Kinaxis Chooses Sales Reps with Personality

Kinaxis, a software company headquartered in Ottawa, Ontario, sells to clients around the world. Its specialty is software for supply chain management—all the processes and relationships through which companies obtain supplies as needed and get their products to customers on time and at minimal cost. This is a sophisticated type of product, tailored to a company’s specific needs. Therefore, Kinaxis depends on salespeople who understand how businesses work, who listen carefully to identify needs, and who provide excellent customer service to maintain long-term business relationships.

Recently, Bob Dolan, vice president for sales at Kinaxis, needed to hire a sales team to serve clients in North America. The company had just one salesperson serving the continent, and Dolan wanted to add four more. He received about 100 résumés and wanted to select from these. He started by reviewing the résumés against job requirements and selected 20 candidates for a first round of interviews. The interview process helped Dolan cut the list of candidates in half, so he needed another way to narrow his options.

Dolan decided his next step would be personality testing. He hired a firm called Opus Productivity Solutions to administer a test called PDP ProScan to the remaining 10 candidates. In addition, Dolan himself took the test and had his current sales rep do the same. The existing salesperson was doing an excellent job, so the results of his test could help Dolan and Opus pinpoint the characteristics of someone likely to succeed in sales at Kinaxis. Based on analysis of all the results, Opus created a benchmark of traits associated with success in the job.Page 272

Representatives from Opus also discussed the test results with each candidate, giving each one a chance to disagree with the scores. No one did. Dolan observed that all the candidates scored high in assertiveness and extroversion—not surprising for people in sales. In addition, two of them scored above the benchmark in conformity and below the benchmark in dominance. Those results suggested to Dolan that these candidates might be so eager to please that they would be quick to give in to whatever customers requested—a pattern that could become costly for the company. Dolan eliminated those two candidates.

That meant Dolan still had eight candidates to fill four positions. He asked each one to give him the names of major accounts he or she had signed up in the previous two years. Four candidates were able to come up with three or four large clients. Those were the candidates Dolan hired.

Since then, Dolan says his experience with personality testing has only reinforced his belief that this selection method helps Kinaxis identify the best candidates. For example, one sales rep had scored low on “pace,” indicating that the individual might lack the patience needed for the slow cycles required to close a sale of a complex software system. Dolan hoped the issue could be overcome if he provided enough coaching, but in fact, the sales rep sometimes behaved impatiently, annoying prospects. After three years of trying to help him grow into the job, Dolan laid him off.

The company’s commitment to careful selection is expressed on its website: “As a growing and determined company, we’re always looking for people eager to push the limits of each day of what’s possible.” Kinaxis was recently named one of Canada’s top employers for young people.

QUESTIONS

What selection methods did Bob Dolan use for hiring salespeople? Did he go about using these methods in the best order? What,