

## A's Hire A's, B's Hire C's

### Not everyone is cut out to hire a Star

*By Jeremy Miller*

Donald Rumsfeld nailed it when he said, "A's hire A's, B's hire C's." Hiring the best people is not a new idea. It is actually quite common. Especially since people like Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*, proclaimed that good to great companies got the right people on the bus before they became great. The problem is not everyone deserves to hire A's. Hiring A's is a privilege. It comes with having a great brand, great products and great culture. This is the environment that attracts star sales people, because they can apply their skills to a company that will reward them accordingly.

That being said, if a company's brand sucks, products suck or culture sucks, why would a star sales person ever work there? Life's too short! These weak companies may be able to get the reps in the door, but good luck holding onto them. This job market is just way too hot and getting hotter still.

Twenty years ago companies with less than ideal selling conditions could still get good quality sales people. Why? Sales people needed jobs just like everyone else. Today is a different story. The unemployment rate is at a 33 year low, and continues to decline. This hot job market is giving job seekers choice.

Today, at LEAPJob, we don't see sales people that are chronically unemployed. Sure there may be a layoff every now and then, but any extra sales people that hit the job market are gobbled right back up in short order. The typical job seekers that we are working with are receiving multiple job offers. Companies want them, and they are willing to pay for their talents.

What is remarkable is the media tells us North America is in a recession. Jim Flaherty, the Federal Finance Minister, claimed that Ontario is becoming a "have-not province." If that's the case, the job numbers are showing a clear separation from previous recessions. In 1989 and 2001, companies shed their workforces in droves. The unemployment rates skyrocketed, and many sales people had to compromise their career choices in order to stay employed. Today sales people are gainfully employed even though the economy is stagnating. A slowdown in the economy is not providing more supply in the job market.

'B companies' are having a much harder time attracting A sales people. Let's not even consider the C and D companies. They don't stand a chance! This job market in a recession is difficult for employers, but let's consider how hard it will be once we move into a growth economy. If you don't have a compelling reason for sales people to join your company now – good luck.

To hire an A, you have to behave like an A. That means becoming your customers' first choice when they need a product or service you provide. This is by no means easy. Creating a first call advantage requires clear focus and commitment from all levels of the organization. The products must fit clear market needs. The brand must be engaging and fit the expectations of your customers. The sales people must promote all these values, and let customers know you have the best choice. And while you are doing this, you have to outperform the competition who is trying to knock you off your throne.

You may not get it right on day one, but that is ok. It is the commitment to get it right that counts. That commitment combined with passion and focus is what great sales people need to be successful. It is a lot of fun, and very rewarding to sell for an organization that puts these elements together. Why? Because the customers take notice, and the sales cycle moves smoothly. Sales people don't have to fight an uphill battle trying to convince people to buy a

product that sucks for a company that sucks. They get to sell a product and a company they believe in. Even if the product has its faults, the commitment of the organization to get it right makes everything else ok.

Moving aggressively to have a winning product and brand is a minimum requirement for the new economy. Consider the demographics for a moment. By 2011 the first of the Baby Boomers will turn 65. By 2031 the bulk of the Boomers will have left the market, and there is no way to replace their contribution to the workforce. No matter what way you look at it, staffing is a major challenge for the next two decades. Only the best of the best are going to be able to attract and hire top sales people.

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