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Builder David Blair stands on the porch of his home at Hammond's Ferry, a mixed-use community in North Augusta, S.C.

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10 traits

of a new-home sales superstar



All builders look for sales superstars, yet few companies are consistently able to make great sales hires. Here are 10 traits to look for when recruiting your next sales professional.

By John Rymer, Contributing Editor

1. Avid goal setter

A sure sign of an average salesperson is one who relies on the company "budget" as their sales goal. Great sales professionals know what they want to accomplish, and they carefully plan their approach. Their goals are specific and achievable.

"It's easy to say you need to work Realtors to be successful in new-home sales. We want a deeper commitment on setting goals," says Ben Walters, COO of Inland Homes, Orlando. "We ask our sales professionals to write down how many Realtor sales they plan to achieve over the next 12 months. We tell them that close personal relationships with top-performing Realtors will result in 50 percent of their total sales. So the question is not, Do you want Realtor sales?, but, How are you going to become trusted and connected to top high producers to gain their confidence to achieve the needed number of sales?"

Goal setting is easy. Ongoing execution of goals is what sets the best sales professionals apart. Their goals are achievable yet challenging, relevant to their situation and time-framed. Superstars visualize success, determine an action plan and work toward their goals on a daily basis.

10 Traits of a Sales Superstar

1. Avid goal setter
2. Asks the right questions
3. Financing expert
4. Passionate about new-home sales
5. Exudes enthusiasm
6. Takes responsibility for results
7. First in the office, last to leave
8. Perfected the follow-up process
9. Always showing value
10. Persistent and fearless closer

2. Asks the right questions

The best sales professionals ask their customers pertinent questions to fully determine their situation and buying needs. Skilled questioning is an art. Great salespeople make their customers feel comfortable answering questions. They know the most effective way to present their homes and communities is to uncover their customers' goals, objectives, concerns and hesitations.

"The best salespeople spend more time in discovery than telling you about their product," says Jeff Agar, COO at Flagship Homes America, Orlando. "This allows them to effectively discuss the features and benefits of their product and service that most relate to each customer."

Every great new-home salesperson has four or five go-to questions that set up the presentation. Ask all sales candidates to discuss their go-to questions during the interview process.

3. Financing expert

Forget the days of relying on your mortgage partner or loan officer for financing information. Today's sales superstars can write the book on home financing.

"We're in an environment where it's easier to sell a home than get a buyer approved," says Eric Dowdy, a sales manager for Marketing Directors SE in Atlanta. Dowdy says the benefit of being a financing expert is that you gain the confidence of the buyer at the beginning of a relationship.

"In order for my customers to consider one of the new homes in my community, they must first trust me and accept me as part of their ultimate decision to buy," he says. "From there, the process of understanding their other market options and helping them work out a solution that is biased towards the offering of my client are my top priorities. That is what separates the customer sale from the customer experience."

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4. Passionate about new-home sales

The more ardent salespeople are about new-home sales the greater the chance they'll have at succeeding. The reason for this is simple: When people love what they do, they inherently put more effort into their work. The passion they have for their product shines brightly in every conversation they have with customers.

"I can't live without the fearless closer. They have got to relish the opportunity to get that customer to reject them in order to get them to accept them."

— Mike Storey, Neal Communities

5. Exudes enthusiasm

Given the recent housing downturn, finding sales professionals who are always in a positive mood — even during difficult times — is challenging. Too many salespeople get caught up in company politics or complain that they aren't given all the tools they feel they need to be successful. Great managers are able to delve into the attitude of sales candidates during the interview process. When faced with unpleasant or negative situations, do they choose to focus on the positive elements? How have they overcome a very difficult environment and turned it into a positive?

6. Takes responsibility for results

Great sales professionals don't blame internal problems, the economy, tough competitors or anything else if they fail to meet their sales quotas. They know that their actions alone will determine their results.

"Great sales professionals have a way of focusing on the job at hand — making more sales," says Tom Stokes of Sterling Crest Homes, Atlanta. "While lesser individuals will get sidetracked, at the end of the day they understand that their paycheck is based on performance, not distractions."

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7. First in the office, last to leave

Most salespeople want to be successful but they aren't prepared to work hard to achieve it. Sales superstars don't wait for business to come to them; they go after it. They start work earlier than their coworkers and stay later than everyone else. They make more calls, prospect more consistently, refine their presentation and spend more time improving their selling skills.

Bob Walters, owner of J. Walter Homes in Sacramento, Calif., advises builders to consider the following questions when evaluating sales candidates: Are they good networkers? Will they go after referrals and meet and connect with the Realtor community? Are they willing to do what it takes to get the job done?

Sale professionals, by nature, are the most difficult to judge on work effort. Don't take candidates strictly on their word. Make sure to invest the time to check references.

"The best salespeople spend more time in discovery than telling you about their product."

— Jeff Agar, Flagship Homes America

8. Perfected the follow-up process

The biggest mistake salespeople make when following up with potential buyers is not personalizing their message for the individual customer. “The amateurish greeting, ‘Hi, I’m just calling to follow-up,’ really says they don’t care,” says Steve Hoffacker of Hoffacker Associates, West Palm Beach, Fla.

“The best sales professionals state their business and dispense with the weak opening,” says Hoffacker. “Always have at least two reasons for calling someone, and plan on having something else to talk about if they say they don’t have any questions. The best sales professionals are constantly on the lookout for new and creative ways to keep their name in their customers’ minds.”

9. Always showing value

Today’s home building marketplace is more competitive than ever before, and too many salespeople believe price is the only motivating buying factor. Successful salespeople recognize that price is a factor in every sale but it is seldom the primary reason someone chooses a particular product or supplier. They know that well-informed buyers will usually base much of their decision on the value proposition presented by the salesperson, and they know how to create this value with each customer, prospect and buyer they encounter.

10. Persistent and fearless closer

Selling new homes requires a tremendous amount of tenacity. Even the best new-home sales professionals will fail with 10 customers for every sale they make. One of the biggest fallacies about great sales performers is that they have “perfect” communities — not true. It’s what they do when faced with barriers that determines their level of success. The most successful people in our industry have learned to face the obstacles, look for creative solutions and refuse to give up.

“I can’t live without the fearless closer,” says Mike Storey, COO of Neal Communities, Sarasota, Fla. “They have got to relish the opportunity to get that customer to reject them in order to get them to accept them. They have to know when they’ve earned the right to ask that buyer to commit, build their confidence they are making the right decision and lead them to their checkbook. The best do it without you even know it’s happening to you.” **PB**

John Rymer is a leading authority on new-home sales and marketing. A frequent speaker at the International Builders’ Show, Rymer’s career in real estate has spanned more than 20 years and has accounted for more than \$5 billion in sales directly under his supervision. He can be reached at john@newhomeknowledge.com.

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