean learning stops. Sales enablement strategies that provide continuous training on product updates, messaging, key skills and new company developments are critical to setting up new sellers for long-term success.

Avoiding the Sophomore/ Junior Year Curse

Years 2 and 3 are pivotal times for reps; it's when they (and you) decide if they can make it long-term or look for greener pastures; otherwise known as the [‘sophomore/junior year curse.’](#)

Sales leaders, along with sales enablement leaders, need a strategy to retain these second and third-year reps. SiriusDecisions has found that 36% of high-performing salespeople have cited a **lack of learning paths as their key reason for leaving a company.**

To combat this, support them with continuous training that's proactive, instead of reactive. For example, instead of only providing training when there's a milestone event, like a product launch, deliver bite-sized, micro-learning on a regular basis that includes assessments to validate that they've mastered the competencies.

Following training, there should be consistent coaching and practice opportunities for reps to demonstrate their knowledge and hone their skills.

Reps can even help each other through a [peer learning program](#) where they can share best practices and ‘win’ stories, empowering your experienced top performers to share knowledge with the new generations of sellers.

Career Development and Mentoring

Another important but often overlooked part of an effective sales talent strategy is career development and mentoring programs. If reps don't see a clear path for ‘what's next,’ then they could start thinking about what's next *outside* of your company.

Early in their tenure, **provide them with a pathway for growth** and career advancement. For example, offer sales development reps a learning and assessment path where they can upskill for other sales positions, such as account executive.

You can also create programs for salespeople to develop

leadership and management skills. Brainshark, for example, launched its [Future Leaders program](#): a series of workshops for salespeople (and other departments) to develop skills and learn about topics such as corporate boards, handling difficult conversations, management vs. leadership and more.

For salespeople who have demonstrated high-potential in terms of competency and productivity, **tap them to be mentors** to help new reps coming in under them.



About Brainshark

Brainshark sales readiness software equips businesses with the training, coaching and content authoring capabilities to achieve sales mastery and outsell the competition.

With Brainshark, companies can: prepare sales teams with on-demand training that accelerates onboarding and keeps reps up-to-speed; validate readiness with sales coaching that ensures reps master your message; and empower sales organizations with rich, dynamic content that can be created quickly and accessed anywhere.

Thousands of companies – including more than half of the Fortune 100 – rely on Brainshark to identify and close performance gaps, and get better results from their sales enablement initiatives.

Learn more at: www.brainshark.com

Want to learn more about sales readiness technology?

See a Demo: brainshark.com/see-a-demo

Contact Sales: brainshark.com/contact-sales

Endnotes:

1. CSO Insights 2018 Sales Talent Study