

Target culture



We let our salespeople set their own targets – which can be way more than we would expect

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ROBERT STIFF has built a business with spectacular growth from a salesforce targeted on margin, productivity and enterprise

Q What was your route into selling?

A After a spell in the military I joined Bejam as a management trainee, where I learnt about operating on narrow margins, before joining the Prudential as a financial consultant.

Q What were the early lessons?

A The Prudential had good sales training and I worked my way up from door to door selling to sales and branch manager levels by observing what senior people did and not being satisfied with leads on more complex products being taken away. But ultimately I found there was a lack of rewards for salespeople and lack of recognition of our entrepreneurship, which I've seen elsewhere in other firms too. Lack of communication from the top is also often poor. If you know you're one of the 20 'percenters' in the 80:20 rule, as I did, there's a time when you have to move on

Q Where did you move to?

A I went to a family nursing recruitment business, Ambition Recruitment Services, although I had no experience in the sector. The firm was not delivering on its potential, so I instigated a new strategy and sales training, and the company then did very well — we took it from £3m to £75m, and it's running well today. But I took this experience to set up Team24 in 2005, which is a different type of healthcare recruitment specialist.

Q Team24 has been a great success...

A Yes, we've grown it to more than £30m in five years and would have done even better if the downturn had not hit.

Q How have you organised the salesforce to achieve this success?

A First, I should point out that of our 53 employees, 27 are in frontline sales. We are very sales-driven and I say to anyone in any sector if you can't sell, don't open a business. To do this, I've found the best way forward is to take people with no experience in recruitment but with some sales background and train them in the way we work, moulding them into the people we want — and give them the potential to make a lot of money.

Q What are the details?

A We spend a lot of time on our ethos and how we work, especially on the experience we want to give our clients and candidates. We run a three month induction on sales basics such as objecting handling, with a lot of role play, mentoring and coaching. Very important is a simple commission structure that is driven by margin: 10% of total company profit our salespeople generate is paid as commission monthly. Accelerators come when they hit £25k profit and we let them set their own targets. That can give targets way above what we expect but we support them to do what they want. I've got some earning more than £250k now, which can be life-changing paychecks.

Q What else is in place?

A Other recruiters give their salespeople responsibility for everything from finding candidates, to compliance issues to filling in time sheets — as well as selling. We've taken all those tasks away from our sales consultants so they do nothing else but sell, by having dedicated support staff for these activities. We can then much more easily target our salespeople on margin, calls made, information packs sent and so on — the frontline sales indicators. I only employ hunters who are focused on the next customer — I don't want farmers. A lot of firms employ people to answer the phone who don't have new business skills — but what happens when the phone stops ringing? It's too late then.

Q How do you recruit for Team24?

A By word of mouth and I've always got CVs on my desk. And I've only lost two people since I started the company.

Q What is the latest news?

A I've subdivided the team and brought in sales managers so I don't have to look after all the sales consultants on my own, and we're looking to give the business a wider UK focus. And I've just put in paperless, cloud computing so that we are using the latest technology.

Robert Stiff is also a motivational speaker and business advisor: for more details visit www.robertstiff.net