

# ShortList

## Cool the KPIs, focus on relationship building: Sales specialist

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Traditional recruitment KPIs are misaligned with contemporary sales competence, and managers should instead be focused on fostering recruiters' relationship management skills, according to Sales Consultants managing director, Kurt Newman.

"We went through a fad with KPIs where organisations would have between 12 and 15 of them; at that point you have to be joking. If you're a hands-on manager, you'll know what's going on with your staff and how to help people who are falling behind," Newman told *Shortlist*.

"For example, I've seen a KPI that timed the amount of time spent with a customer on the phone. All that served was to harm the development of a relationship, because staff got panicky about winding-up phone calls to hit their target. It's an old cliché, but be careful what you measure, because that's what you'll get."

Keeping some KPIs isn't detrimental to a business, as long as the primary focus is on making sure consultants are building relationships with clients, said Newman, whose company has consulted for recruitment companies including SKILLED Group.

"The only thing worth measuring is how the client feels about that salesperson and your organisation. That's where loyalty comes from, and you do make more money out of repeat business, in recruitment especially because it is such a service industry."

Recruitment company leaders, particularly in small firms, should position themselves as "hands-on coaches", rather than unapproachable managers who are only concerned with numbers, Newman said.

"Managers need to spend more time coaching their people, which means going out on more appointments and figuring out what the sales call objective should be, and how the process is applied and so on," he said.

"The manager or business owner needs to demonstrate the required skills from time-to-time to his or her staff, so that they can transfer knowledge and their people become more competent."

### Personalise the follow up

The key to not becoming a "nuisance" when salespeople follow up is coaching them to personalise the reason for contact and researching relevant information about the prospective client, Newman said.

"People need much more contact before they accept an appointment from a salesperson, and this is across the board. Persistence and resiliency is now a prerequisite for managers, owners and even the salespeople you hire.

"For a large client that you want, you need to understand their business and the problems they face, you need to meet multiple people within that organisation to gather more information and you need to personalise each approach, either to them professionally or around their interests and hobbies."

Newman gave the example of one of his clients undertaking a lot of M&A work, which had affected the company's sales process. Through dedicated research about some of the problems companies in similar situations had faced, Newman secured the appointment.

"You want the reaction to be, 'these guys know something about me, and the problems my business could be facing', and then you'll get the appointment. It's never a product push, particularly in recruitment, because it's a great way to get a competitive edge over other firms that might be pitching to them as well.

"If there's potential for a large amount of business from that client, the more important that research aspect becomes."

Newman had another client who was very interested in the V8 Supercars, so he used special promotions about V8 events as a way to touch base, which helped build the relationship.

"It's about multiple touch points, whatever it is. It could be sending them personal things to do with cars,

or gardening, or whatever, and it can be as simple as sending them an article about their competition."

## Align the sales process with the buying cycle

The worst mistake any salesperson can make is to approach a potential customer as if they have no idea about the product they want, Newman said.

"A lot of business owners don't realise how advanced clients are in their buying cycle before meeting you. Often – and this is because of the internet – a potential client is 50-to-75% through that cycle and prepared to make a decision," he said.

"Instead of asking some good questions, an inexperienced salesperson will think it's a done deal if a client gets back to them and will only serve to annoy the prospective client if they start at 'zero' with them. You need to ask the right questions and do the research to make sure you know where the client or customer is and you can address their needs."

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