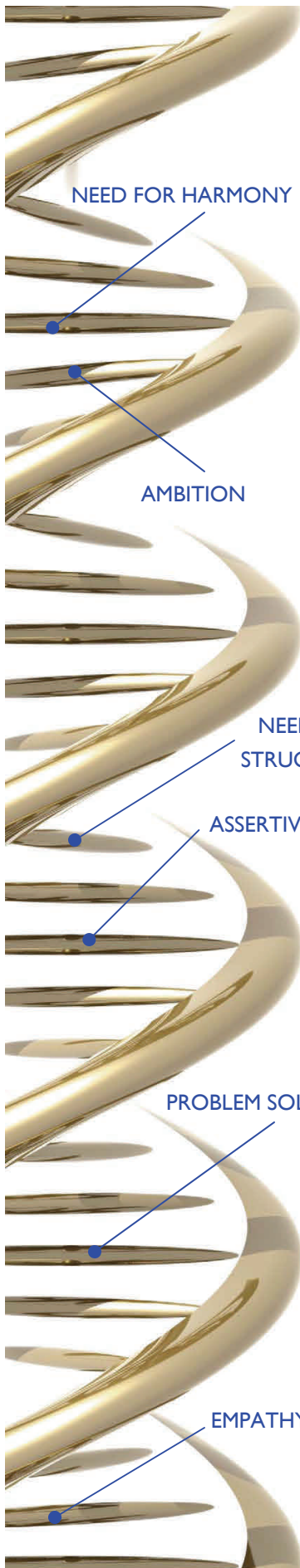


# Success DNA - Why It's Critical for Sales Leaders

By Scott Zahn, Co-founder



In this economy, sales execution is on everyone's mind. With fewer opportunities for new account penetration and new business development, it's absolutely imperative that your sales professionals win a higher percentage of their transactions every single quarter.

While many sales training and productivity firms flood the market with messages about how to boost performance, choosing which options to insure success this month, this quarter and this year is more challenging than ever. Recent research shows that the best sales organizations are focused on how to leverage the key selling skills of their top performers to improve everyone else's performance. One of the most cost-effective approaches yielding impressive results is sales performance coaching. Coaching is all about helping your sales professionals read situations better and adjust their selling style appropriately.

## Establishing Peak Performer Benchmark

Though the concept of sales coaching is not new, recent research indicates that optimal coaching outcomes are achieved when the sales organization establishes the benchmark for peak performance. Specifically, what is it about the "A" level sales professionals that makes them so unique? Understanding these characteristics, called the Success DNA, is essential to coach and improve the performance of the entire team.

Over the last 3 decades, researchers have refined a series of scientific conclusions identifying an individual's core behaviors as a consistently accurate measurement for understanding peak performance. Continu-

ing research has shown that behavioral indicators have high correlations to actual performance results across a variety of employee roles as opposed to selling styles or methods. Behaviors can be simply described as attitudes and competencies that really define the Success DNA for your sales professionals.

Like any measurement criteria, establishing the benchmark for performance is the first step. In team sports it's usually the win/loss record. In selling, it needs to be more granular. Regardless of the variables measured, the same standards need to be used for all sales professionals within a logical organization. Therefore, selling organizations can have separate Success DNA measurements for territory sales groups versus National Accounts sales groups.

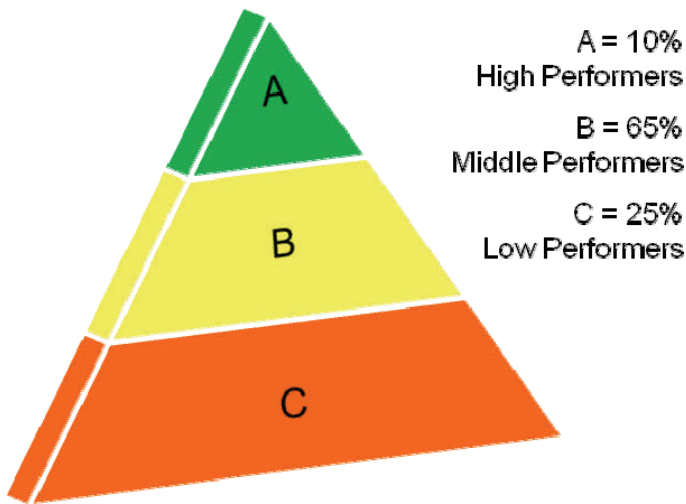
By measuring the peak performers and using their results to establish a benchmark, sales managers can now compare the "B" and "C" level sales professionals to the benchmark to see the specific root causes behind inconsistent or poor performance results. Analytics at this level can help sales managers understand why certain reps have issues at various points in sales campaigns.

## Applying the Peak Performer Benchmark to Everyone

To see the implications, let's examine a specific sample behavior; a sales professional's need for harmony. A sales rep's score relative to the top performers' benchmark will often reveal how the rep is likely to act at critical points in a sales cycle when persuasion is required.

For instance, when trying to

## The Three Levels of Performers



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commitment to move ahead with the sale. If the benchmark results show that the peak performers in your organization have moderate scores on this attribute, but the sales professional in question scores higher, he or she will likely under perform in these situations. The propensity to avoid difficulty (reflected in a high need for harmony) is likely to have a negative impact on this sales campaign. As a result, the alignment needed to move the buying process forward, is often missed or glossed over. In cases where the competition understands the situation and executes more effectively (thus achieving a higher degree of alignment), your rep will eventually be completing your version of a lost sales report while his competitor is celebrating the win.

Knowing the Success DNA of your sales organization allows managers to work one-on-one with each sales rep for personalized coaching. Research shows that the top sales organizations significantly out perform their competition when their coaching and training program is driven off the organization's Success DNA. Sales managers who have embraced this

leadership strategy witness shorter sales cycles and higher win rates on a consistent basis.

### **Applying Peak Performer Benchmarks to Hiring Process**

When the sales organization's Success DNA is applied to the hiring process, equally impressive results are achieved. For years, hiring new sales professionals has been a time consuming task and problematic. It's not a reflection of poor interview skills or lack of effort, but simply the difficulty in uncovering the cognitive behaviors associated with each candidate's Success DNA.

However, managers who understand their organization's Success DNA have a clear advantage when it comes to selecting between new hire candidates. Hiring managers can now clearly see where each candidate specifically differs from their peak performers. By infusing science into the process, the inconsistency of a gut decision can be supported with fact based analytics.

In a typical scenario, you may have identified five candidates who meet each of your overall requirements. This short list has been through a complete interview cycle. Each of the candidates appears to be a good fit and reference checks show no "red flags" or danger signs. While most managers would be burdened with this decision phase, managers who have their organization's Success DNA mapped are clearly in control.

For instance, using the Success DNA, the candidate's profile reveals that he is exceptionally unstructured. He comes to the interviews seemingly nonchalant. He rarely has prepared materials, and his spontaneous comments – while refreshing, seem somewhat out of context at times. Follow up calls to his references indicates a strong track record but confirm your observations of this un-

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clear that the candidate's selling style was effective in his previous organizations, it may be a liability in yours, due to his unstructured approach.

This added insight can now be factored into the hiring manager's decision process for evaluating this candidate against the strengths and weaknesses of the other candidates. Should this candidate turn out to be the best, the hiring manager can now proactively coach this new rep to mirror the structured methods used by the benchmark group. The coaching can stress a higher respect for the transaction related details and the instruction can be delivered consistently until the rep has embraced the new process.

Additionally, the manager can ask proactive questions around the new rep's prospect list looking for selling situations where the buyers have a very formal buying process where a structured campaign is absolutely required. These selling opportunities will be the manager's focus during the transitional quarters as this new hire is likely to struggle in situations where the tendency exists to be more spontaneous if not coached effectively by the sales manager.

### **Benefits of Measuring the Success DNA of Your Organization**

Sales organizations that measure their Success DNA have a clear advantage in this shifting economy and realize significant performance improvements:

- Shorter sales cycles and higher win rates.
- Lower cost of sales and less competitive pressures.
- Successful new hires that perform like A players
- Lower hiring and training costs

The most successful sales organizations today leverage the best practices of their top performers to improve the entire sales team's performance. The ability to sharpen and focus

the selling skills of each sales professional will be one of the critical factors for determining winners (peak performers) in this highly competitive and difficult economy.

Spring Lake Technologies offers knowledge-based analytics and tools to measure Success DNA and most importantly help sales leaders coach and mentor sales professionals for higher levels of performance. The company's SmartSeries suite of on-demand sales performance applications is defining success for sales organizations like RightNow Technologies, Siemens and Advent around the globe across a wide range of industries.

To try SmartProfiling from SLT to measure your team's Success DNA, you can click the "Try it Now" link on our web site, or email me at: [szahn@springlaketech.com](mailto:szahn@springlaketech.com). This limited offer is free for now but, the results will last a lifetime.

