

WORDS OF SALES WISDOM



Lead-Generation Techniques of Superstars

[By A. Harrison Barnes]

One of the most interesting aspects of being a sales manager is watching how most people whose jobs require them to sell services and products rarely vary their approaches to selling. The most overlooked aspect of moving any product or service is the need to consistently vary your approaches to how you are trying to sell your product.

Regardless of whether you sell products or services, the need to vary your sales techniques remains the same. Leads are the lifeblood of any sales system, and I want to make it clear that in order to radically increase the number of clients you have, you need to vary your sales approaches.

In order to explain the importance of a good lead-generation approach, I would like to examine the nation's top legal-recruiting firm and how its recruiters go about generating leads.

Case Study: BCG Attorney Search

One of my best experiences and favorite aspects of my work has been running a national legal-recruiting firm called BCG Attorney Search. BCG Attorney Search does an exceptional job, has extremely qualified recruiters, and, in terms of its representation of candidates, is more professional, more insightful, and more thorough than any other legal-recruiting firm out there.

Most of the candidates BCG works with receive offers, and its screening standards are so high that legal employers look at its candidates very closely. Each legal recruiter in the company is supported by at least two or three additional administrative support people who assist the recruiter with tracking down job orders, generating candidates, and doing a great deal of the work.

This is unprecedented in the industry, and this high degree of "back-office" work that supports the recruiters makes them among

the most successful recruiters-legal or otherwise-anywhere. A recruiter for this company making less than \$200,000 per year is the exception rather than the rule. Most recruiters are able to get to this level within one to two years on the job-with no prior experience.

Because BCG Attorney Search is so good at what it does and because its recruiters are so exceptional, more than 95% of its recruiters never even do recruiting; they are flooded with interest from candidates who want to use their services. It takes the company hours each day to screen resumes flooding the firm before the firm's recruiters even see a candidate.

What makes BCG Attorney Search so interesting is the high dollar value of a "placement," which is equivalent to a "sale" in the legal-recruiting business. Each sale is worth tens of thousands of dollars to the recruiter who places a given candidate with a law firm or corporation. A placement is highly valued because fewer than one in every 250 attorneys in the United States has the qualifications that would lead a firm to pay a fee to hire him or her. Accordingly, the jobs of BCG Attorney Search recruiters are based on the numbers of "exceptional candidates" they see coming across their desks. The more exceptional candidates a BCG Attorney Search recruiter receives the better.

After spending years working for BCG Attorney Search, I have observed a couple of trends that have emerged that separate

the company and the individual recruiters' marketing efforts from what average recruiters do. I have examined the careers of numerous legal recruiters and recruiting companies and seen what makes certain recruiters better than others in terms of lead generation.

There are certain traits that make recruiters and recruiting companies exceptional at lead generation. After years of having been actively involved in all aspects of running a recruiting firm-and having been a recruiter myself-I have made the following observations about what it takes for an individual salesperson or organization to be exceptional at lead generation:

Good Sales Organizations and Salespeople Have Referral Systems in Place.

Most recruiters will simply make a placement and then forget about the person placed. This is similar to what most sales organizations do. They will often sell a product and then fail to continue communicating with the prospect. In my opinion, this is one of the most profound mistakes a salesperson or organization can make.

In the case of BCG Attorney Search, keeping in touch with prospects could not be more important. Remember that fewer than one in every 250 attorneys is placeable. The entire name of the game involves tracking down the most placeable attorneys and then bonding with them and placing them in positions where they are likely to experience success and fulfillment.

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What an average or poor recruiter is likely to miss, however, is the fact that the person he or she places is likely to know other people who are also likely to be placeable. Staying in contact with people who are placed is probably the best method for generating referrals imaginable. Very few recruiters realize this, however.

I see this with the most successful real estate agents. I see this with the most successful insurance salespeople. I see this with the most successful stockbrokers and financial planners. The fact of the matter is that every single person who succeeds on a major scale at anything sales-related is likely to have a good referral system in place.

Recruiters with good referral systems continually communicate with people after they are placed as trusted confidants. The recruiter is there to listen, and the recruiter is there to answer the person's questions. People appreciate this attention, and this attention is meaningful on all sorts of levels.

Most of the time, good recruiters do not even ask for referrals. Simply staying in touch with people they have worked with and placed is what generates referrals. This is exceptionally important, but very few people do this. It makes no sense to me. Simply staying in touch with people can increase a salesperson's or recruiter's number of sales or placements by 50% or more.

Organizations also need to communicate with the people to whom they have sold their products or services. BCG Attorney Search, for example, frequently communicates with people it has placed. The company sends articles to placements and past candidates. It sends out information about salary changes. It sends placements thank-you cards and letters. The goal of a solid sales organization is to build goodwill.

Again, this is something most sales organizations ignore. Solid companies grow

through referrals and showing interest in the people who have *chosen* to do business with them. This is what separates the strong from the weak. Your company needs to take actions that stimulate referrals.

Good Sales Organizations Are Willing to Acquire Clients While Breaking Even Upfront.

Most salespeople and sales organizations are afflicted with the disease of short-term thinking. Short-term thinking says, "I must make as much money as possible right here and now. I do not care about tomorrow." The fact of the matter is that tomorrow always arrives. When tomorrow arrives, some salespeople are going to be succeeding and having growing careers; others' careers will be stagnant. Which group do you want to belong to?

A good recruiter often spends hours speaking with people he or she may be unable to assist about their careers. Sometimes the candidate wants to work at a small, inferior firm that does not use recruiters, and the recruiter will put the candidate in touch with the firm and walk away without collecting a fee. A good recruiter may spend months doing tons of legwork for a law firm only to have a major project cancelled due to a budget cut or other issue. So many things can go wrong, and it is never easy for a recruiter to be selfless with his or her time or the efforts he or she continually makes.

If there is one thing I have learned after years of recruiting, it is this: Life supports what supports life. Despite recruiters' best intentions, they may often feel like they are being taken advantage of and that their time is being wasted on unprofitable pursuits. They may often believe that the money and effort they have "lost" will not come back to them. In my experience, this could not be further from the truth. The solid work that recruiters do—even if it does not pay

dividends in the here and now—always comes back to them.

I see recruiters investing effort upfront by spending great deals of time doing things like public speaking, writing articles, and other similar pursuits. This spirit of "giving" helps recruiters with their careers and ultimately comes back to them in the form of more clients from referrals and other sources.

Individual recruiters must be willing to acquire candidates whose placements allow them to break even—or even lose money while acquiring candidates. Likewise, sales organizations must be willing to invest time and money upfront to acquire clients. Even if you cannot help someone or sell him or her something right now, you need to remember that he or she may know someone whom you can help. You can communicate with people long after you have met them.

I remember when I was younger constantly getting calls from stockbrokers at work and never having more than a couple thousand dollars to invest. Once I told brokers that, they generally got off the phone quickly and never contacted me again. They said I was not worth it or other things along those lines. If those same people had been willing to help me when I was younger, I would have been very grateful and probably would have done business with them throughout my career. Instead, these people were too eager to make a quick buck.

Good Sales Organizations and Salespeople Are Willing to Guarantee Their Clients' Purchases Through Risk Reversal.

It is ironic but true that most businesspeople are unwilling to guarantee purchases made by their clients. In addition, most salespeople are unwilling to put themselves on the line when making purchases. The thing to remember when you offer guarantees is that very few people are ever going to take you up on them.

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Yes, some people will try your product and then return it or use your service and ask for their money back. However, most people will not. What makes guarantees so powerful is that they can often result in 10%, 20%, or 30% more people using a product or service than might otherwise do so. This massively increased percentage of people using your service will more than offset any returns you may get.

In the legal-recruiting sphere, many recruiting firms will fight with employers over the terms of their guarantee periods. They will say their periods should only be 30 days long or only 90 days long. At BCG Attorney Search, we always strive to give our clients the best guarantees available in the business and rarely push for short-term guarantees.

The first reason for this is that we have faith in our candidates and know they are likely to stay for the long term wherever they go due to our rigorous screening process. The second-and most important-reason for this is that we want to reassure our clients that we will stand behind our work and our people.

I can think of nothing more powerful to motivate me to do something I am not sure about doing than an extremely powerful guarantee. A good guarantee is generally enough to push me "over the edge" and make me decide to make the purchase.

Several months ago, I was considering purchasing a piece of exercise equipment and had been pondering this purchase for months. The salesman finally said something to me that I'll never forget. He said that the company could not offer me a guarantee but that if I truly did not like the product after using it for 30 days, he would give me the commission he received for selling the product (around \$250) right out of his own pocket. After hearing that, I was sold-and I really enjoy the product and benefit from it to this day.

Several years ago, I was in a Dayton Hudson's (now Macy's) in Detroit, Michigan. This particular Hudson's offered a lifetime guarantee for everything it sold. I saw a rough-looking guy walk up to the counter with a beaten-up pair of sneakers he had purchased (according to him) more than a year ago and demand a refund. Incredibly, the store gave him a refund without asking any questions. Nordstrom's does the same thing.

Good organizations stand behind their products. Good organizations and salespeople do whatever it takes to reverse the risk for their clients prior to their purchases.

Effective risk reversal results in more people coming to a company or salesperson and buying what they have to offer.

Good Sales Organizations and Salespeople Emphasize Why They Are Better and Why They Are Different to All of Their Clients.

It is very difficult for businesses to get off the ground. Notwithstanding, once a company gets off the ground, it often starts taking its clients and itself for granted. Regardless of whether it is called a unique selling proposition (USP), an irresistible offer, or a benefit, each company needs to have something that truly and meaningfully sets it apart from the competition. This applies to salespeople, as well.

When the recruiters at BCG Attorney Search deal with potential candidates, they are trained to emphasize the things that make our company great. They tell every candidate why our company is better, and they educate candidates about all of the reasons our company is best positioned to serve them.

While many candidates may already know these things, reinforcing this information is powerful. For those who do not know the reasons our company is superior, this will teach them. Speaking about your company's

strengths also serves to show your clients your enthusiasm for your work and make them feel as if they made wise, wise decisions by choosing you.

Individual salespeople should also talk to clients about their particular strengths. Perhaps they keep their ears to the pavement to spot opportunities for their clients before others do. Maybe they give their cell-phone numbers to all of their clients and are always reachable. Perhaps they exhibit extraordinary attention to detail in everything they do. Each salesperson has his or her own strengths. Obviously, a salesperson needs to speak in terms of the benefits of the company he or she represents, as well.

What many sales organizations and salespeople do not realize is that people simply *love* to feel good about their choice of a company or their use of a particular salesperson. Your clients deserve to feel good about patronizing you, and making them feel good about their choice will also make them likely to tell others. People love to brag, and bragging about a product or salesperson is no exception.

You need to educate your clients about you and your company so they will educate others. Educating others will bring you more referrals.

Good Sales Organizations and Salespeople Do Not Just Use One Method for Generating Leads; They Use a Variety of Methods.

There are so many methods for generating leads it is astonishing! Nevertheless, in most sales organizations, you will always find at least one salesperson who stands around and says things like "There are no leads. There is nothing to do."

One of the most shocking episodes I have witnessed in my career was when our company employed a recruiter who would go home at 1:00 or 2:00 each day complaining

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that she had exhausted all of the potential clients for the day. This was amazing to me. There are so many potential leads out there and methods for getting them that I can only list a few here:

- Use telemarketing.
- Use direct mail.
- Mingle out in the community.
- Purchase or create lists of potential prospects.
- Email people.
- Use advertising.
- Deliver higher-than-expected levels of service to existing clients so they tell others.
- Send out press releases.
- Join chat rooms and talk about your products or services.
- Write articles.

This list could go on and on forever. Good sales organizations are constantly looking for methods to generate more leads, and so are good salespeople. When you are in

sales, you need to understand that leads are the lifeblood of the business. You need to constantly be on the lookout for new ways of getting leads.

Conclusions

There is *nothing I love more than sales* (except for my family). There should be nothing *you* love more. What other profession presents so many limitless opportunities for getting leads and then converting them into sales? Take off your blinders and see the numerous opportunities all around you. Generating leads is not only the job of individual salespeople but the responsibility of the companies they work for, as well.

As I noted at the beginning of this article, the recruiters at BCG Attorney Search do not always need to look for leads as aggressively as they might otherwise need to because their company's reputation precedes them. However, there are breeds of recruiters who,

with the same amount of time and effort, make two or even three times what the average recruiter does due to their ability to generate leads at every turn. Those are the sorts of recruiters who follow many of the lessons of this article.

The same holds true in any sales organization. If you are constantly on the lookout for ways to get more leads and conduct yourself as a lead generator, your career will reach the stratosphere, as well.