

# Looking for Rainmakers? Use More Science and Less Voodoo

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Back in the “old days,” some salespeople were fortunate enough to have sizeable competitive advantage by virtue of their company’s offerings alone. In the 1980s, IBM salespeople had PCs. In the 1990s, Microsoft salespeople had Windows. In the 2000s, Apple salespeople have iPhones. As competitors and markets globalized, however, such technical competitive advantage has become increasingly more elusive – and short-lived. Great salespeople, unable to reliably differentiate themselves by what they sell, differentiate themselves more and more by *how* they sell.

Conscious of this shift, companies have expanded beyond traditional, product-focused sales training to training that includes a focus on having sales conversations at different levels within a customer organization, usually targeted to the executive level. Though each year brings a hot, new spin on such training, and companies continue to invest millions in these programs, a bountiful crop of successful salespeople has yet to be produced. Rainmakers continue to be in desperately short supply, and sales leaders continue to wonder why.

In a recent job posting for a senior sales consultant, a major IT consulting company required that candidates possess an advanced degree and significant experience in application development. Consider the personal attributes and natural interests of an individual with these qualifications: are these the same characteristics that predictably support credible, insightful conversations with most senior strategic-client executives? Probably not. With recruiting approaches like these, it should be no surprise that research from the past three years shows that fewer than 5 percent of today’s salespeople consistently and successfully execute executive-level sales campaigns. This is because, long before training begins, sales success is predetermined by innate attributes.

The tables shown here illustrate research drawn from a large cross-section of salespeople. The first table shows how salespeople are selling today. The second uses empirically developed attribute profiles to determine the natural sales approach of those salespeople.

Traditional, “offering-centric” salespeople deliver feature and terms-of-transaction messages to purchasing and project-focused contacts who often have an existing and proactive interest in those messages. Salespeople who excel in this approach have an eye for detail and natural interest in technical issues.

“Operation-centric” salespeople deliver operational-efficiency messages to client managers who have no interest in details about the offering or the transaction of buying. Salespeople who excel in this approach often have an analytical personality and natural interest in business processes.

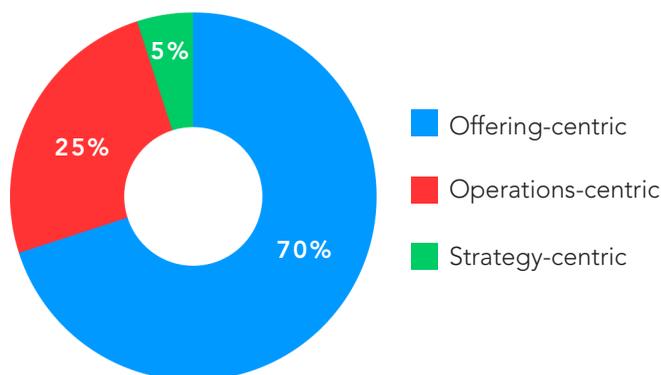
The “strategy-centric” approach is perhaps the most

difficult to execute, requiring a salesperson to deliver messages about strategic benefits to business- or mission-focused executives. Those who are successful in this approach tend to have a risk-taking personality and natural interest in markets and economics.

Some salespeople will have no difficulty changing how they sell, but many will struggle to do so. It is possible for ambitious salespeople to overcome their personality and natural interests to change the way they sell, but making this change requires coaching and experience that goes far beyond mere training. Regardless of how you believe those in your organization should approach selling, your guiding principle in recruiting and hiring should be to hire to attributes and develop (train and coach) to competencies (knowledge and skills). ■

Join *Selling Power* at the **Sales 2.0 Conference in San Francisco** on May 5–6, 2014, and hear Bob Bartholomew present “Decoding the DNA of a Rainmaker.”

## CURRENT SALES APPROACH



## SALES APPROACH SUPPORTED BY ATTRIBUTES

