

Competing against well-funded US companies for top talent

This week, Caroline Franczia, founder of Uppercut-First, dives into the plot of Moneyball. All eyes are on Billy Beane, who develops tactics to recruit players and achieve results at the lowest possible expense.

It is no secret that hiring salespeople can be a struggle and that hiring the wrong person costs the company a lot. From the time spent on the recruitment process to recruitment agency fees, training expenses, and lost productivity, the costs can pile up quickly - without even taking into account the negative impact on team morale.

What with well-funded American startups opening offices on this side of the pond, there's even more pressure. Often, an executive team will be desperate enough to raise the average salary only to recruit a talent that, yes, has credentials and might have been successful elsewhere, but isn't really the perfect fit.

Billy Beane: "I can't compete against 120 million payrolls with 38 million dollars."

Stephen Schott: “We’re not going to compete with these teams that have big budgets. We’re going to work with the constraints that we have and you’re going to get out and do the best job that you can be recruiting new players. We’re not going to pay 17 million dollars a year to players.”

How do you manage an efficient and cost-effective recruitment process then? Knowing how talented salespeople make a decision is a start.

They base their decision on three main criteria:

People: Is the executive team inspiring? Is the company culture energising? Is the hiring manager driven? Is he/she a coach? A possible mentor even?

Great employees are attracted by excellence. Some come as a pack: you hire a manager and his/her old team follows; it works if and when the manager has done due diligence, accepting the challenges for what they are without turning a blind eye.

Product: Someone recently told me, ‘I joined them because they are smart, and they have 0% churn! I didn’t even know that was possible.’

I didn’t either! As a sales rep or leader, it is comforting to know that the product is not only reliable, but it is delivering the value you are selling to the customers as a trusted advisor. Your trust is your reputation; your reputation is your success.

Opportunity: the package is one thing, but what the good recruiters use to seduce the great talent is not so much a package but the opportunity to join the company. You may have a great package and never achieve your variable; you may have an average package and overachieve.

Some salespeople see the opportunity not of a salary but of a life change: million-dollar commissions, stock options... and so on. So don’t push a package, push a great comp plan and possibly, great stock vesting.

Now that you know how they choose, act to attract them.

Billy Beane: "I made one decision in my life based on money. And I swore I would never do it again."

Think outside the box:

The best salespeople are naturally driven and highly coachable; they learn from their experience and show great resilience and adaptability. Last but not least, they learn fast. Now that you know, you may want to recruit based on these traits, take some risks in the profile you choose and teach them everything, coach them, and develop them. The Return on Time investment here might be worth your extra mile.

Peter Brand: "People are overlooked for a variety of biased reasons and perceived flaws. Age, appearance, personality."

Have a plan:

Don't get seduced by the people with numbers; numbers can be faked, interviews can be faked. Put them in situations: tell them to come with a presentation and give them 40 minutes to present it. If they've done their research; if they remain calm when you are a mean customer; if they ask questions and present themselves as a trusted advisor, give them the green card. Your scoring value is to put your candidate *in situ* and use your best judge of characters by asking them to run unofficial interviews.

Billy Beane: "This is the new direction for the Oakland A's. We are card counters at the Black Jack table, but we're going to turn the odds on the casino."

Do things right – and do them differently to your competition. Be human in your process. Inspire excellence.

Many CEOs will have a LinkedIn post that says 'Contact me, I'm hiring!' – but tend to push candidates back to recruiting agencies (best case) or never even consider an answer (worst case). Treat all of your candidates like customers; use social media and employee advocacy to promote why it is great to work at your company. Your best references and bait are your current successful employees.

Billy Beane: "Then what the fuck are you talking about, man? If we try to play like the Yankees in here, we will lose to the Yankees out there."

Last but not least, I have had the chance to work with amazing recruiters –not just agencies, but actual people. They make a difference with their tenacity in finding the right contact and qualifying them and their investment in understanding your value proposition and how to position it.

They can make the great candidates excited to work with you and can communicate between both parties to make amazing things happen. You should always free up the time and money to hire a headhunter.

Peter Brand: “Your goal shouldn’t be to buy players. Your goal should be to buy wins. In order to buy wins, you need to buy runs.”

Caroline Franczia is a regular columnist for Maddyess and the founder of Uppercut First. Experienced in working for large companies such as Oracle, Computer Associates, and BMC, Caroline also lived in Silicon Valley for four years before moving to startups (Sprinklr, Datadog, Confluent) where she witnessed on the ground the benefits of a well-thought sales strategy. These are the foundations of UF: a structure that accompanies the European startups in their sales strategy by giving them an undeniable advantage in their go-to-market.

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