



Strengths, Styles, and Skills: A Triple Fit Approach to Sales Talent

How to Align Your Sales Talent with Your Market

Many business professionals define their companies by products or by industry. It's also common to hear people categorize companies by saying things such as "We're a high-tech company" or "We're a service company." However, defining a company by what it does or what it makes cannot tell you what kind of sales efforts you will need to make your company successful. As a result, too many organizations end up with a vague sales strategy and hit or miss approaches to selection, training, and development – resulting in an underperforming sales organization.

Over the years we have developed, tested, and refined methods to help clients better design their sales organizations and align sales talent decisions with their sales strategy. This paper will introduce you to two of those methods: our Quadrant Solution and our Triple Fit framework.

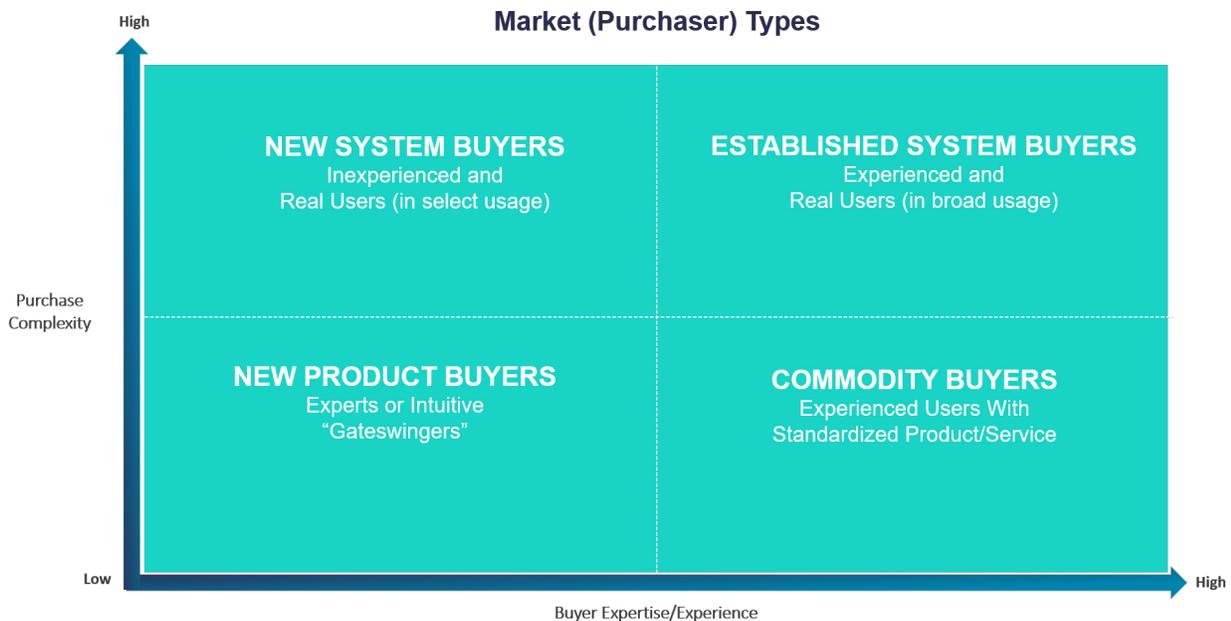


The Quadrant Solution: How to Align Your Sales Roles with Buyer Needs

One of our specialties at Chally is helping companies use assessment analytics to find, hire, and develop salespeople. What may surprise you is that long before we discuss assessments, we encourage clients to pause and first ensure the design of their sales organization reflects a deliberate and focused sales strategy. Here are four steps you should take.

Step 1: Identify Your Market Type

Step 1 of our method is understanding your market type. Your market type is based on how complex your offerings are and how experienced your buyers are. For ease of application, we've sorted market (buyer) types into four quadrants. The quadrants are based on two different aspects. One axis is solution complexity and the other axis is your buyer's experience with products, services, or solutions similar to your offerings.



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In many cases, you may see your market type changing based on where your offerings are in the Product/Solution Lifecycle. If you're looking at this from a market perspective, a lot of times what we see here is that offerings move along a bell curve.

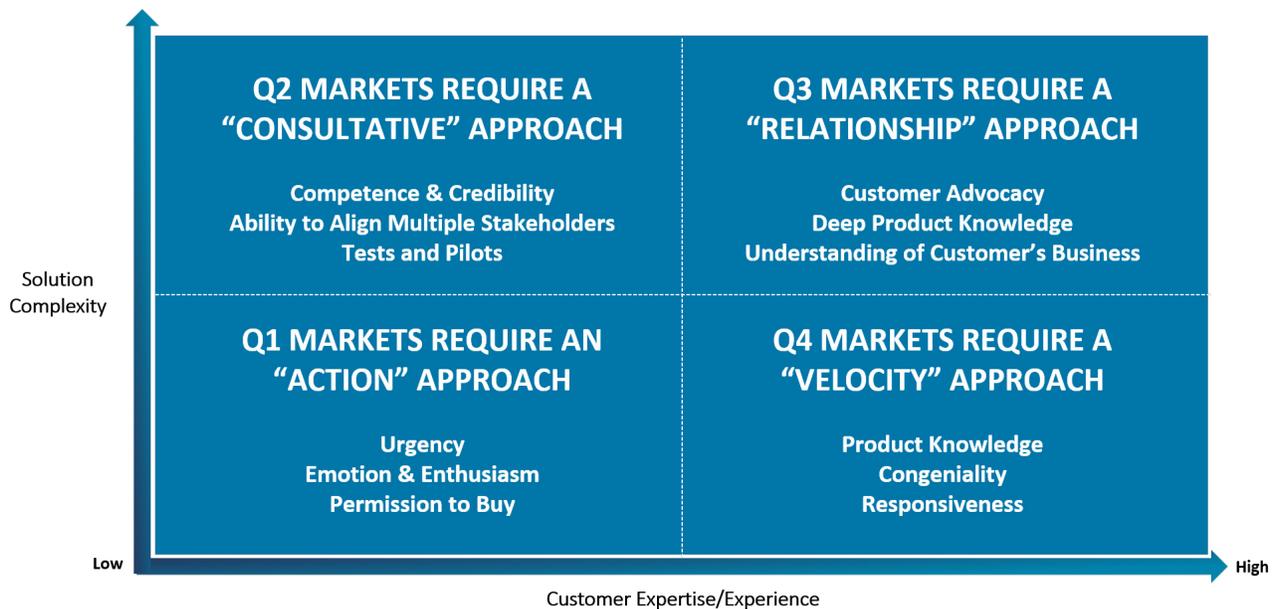
Truly new products or services are typically purchased either by technical experts who must buy new technology to remain expert or by visionary “gate-swingers” who are attracted to the idea of being on the cutting edge.

- Once a product or service gains traction, companies, their partners, and even competitors may start to build ancillary products. As a result, the offering moves from a single product or service to a system of interconnected components – often called a solution. New solution or system buyers tend to be inexperienced end users. They need help seeing and making the whole solution or system work in their environment.
- Once solutions become more established and well known, you will likely see that you have more competitors in your space. Buyers become experienced and knowledgeable (and often more controlling). They know that you need them more than they need you and will often begin to demand customization and high levels of service from you in order to gain and retain their business.
- As time goes on, you get into the lower right side of the quadrant which is commonly thought of as the commodity space. Commodity buyers have become so totally experienced with a product or service that the purchase and usage are completely standardized and routine.



Step 2: Align Your Selling Approach to Your Market Type

Step 2 of our method is all about matching your sales approach to what buyers in that quadrant need in order to make a purchasing decision. Research originally conducted by the Chally Group Worldwide, and continued today by Chally, has found that buyer need is largely driven by the two factors that we discussed above – the complexity of the solution and the experience or expertise of the buyer.



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- Technical trend-setters and influential gate-swingers in Quadrant 1 need an emotional appeal coupled with a sense of urgency in order to buy. Effective selling to these buyers requires an approach that emphasizes how new, exciting, interesting, and better your offering is. We use the term “action” approach to describe the selling activities that are most effective for this quadrant.
- Inexperienced but real users in Quadrant 2 have both substantial technical purchasing and application support needs. Because you are now selling a system or integrating products, sales often involve multiple people within the customer’s organization. Their needs must be met by a “consultative” approach that starts in sales and continues throughout delivery. Educating clients and working side-by-side with them to architect and implement are key activities to the consultative approach. Sellers in this quadrant also need to be able to align multiple stakeholders and keep the sale moving forward.
- Customers in Quadrant 3 continue to have high technical and application support needs. However, they are now more experienced and are often more demanding. Effective selling to this market often involves distinguishing yourself, not just on your expertise, by how you serve your customers, the depth of your product knowledge, and how well you build long-term, personal connections. We call this the “relationship” approach. Companies and sellers who do well in this market demonstrate deep knowledge of their customer’s business and are seen as advocates who get things done for their customers.
- Only two needs typically predict commodity buying behavior in Quadrant 4: price and convenience. Selling in this space requires responsiveness and the ability to differentiate your product or offering from your many competitors without introducing a lot of complexity. Decisions are often either/or and result in an immediate transaction. We call the combination of presenting options and supporting quick decisions in this quadrant the “velocity” approach.

Now that you understand your markets and how to best approach them, you can start to think about the sales roles within your organization.

Step 3: Select Specific Sales Roles Based on Sales Approach

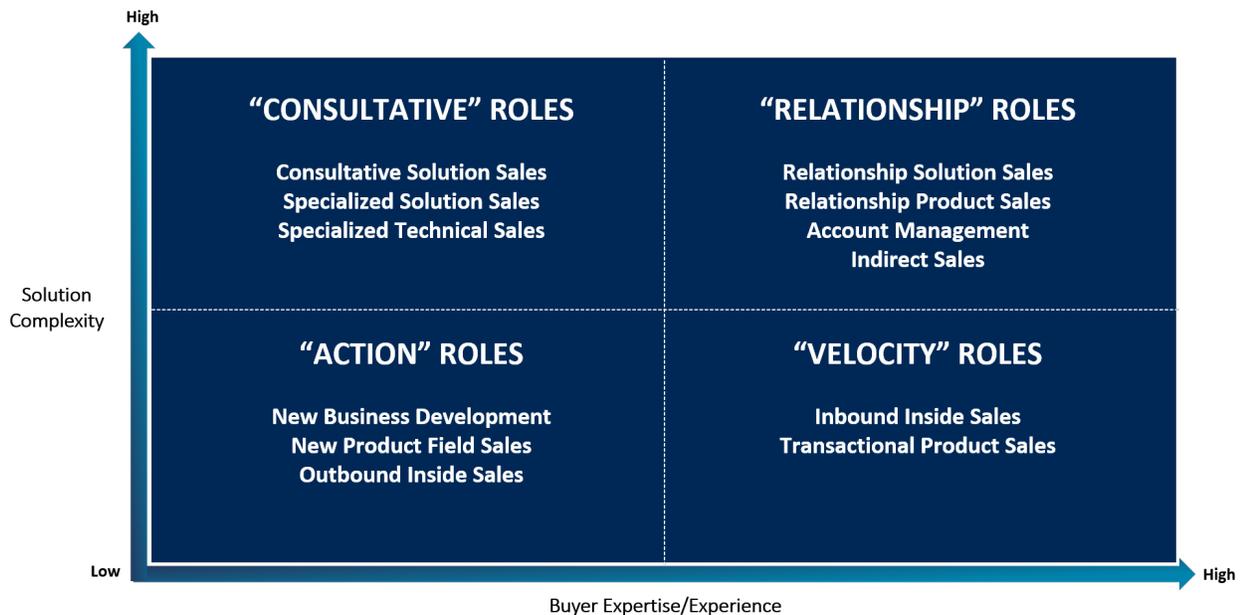
Step 3 is about how you choose or design sales roles so that selling actions are deliberately aligned with the needs of your buyers.

"Action" approach sales roles in Quadrant 1 are designed to create a sense of excitement and urgency and get to a quick close. In some organizations, Quadrant 1 roles are designed to be outside or "field sales" positions where much of the selling is done in person. Other roles in this quadrant may be performed over the phone and may involve closing the sale with one or two calls or BDR type roles that close for a next step such as a meeting.

As the complexity of the solution increases and sales cycles lengthen to include multiple phases and buyers in Quadrant 2, you will likely need to define consultative sales roles such as territory consultative sales, solution architects, and sales engineers.

Quadrant 3 markets require roles that focus on meeting customer needs and building relationships. This is where you're going to want roles such as account managers, territory relationship sales, and channel program managers.

Lastly, Quadrant 4 velocity sales roles are those that are deliberately designed to handle high volume and quick close sales of commodity products and services. Roles that align with this approach may include inbound inside sales, customer service, and retail sales.



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Step 4: Execute an “Outside In” Sales Talent Management Strategy

When growing or transforming their own sales organizations, most people don't take the time to step back and think about the situation from the buyer's perspective or from the market's point of view. As a result, too many organizations over-simplify and end up hiring sellers who don't produce. Often this failure isn't a matter of hiring the wrong person – it's hiring for the wrong role in the first place.

To save you from this mistake, the Quadrant Solution allows you to take an “outside in” approach. This means designing your sales approach, customer engagement processes, and customer-facing roles based on the needs of your market.

Only after you have taken steps to understand your market (buyer) types and the selling approach and associated roles that support buying, are you ready to start selecting, motivating, and developing people for their specific sales roles.

Chally's Triple Fit Framework:

Our guess is that you have multiple roles within your sales organization. Building and executing an effective “outside in” talent management strategy in a way that addresses the unique nature of each role can feel complicated. The good news is that it doesn't have to be. At Chally, we've developed our Triple Fit framework to acknowledge the multi-faceted nature of sales while simplifying the complexity. Here's a primer on the three elements:





Seller Strengths

We use the term “strengths” to indicate what people are inherently or naturally good at. When measured effectively, knowing a person’s strengths can predict whether they have the capacity to succeed in a specific role.

We emphasize the word “specific” here because we know that there is no such thing as a generic superstar salesperson. People who don’t work in sales often lump all sales jobs and all salespeople into one category, resulting in the misconception is that there are “natural-born sellers.” Sure, all

selling roles require table stakes such as the ability to communicate and close. But real sales pros possess special skills and strengths that allow them to excel in specific positions. Every pro baseball player must throw, catch, and hit. Yet, what it takes to be a great hitter is dramatically different from the natural strengths and skills needed to become a winning pitcher. Just like athletes in baseball, not many salespeople can excel in multiple unique roles such as business developer, account manager, solution architect, etc.

Our 45+ years of research and experience have shown that different sales roles require different strengths. The key to successful selection in sales lies in identifying the natural strengths that statistically differentiate between top and bottom performers for a specific position.

Even people who know sales frequently make the fundamental mistake of thinking that you can simply divide sellers into “hunters” and “farmers.” We find that this simplistic and binary perspective can limit sales growth. Our research shows that there are at least 14 different types of selling roles. While many of those roles have a superficial similarity, the core strengths needed for each role can vary widely.

To illustrate this point, consider just six different sales roles we commonly see paired with some of the competencies that tend to differentiate the top and bottom performers:

1. New Business Development

This is the classic “hunter” role. Successful hunters possess natural strengths in finding opportunities, developing leads, problem-solving, and closing business.

2. Account Management

Also known as the classic “farmer,” the Account Manager is responsible for retaining and growing existing accounts. The best account managers possess the natural attributes to be able to systematically manage an account plan, educate customers, and work internal systems on their customer’s behalf.

3. Consultative Sales

This is someone who sells complex solutions or systems to inexperienced buyers. This role calls for people with the inherent ability to effectively generate leads, qualify profitable prospects, tailor presentations skills, and adapt to multiple buyers with different interests and agendas.

4. Outbound Inside Sales

These are people in roles that are focused on selling new products in a high volume, high velocity environment. They need to be naturally good at maintaining product knowledge, delivering persuasive presentations, and responding to objections by reinforcing standard features or benefits.

5. Inbound Inside Sales

This type of selling requires a service-oriented person whose attributes support behaviors such as identifying customer needs, solving problems, and making profitable recommendations.

6. Indirect Sales

Also known as Channel Managers, people in this role motivate and support channel partner sellers and distributors. Those who are most successful have natural strengths in activities such as training, making joint sales calls, delivering presentations, demonstrating product knowledge, and maintaining repeat sales.

So, get clear on what roles you need based on your market and sales approach and then focus on finding people with the natural strengths and potential to succeed in those sales roles.



Seller Style

Seller Style is language we use to convey the aspects of personality that affect how we like to sell. In a nutshell, any version of personality style is simply a way of capturing the pattern of differences in our habits, motivations, and preferred approaches to life. When viewed this way, it makes sense to recognize that a person's selling style can influence the kinds of sales positions they will be attracted to and will be energized by. Someone who is extroverted and theatrical will likely prefer a sales job that is action oriented and has a short sales cycle. On the other

hand, someone with a quiet, patient, and people-oriented personality will likely be drawn to selling roles that require a relationship approach. Recognizing motivations can help you unleash the passions and potential of each of your people.

Understanding the personalities and styles of your sellers can also help you identify, understand, and act on potential mismatches that are demotivating. In our work with clients, we frequently see talented salespeople who have been placed into a role that requires a sales approach or process that runs counter to their interests and motivations. Even when these sellers have the “can do” competencies, they may find it draining to work in environments that don't energize them. For example, some complex consultative system sales have deal cycles that take months or even years and require great patience coupled with diligent attention to close. A seller who prefers quick action and fast wins will likely become frustrated when such deals drag on – potentially resulting in disengagement and even unwanted turnover.

Fascinatingly, it seems that certain personality styles best align with the four different sales approaches described earlier in this paper. Here's a brief description of each of the four Selling Styles and the sales approach they often gravitate to.

CLOSERS

Closers are perceived as theatrical and confident. They usually have less fear of personal rejection than the other selling styles. Their preferred sales techniques are building emotion and enthusiasm and creating urgency. They are often motivated by income potential, size of commissions, the emotional appeal of the product/service, the glamour of product (“high status” is best), and the chance to be onstage. Closers often prefer the Action Approach in sales. They take pride in their ability to influence decision makers to make innovative purchases that help them stay on the cutting edge.

BUILDERS

Builders are perceived as dependable and loyal. They are often motivated by quality products and services, control of territory and selling method, image of the company in customers' eyes, and by having support from colleagues in customer service, sales operations, etc. They tend to like the freedom and independence of sales. Builders often prefer the Relationship Approach – showing patience and persistence, demonstrating product and customer knowledge, getting things done to benefit the customer, and effectively managing time and territory. They pride themselves on the depth of their relationships and the fact that customers will even follow them if they end up moving to a competitor.

WIZARDS

Wizards are perceived as expert and competent. They are usually more academically inclined than the other selling styles. They are often motivated by management opportunities, sophistication of product or service, the prestige or image of company in the eyes of the general public, and being part of a strong team. Wizards often prefer the Consultative Approach in sales – demonstrating competence and credibility and being systematized and organized. They pride themselves on their ability to gain buy-in using tests and pilots and to align multiple stakeholders.

EXPEDITORS

Expeditors are perceived as responsive and service oriented. They are often motivated by frequent interactions with people, security, opportunity to match job with hobbies, interests, and flexibility. Expeditors often prefer the Velocity Approach – demonstrating product knowledge, being congenial and approachable, and exhibiting energy and stamina. Expeditors take pride in their ability to quickly build rapport and help customers make good buying decisions.

A Note on Styles

Of course, there is a big caveat when it comes to making style part of your talent management strategy. A person can like doing something but not be good at it. As a result, talent decisions based on style alone can backfire. So don't stop at styles. You need to formally evaluate strengths and skills.



Seller Skills

The last piece of the equation is seller skills. Skills is the term Chally uses to convey the quality with which sellers demonstrate desired behaviors on the job.

While strengths may carry across from one firm to the next for similar roles or job families, the skills your company needs will vary depending on how you design your sales organization, how you clarify

responsibilities and measure success or KPIs, and how you design your sales process. As Frank Cespedes writes in his book, *Aligning Strategy and Sales*, “Success comes from aligning your selling program with the opportunities pursued.”

The Quadrant Solution can help you align your development programs with the markets you are targeting and how those customers buy. Consider for example the popular programs offered today on consultative selling. When you understand the quadrants, it becomes clear that consultative selling skills are most useful for Quadrant 2 sales roles and that people in other sales roles will most likely benefit from different types of skills training. This helps you avoid the mistake of spending money and time on training that is not relevant for your sellers.

Other mistakes to avoid in the skills arena include attempting to fix talent gaps through training alone and/or sending everyone to the same training regardless of their skill level or role. Successful sales training and development is never generic. Your training and coaching interventions need to:

1. Reflect your firm’s sales strategy
2. Focus on the specific activities that drive customer buying decisions and/or retention
3. Be selected or designed to address skill gaps

When you do this, salespeople get meaningful opportunities to develop the skills that matter most to your company and to them personally.

We suggest getting clear on the skills you require and expect, assessing how well your sellers demonstrate those skills, and taking action to address the skill gaps that matter most to achieving outcomes such as revenue growth, client satisfaction, and retention.

The Alchemy of Triple Fit

Strengths, Style, Skills are each powerful on their own, however we find that it's the combination of the three that produces magical results. We call this alchemy rather than addition. Here's how it works:

Strengths themselves represent a person's natural wiring or their inherent talent. Potential strengths are often only fully realized (turned into demonstrated skills) when they are intentionally developed through coaching, training, self-study, and intentional practice. The more a person is motivated to sell in a certain way, the more likely they will be to pursue development opportunities and devote the time to practice, thereby getting even better at what they are naturally good at.

The alchemy of Triple Fit has proven time and time again to produce more productive, engaged, and motivated sellers who meet your buyers' needs and deliver better sales results.

Patti McCord, the former Chief Talent officer at Netflix became well-known and respected for her revolutionary approaches to talent management. She famously sums up her approach by asking one simple question, "Are your people doing the work they love doing and that they are extraordinarily good at?" We believe the Triple Fit approach provides you with the guidance you need to answer "yes" to that question.

Strengths indicate each person's natural fit for a specific sales role. Styles can give you a sense of what sellers love doing. Skills tell you what activities your sellers have mastered and where they may need help to become extraordinarily good. Combine the three and what started as a complex puzzle becomes as easy as putting the right pegs into the right holes.

Gauging Sales Talent Gaps

Now that you've read about how to base your sales talent decisions on your sales strategy, do you have a sneaking suspicion that the sales team that got you to where you are today won't be the same team that gets you where you need to be in the future?

According to a recent CSO Insights Sales Talent Study, "Determining whether you have a talent gap, or determining how significant it is, begins with an understanding of your current talent pool and pipeline." There are three categories of tools that can help you diagnose performance issues and determine whether you have a significant talent gap. Each tool aligns with one element of Chally's Triple Fit framework.



Predictive Strengths Assessments

In his book, *The Talent Delusion*, Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic writes, “Few people are talented in every area, and talent is always the product of fit between a person’s disposition and the requirements of the task.”

Predictive assessments (such as the Chally Assessment™) gauge a seller’s disposition and potential to perform the tasks required of specific sales roles. When used appropriately, these assessments can reliably and accurately predict whether a person’s inherent strengths align with the competencies or attributes that have been shown to correlate with success in that role. Like the way a DNA strand identifies the genetic makeup of an individual, predictive assessments give us a way to measure attributes that are not always apparent on the surface and that can’t be gauged through interviews and observation.

While predictive assessments are most commonly used for hiring, they can be also be powerful tools for evaluating the capacity of your entire talent pool. For example, we frequently create Talent Audits for clients – illustrating on one page who on the team has the natural strengths required for a variety of different sales roles. Seeing their organization’s “Sales DNA” at a glance provides sales leaders and their HR partners with data to inform and implement a focused talent management strategy.

Personality Style Indicators

For centuries, observers of human behavior have noticed that there seem to be patterns of differences in how people interact with the world around them. Interpreted broadly, personality style is simply a term used to describe these patterns. There are scores of style tests and quizzes on the market, ranging from communication style to social style to team style. Unfortunately, most personality tests haven’t been shown to be statistically predictive or valid for hiring or promotion decisions. This may be because most of these tests are easy to game.

Despite their lack of predictive validity, we think personality indicators can be useful for other applications. Instruments that gauge and/or describe style can be useful for both self-awareness and understanding others. Identifying personality styles can also get you started on the road to understanding what makes your talent pool tick. In other words, results from personality quizzes and more robust style instruments can help you understand which sellers will enjoy and be motivated by certain selling approaches. For example, in addition to identifying competency strengths and gaps, our Chally Assessment also produces insights into a seller’s motivations and habits. Many recipients of our reports find great value in understanding not only what their sellers CAN DO but also what they WANT TO DO. This matters because, quoting Chamorro-Premuzic again, “It is possible for



someone to have the necessary skillset to perform well in a job or role, but be utterly devoid of motivation to do so.”

Always remember that personality indicators alone won't tell you for certain if that seller will succeed in a role. For that you need to formally assess strengths (via a predictive assessment) and skills.

Demonstrated Skills Assessments

We've discussed ways to gauge potential (strengths) and personality (style). The third category of tools in our Triple Fit approach gauge performance (skills). Skills assessments evaluate how well an individual seller is performing on the job. Most assessments of this kind are multi-rater— often referred to as 360s. This means that both the seller and sales manager (and possibly customers and peers) rate the seller to get multiple perspectives on the behaviors and skills the seller is demonstrating day-to-day.

To be most useful, the skills assessment you build or buy should be targeted. Rather than assessing your sellers on how well they perform one hundred generic selling skills, use your dollars and your managers' time wisely. Assess and act on skill gaps that tangibly

impact performance. If you aren't sure where to start, study high performers to identify the behaviors they use to accelerate sales cycles, increase topline, improve margins, and ensure customer retention. Interview your customers to learn what behaviors most support their buying decisions. Don't assume that because a seller had “the same job” at another company they will have all the skills you require. Our favorite quote is from Harvard Business School professor Frank Cespedes who writes, “You need to develop salespeople so that they are good at executing the sales tasks that are aligned with your specific strategy, not what they learned at another company that made a different set of strategic choices.”

Skills assessments are powerful tools for identifying training needs for individuals and teams. They can also be repeated after a training program or coaching intervention to determine whether the program improved performance.

Of course, training won't necessarily solve skill gaps unless your sellers also have the strengths (natural aptitude) needed for their jobs and the style (motivations) to perform. Taking all three into account gives you a comprehensive view of your organization's sales talent.

