

WHAT MAKES A WINNING TEAM?

**THE SAME TRAITS THAT
PRODUCE SUPERSTAR ATHLETIC
PERFORMANCE CAN ALSO
DELIVER TOP SALES FIGURES**



WHETHER ON THE PLAYING FIELD OR in the sales arena, the objective is always the same: to win. But do the similarities between sports and selling end there? Herb Greenberg doesn't think so. As president and CEO of Caliper Human Strategies, Inc., a management consulting firm, Greenberg has compiled the world's largest database of business professionals and athletes relating personality to job performance.

In the past 34 years Caliper has tested almost 1,000,000 individuals for more than 20,000 companies worldwide, and more than 4,000 athletes for eight professional sports franchises including Houston's Rockets and Orlando's Magic. From these tests Caliper builds a profile on each individual, rating their relative strengths and weaknesses. The profiles help Caliper advise clients on whether an individual will perform well in a certain job. After studying

thousands of results, Greenberg believes that many of the same attributes predict success in both sales and sports.

■ COMPETITIVENESS

"In athletes, we look for a strong competitiveness," Greenberg explains. "That relates to, but is not the same as, ego-drive (the need to get to 'yes') in salespeople. Defined briefly, competitiveness is that burning need to win with every move you make. It's not just the desire to win the game, which every athlete has, it's that instinct to compete with every move you make on the field or the court. In other words, if someone comes dribbling the ball downcourt, you want to block him, stop him, get the ball out of his hands – whatever you need to do to win at that moment in time.

"Now in the case of the salesperson, that desire to win is very specific: It's the desire to get to yes. It is not a matter of making a lot of money. Making money to a salesperson is like winning the game is to the athlete. Sure you want to make a lot of money, but the key to the successfully competitive salesperson is that need to get it done now. He or she wants to get that yes immediately."

by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Hiring the right people is as important to a sales organization as the college draft is to a professional sports franchise. Follow the pro guidelines to build your all-star selling team.

■ ASSERTIVENESS Greenberg says that while competitiveness is essential to success in athletics, he believes that another quality, assertiveness, is only important for certain positions.

“Assertiveness is the ability to lead strongly,” Greenberg explains, “yet without having to push or bully. In other words, the ability to lead so others believe they are accomplishing on their own. Assertiveness is only important in sports in either coaching or in certain team positions requiring leadership, such as the point guard in basketball, quarterback in football, or catcher in baseball. For these positions, when we help a team make a decision about drafting a player, we look to see whether that player has the necessary leadership for the position. On a number of occasions we’ve said to a general manager, ‘If you want to draft that player, fine, but not as a catcher. Never mind his talent, he just doesn’t have the leadership to be a catcher.’”

“In sales, assertiveness is critical in sales management. In straight sales, depending on what you’re selling, it may be less critical, but in sales management it’s absolutely essential.”

■ AGGRESSIVENESS Greenberg is quick to point out that assertiveness and aggressiveness are not the same thing. Each has its place in the athletic arena, he

says, but too much aggressiveness often stands in the way of a salesperson’s success.

“Aggressiveness is more a physical or psychological need to just push things out of the way,” he explains. “It can be either negative or, if under control, a positive attribute.

Aggressiveness means creating your own opportunities, rather than waiting for opportunities to appear. Some people have described the difference this way: Say you have an assertive person and an aggressive person in a tunnel and they come upon a barrier blocking their way. The assertive person will get beyond the barrier by climbing it or going around it; the aggressive person is going to drive through it and knock it over.

“In football, for example, you want a defensive end to be aggressive because his job is to knock over everything in his way to get to the quarterback. At the same time, in basketball you can tell a player who has a lot of aggressiveness because he probably fouls out too much of the time. That’s a situation where unbridled aggressiveness doesn’t help his efforts. And the same thing can be true in sales. Untempered aggressiveness is often seen as bullying. The customer says, ‘He doesn’t care about me; he just wants to make the deal.’ Traditional high-pressure sales tactics

THE TRAITS OF A WINNER

ATHLETE

SALESPERSON

The burning need to win.

COMPETITIVENESS

Ego-drive —the inner desire to get to “yes.”

The ability to lead a sports team to the highest attainable level of success.

ASSERTIVENESS

The ability to make strong presentations and reach the highest possible level of sales and profits.

The drive to push through obstacles.

AGGRESSIVENESS

The drive to create opportunities.

The ability to handle failure, loss and rejection.

EGO-STRENGTH

The ability to handle failure, loss and rejection.

The motivation to practice and work steadily and effectively without external reward and punishment.

SELF-DISCIPLINE

The motivation to work steadily and effectively without external reward or punishment.

that make the customer feel ill at ease often indicate too much aggressiveness.”

■ EGO-STRENGTH Whether in sports or selling even the top performers must learn how to face rejection and failure if they want to succeed. Greenberg says that the ability to move beyond life’s inevitable rejections will determine success much better than talent alone. “In baseball,” he explains, “a Hall of Fame hitter might bat .333 over his career. That’s the very best, the multimillion-dollar player. But if he bats .333, that means that for every three times he comes up to bat, two times he doesn’t get a hit. He fails two out of three times.

“Similarly, even the best salespeople are rejected more frequently than they are accepted. With one of our stockbroker clients the hope is that out of 100 cold calls a salesperson will get three appointments and close one sale. And that is successful. So whether it’s in selling or in sports, the way someone deals with failure is absolutely as critical to their success as their talent.

“It’s a frequent phenomenon in baseball – hot rookies come to camp batting .400 or striking out everybody in sight, but don’t know what to do once the inevitable slump hits. They start changing their swing, holding the bat differently, but nothing works and within a few months they’re out of the game never to be heard from again.”

Greenberg says that with two salespeople of roughly equal ability, the difference between short- and long-term success is often determined by self-esteem.

“Self-esteem is one of the most critical attributes to success,” he says, “but a lack of self-esteem is probably the single most common thing that defeats good athletes and good salespeople. As with athletes, no matter how successful salespeople are, they are going to hit the slumps, get rejections, and no matter how strong their ego-drive, they are not going to want to face that next rejection. In sales, like no other profession in the world, you repeatedly expose yourself to the customer and leave yourself open to rejection.

“To move beyond those feelings, you’ve got to have a sense of self, that self-esteem that we call ego-

strength. That characteristic is what enables you to say, ‘OK, I know I’m going to get four turndowns before I get to a “yes”.’ It basically comes down to not taking the rejections personally and having to go for a 3-hour lunch or do anything just to avoid facing more rejection.”

■ SELF-DISCIPLINE Along with competitiveness and self-esteem, Greenberg also emphasizes the importance of self-discipline in driving sales and athletic success.

“Essentially, self-discipline is that internal task master that says, ‘I want to do things in an orderly, systematic way,’” Greenberg explains. “Self-disciplined athletes say, ‘I want to practice because it will make me better; I don’t need a coach to tell me to practice, I want to practice. I want to come into camp in condition because if I come into camp overweight, I’m going to be off to a late start and I’ll have a lot of extra work to do.’ Self-discipline is that ability to plan and organize one’s work and time systematically, thoroughly and efficiently – all without that external carrot or stick.

“The self-disciplined salesperson says, ‘OK, I am going to start on the north side of town to see Jim and Sally and that should fill my morning. Then I’m going to make an appointment midtown with Joe for lunch, so that I can see Sam and Harriet on the south side in the afternoon. If I finish that appointment by 4:30, I should be able to squeeze in an extra meeting late with Bill whose office is near mine, and I won’t have to waste a lot of time in transit.”

For obvious reasons, salespeople who don’t need managers to provide incentives will tend to excel. But Greenberg says that even an important trait like self-discipline is not absolutely essential for success in selling. It all depends on the nature of that particular sales job.

“Under certain management structures, you can get away with a lack of self-discipline. Under others you cannot. With one recent client, we evaluated a young woman who possessed every talent in the world. She was smart, assertive, aggressive, proactive, had ego-drive, could make quick decisions – basical-

“SELF-ESTEEM IS ONE OF THE MOST CRITICAL ATTRIBUTES TO SUCCESS.”

BEST OF THE BEST

You think it's tough to break into the ranks of the top sales achievers? Just try becoming an NBA all-star. According to Caliper CEO Herb Greenberg, who administers personality profile tests to college athletes for professional teams, the odds against a college basketball player becoming an NBA superstar aren't that much greater than winning the lottery.

Out of approximately 20,000 college basketball players in the United States each year, 400 of the very best gather for showcase scrimmage games and combines around the country. After carefully evaluating the players' comparative talents, NBA scouts, coaches and general managers select 54 of these players in the NBA draft. Maybe 10 more are invited to NBA camps as free agents. So of 20,000 college players, only 2 percent go to tryouts and just .3 percent get a shot at the pros. Of those who get tryouts, the majority either don't make a team or hang on as the last man on the roster. Some players do become moderate successes who contribute to their teams and put up respectable numbers. Few, however, become superstars. Greenberg generously estimates that of those that do make teams, perhaps 20 put together genuinely solid NBA careers, but on average maybe four will become superstars. This means that each of those original 20,000 bright-eyed college hopefuls has a .02 percent, or 1 in 5,000, chance of someday joining Michael Jordan and Shaquille O'Neal at the NBA all-star game. With such long odds it becomes apparent why they call the top college players "lottery picks."

ly just a terrific salesperson. Yet we still recommended that our client not hire her.

"Why? Because the job was going to take place in a small town about 500 miles away from headquarters where she would only have contact with the sales manager about once a week on the phone. So the job would entail not just closing sales, which she could do extraordinarily well, but also putting together a marketing plan and organizing her work and time, which she could not do so well.

"She had no patience for going through telephone books and lists to plot out a program.

She wanted to sell, sell, sell. I told this manager, if you could bring her into the home office and have her work under you where you could structure her time and expose her to a number of prospects a day, she'll be a closing machine.

"But if you put her out there where self-starting is as important as sales ability, she'll waste most of her time spinning her wheels. For that position, self-discipline was very important and she just didn't possess it."

■ PREDICTING SUCCESS

Ultimately, this example illustrates a greater point Greenberg highlights about analyzing talent and predicting future performance: that each different sales job requires a unique set of talents and strengths.

"Whether in sports or sales," he says, "to truly evaluate how a player or a salesperson will do, you need to know what the individual will be asked to do. Merely saying somebody can sell or somebody is competitive enough to play is not sufficient. It all depends on the sales situation.

"Let's say you're selling \$1,000 PCs over the counter. You'd better have a lot of ego-drive. Why? Because when someone walks in, you are either going to sell that person right this minute or they are going to walk out of the store forever. When you're selling retail, it's your job to persuade customers at the counter that this PC will solve all their problems.

"Now, on the other side of the spectrum let's say you're a salesperson who sells mainframe systems that cost several hundred thousand dollars or even millions to business and government clients.

"You can't expect to close a sale every day, maybe

at best four or five a year. But if you have too much ego-drive, and too much immediate desire to close deals, you will become frustrated.

“This frustration at the lack of closing may even cause you to push too hard, turn off potential clients, and eventually fail. These two examples are both sales jobs in the computer industry, but they require totally different strengths from the salespeople.”

■ TRADE-OFFS When professional sports franchises draft athletes, they have their pick of the very top players in the country. Unfortunately, few sales organizations share this luxury. More often than not, hiring salespeople is an exercise in compromise. Greenberg acknowledges this fact, but still believes that managers can match certain strengths to create better job performance.

“Really, whether in drafting athletes or hiring salespeople, there will be trade-offs,” Greenberg says. “If you’re waiting for the perfect applicant, you’re going to wait a long time and hold unfilled positions. You have to determine what you can trade off and what you can’t. What weakness can you live with in this position and what weaknesses mean a fatal flaw?”

“Also, there are some salespeople who will need a great deal of stroking, and if you as a manager cannot satisfy that need, then you shouldn’t hire that person. Many times we’ve said to a manager, ‘Joe should not work under you, because the two of you will be like oil and water. But if Susan has a position available, the chemistry will be excellent and it should work terrifically.’”

Greenberg supports his arguments with hard data. Of the 600 basketball players Caliper has tested, 168 were drafted and signed by NBA teams, then played at least one year. Of these, the Caliper-recommended players averaged 909 points, 320 rebounds and 1,919 minutes played per season, compared to 376 points, 160 rebounds and 1,004 minutes for those not recommended. In baseball, recommended players averaged 146 hits, 80 runs scored and 69 runs batted in per season. Those not recommended averaged just 71 hits, 38 runs scored and 35 runs batted in.

“It’s important to remember that these statistics merely represent the players who stayed in the league,” Greenberg emphasizes. “There were several hundred whom we did not recommend who either didn’t get drafted or performed so badly that they were cut before accruing any statistics. In other words, if you were to load in all the people we did not recommend who simply failed, the differences would be even more dramatic.” It should also be noted that Caliper made these recommendations based solely on test results, so the company could not have recommended players based on performance on the baseball diamond or basketball court.

Understandably, statistics for business executives are not as readily available as for athletes. Despite that fact, the data that does exist suggests that Caliper’s positive results among athletes holds for salespeople as well. “Every time we send out a test report on an applicant,” Greenberg explains, “we also send out a form that asks, ‘Did you hire this person or not?’ Then every subsequent six months or a year we send follow-up forms asking how the person is performing. Just as it’s impossible to follow up on athletes who are not drafted, we cannot follow up on salespeople who are not hired, so our data are just for those people who were hired, whether we recommended them or not.

“For salespeople in such high turnover industries as life insurance, automobile, and real estate, of those we recommended who are still on the job after 14 months, 85 percent are in the top half of their sales forces. Of those hired against our recommendation, the figure is much lower, around 17 percent. As for turnover itself, of those recommended, only 28 percent are gone after 14 months, whereas 57 percent of those not recommended leave within the same time frame.”

Of the hundreds of thousands of tests Caliper has administered helping innumerable companies and sports franchises, Greenberg still derives particular

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pleasure from those cases when Caliper recommends a player or salesperson against the conventional wisdom who then goes on to become a top performer. As the ideal example, Greenberg relates the story of a basketball player coming out of St. John's University many years ago.

"This was a kid who, despite being an All-American in college, had been labeled by the experts as too slow, without enough lateral movement, and too short to play the forward position in the NBA. But our test results suggested that his intense com-

petitiveness, phenomenal self-esteem and rigid self-discipline were so strong that he would make up for any such physical limitations. Since that time the player, Chris Mullin, has become a perennial all-star and in 1992 even played on the Olympic Dream Team that won the gold medal in Barcelona. And while that's probably the most famous case, that's the type of result our testing and job matching have been producing for sales organizations for 34 years."

For more information on Caliper, call (609)924-3800.

THE PEOPLE WHO MEASURE SUCCESS



Caliper's focus is on helping you assess the potential of individuals and develop the promise of your organization.

We can provide the professional advice you require to make the most knowledgeable, informed, objective decisions – whether you are hiring for an important position, promoting a key employee,

improving the performance of a department or creating more effective management approaches.

We believe that the winners in this world are those individuals who are fortunate enough to be in situations that play to their strengths. Helping you identify those strengths and those situations is what Caliper is all about. Call us at 609.924.3800.

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