

## Defining Sales Talent Management: An HR Execs' Approach

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Freescale's 2005 revenues totaled \$5.84 billion on the back of a 900-person sales team promoting its semiconductors in an ultra-competitive market.

Freescale accomplished its goals, in part, by bucking many negative sales talent management trends. While 63 percent of respondents to Miller Heiman's Sales Performance Study report they do not have an effective process for hiring qualified sales professionals, Freescale has a proprietary model. And, while only 45 percent say they benchmark the traits of their top sales performers to help make hiring decisions, Freescale has identified 11 core competencies. What's more, despite increasing turnover at many corporations, Freescale has not lost any of its top sales executives in the past year, giving it a clear advantage amid a dearth of qualified sales talent.

Representing the Sales Performance Journal, business journalist Jennifer LeClaire talked with Kurt Twining, senior vice president of Human Resources at Austin, Texas-based Freescale about his approach to recruiting, training and retaining the best and brightest sales talent in the technology industry.

**Sale Performance Journal:** What would your organization be like if you were to "clone" your top performers?

**Kurt Twining:** We are very engaged in understanding what "winning behaviors" our top performers engage in every day: how they act differently, how they think differently and what competencies they have. We have completed a detailed study on our top 22 performers around the globe. We interviewed them for approximately four hours using a Behavioral Event process that helped us discover 11 core competencies that we now use to select, develop and promote people. Each of the competencies were then scaled into four levels, and we were able to set a gold standard for the behaviors that we know differentiated average from great employees. Now we are introducing a concept called Making Great Leaders, where all of our exempt employees will get feedback on how they compare to this competency model and on their leadership styles, their motives, values, social roles and self-image. This will help us train and develop employees with winning behaviors.

**SPJ:** Do you see a widening gap between core and star performers? How are you closing that gap?

**Kurt Twining:** Our goal is to close the gap. If you want to look at star performers in sales, then you have to study things like emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the awareness of and ability to scan the

environment quickly, understand what the situation is, be cognizant of your own self-awareness and apply the right behaviors in a healthy and productive manner. If you can grasp the four quadrants of emotional intelligence, then you have a chance to outsell your counterparts by 133 percent to 200 percent. Every time you add one more competency to your skill set, you have a leg up in connecting with people. When you put gold sheets and blue sheets together with emotional intelligence, you have a great chance to win. Those common data points on top of the iceberg, like where you went to school or where you grew up, have no predictive validity on success. They are just your ticket to the game. When we hire people, we want to know what has collected underneath the iceberg, like motives, values and self-image.

**SPJ:** When you look for sales execs, what's most important to you – natural tendencies toward sales success, like charisma or sheer talent, or a long resume of relevant experience?

**Kurt Twining:** We just hired someone today. He had a high likeability factor. That's important because you end up doing business with people that you generally enjoy. Then, the second level of criteria kicks in quickly: Can they understand and demonstrate the right value

proposition for each unique customer and can they demonstrate the confidence and the commitment to deliver on all expectations? We want to know where in diverse environments around the globe they have made a strategic impact, opening new markets, creating new solutions and business opportunities that hadn't been there before and leading others in the same direction. So you need to be emotionally intelligent, but you also need technical intellect.

**SPJ:** The 80/20 rule means most of the sales team is underperforming. If 80/20 became 60/40 (40 being top producers) the revenue impact would be tremendous. Have you experienced this 80/20 phenomenon in your organization, and how are you breaking the 80/20 rule?

**Kurt Twining:** I don't know that we are 80/20. Our expectations are higher than that. I look at it a different way. Retail stores have A stores, B stores and C stores. They used to spend all their time trying to get C stores to move up to B stores and then hope their Bs would get to As. Today they don't do that. Today they eliminate C stores. They spend all their time getting Bs to A so they can have more As. That's the approach we are taking.

**SPJ:** The cost of turnover among a sales team is high – they may even take customers with them. What are the key challenges in retaining star performers today?

**Kurt Twining:** We haven't lost any members of our sales team at the top two levels within the organization in the past year. I believe it's because we have an exciting growth plan. We award our top performers with equity within our company that builds the pride of ownership. We have a good business proposition and a compelling story in the sense that we are a two-year-old company that has a bright future. The company spun out of Motorola two years ago, and everybody wants to be a part of seeing how far we can take this organization and what markets we can be a part of growing. Our sales commission plans are continually reviewed to ensure that we have the right balance between growth and design wins. It's important that everyone aligns to the future of our organization, without losing focus on profitability. We are working on the things that matter most and that is one of the things that differentiates us as we compete in a very competitive market. The good news is our organizational turnover is tracking under nine percent.

### About the Author

Jennifer LeClaire has reported for The Associated Press, The Christian Science Monitor, and The New York Times.

### About Miller Heiman

Miller Heiman has been a thought leader and innovator in the sales arena for almost thirty years, helping clients worldwide win high-value complex deals, grow key accounts and build winning sales organizations.

With a prestigious client list including Marriott Corp., Dow Chemical, Pepsi, Schwab Institutional and Wells Fargo, Miller Heiman helps clients in virtually every major industry to build high performance sales teams that deliver consistent sustainable results to drive revenue.

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