

Accelerated Start-Up:

How to Get Your Brand New Sales Rep Productive

in Less than 100 days

By Walter J. McDonald

You have just spent quite a lot of time, effort and money recruiting and selecting what you hope will be a highly productive new member of your sales team. Your recruitment process has been developed over the years, including testing, screening, reference checking and multiple interviews. You might have even invited the candidate to complete small projects such as visiting competitors, interviewing your personal key account friend or attending a machinery trade show to determine the quality and insightfulness of his questions. Now, this handsome, impressive, energetic, enthusiastic, smart candidate is ready to start next Monday.

You feel confident about your new hire. Yet, there is a very good chance he may flounder.

You ask yourself, why do most sales reps take so long time to become really productive? Why do so many eventually fail? Why can't they get themselves organized and off to a stronger start? After all, you did give them the keys to the building, a set of brochures, price lists and a box of business cards, didn't you?

Model Accelerated 90-Day Start-Up

Sales Training Process

- ① **Learn company policies and procedures**
- ② **Gain essential product and competitive product knowledge**
- ③ **Develop presentation and demonstration skills**
- ④ **Organize and manage the sales territory. Work specific/targeted account list. Structure Routes. Increasing weekly call, demo quotas. Get rentals. Make sales.**
- ⑤ **Organize sales tools**
- ⑥ **Sharpen selling skills**
- ⑦ **Visit large (key account) customers with Dealer Principal**
- ⑧ **Attain initial sales/rentals objectives**

The reason may be that my research shows more than 3 in 10 new sales hires in this industry fail. Only about 40% meet their first year performance expectations. And, the turnover costs about 150% of compensation. When you consider direct, indirect and opportunity cost, your loss approaches \$200,000 for each failed new sales rep.

The good news is, you can improve your odds for recruiting success. Here's how.

1. Before you begin: prepare a description of qualifications a prospective sales candidate **must have** to be successful before you begin your recruiting process. These include his experiences in selling deals your size, prospecting, maintaining

territory coverage intensity, managing his pipeline, building long-term relationships, key account management, holding margins, time and territory management skills, learning technical products, technical selling skills, getting commitments, achieving quotas, obtaining referrals.

What demonstrated and proven experience must your candidate have in each of these categories? (Hint, why would you hire a sales candidate with no sales experience?) Unless you are utilizing a highly-validated psychological testing service to profile your sales candidates, the candidate must have competence in at **least two** of these three bodies of knowledge and skills:

- a) Knows and understands your customer segments.
- b) Knows your products categories and technologies.
- c) Has extensive, relevant B2B selling skills.

This skill set implies that a very personable service technician or product support field rep in your dealership, or even your financial rep with high levels of energy, empathy, ego-drive, determination and customer relations skills could be taught selling skills.

2. Avoid emergency hiring. Set up continuous search procedures for top producers so you will know where they are when you need them.
3. Replace marginal performers regularly with high-potential, high-probability candidates. This also helps update and maintain your own personal recruiting and selection skills.
4. Expect and demand top results from every rep on your team. Recycle and renew older, mediocre reps through your new **Accelerated Start-Up Program**.
5. Base sales compensation on gross profit performance and market share penetration.

So, what about the **Accelerated Start-Up** of your high-probability new hire in machinery or product support sales? Here is how you can do it more effectively.

In my more than 2,650 dealer management and sales workshops, I see a common success theme: *the more structured you can make the first 90 days for your new sales hire, the quicker he/she will become effective and productive in their new sales territory.*

These are the two really important, field-proven Best Practices for a highly-successful Accelerated Start-Up Process:

1. Make your formal Accelerated Start-Up Program the primary sales recruiting tool.

New sales reps want to be trained and coached. One of the biggest issues newer sales reps mention to me in my *Executive Selling Skills Workshop* is their sales managers often ignore them and provide little or no guidance, except when they don't meet quota. In fact, one dealer principal once said to me, "I pay these guys a lot of money and their time and territory management problem is their own ____ problem!"

If you are attempting to recruit **top tier** candidates, they look for and expect a solid training program from their ideal prospective employer. And, the more formal and well-constructed your program, the more professional and attractive your company will appear to the best candidates. You should package your **Accelerated Start-Up Program** into a recruiting pamphlet with a companion spiral bound workbook for your new hire. Successful candidates will be eager to show the program pamphlet to their spouse, parents and friends who may further encourage and inspire your candidate.

This way your Accelerated Start-Up Program spotlights your dealership as a highly-professional, great place to work. Your dealership offers limitless opportunities and comprehensive training for the successful new recruit.

Early in your recruiting interview you should present and discuss your **Accelerated Start-Up Program**. This program is your primary recruiting tool. You tell your potential candidate that for him to be successful, his time, **all of his time**, belongs to you for the first 90-days.

If your candidate is a less than courageous “reluctant astronaut” with too many personal commitments to meet the challenges of your **Accelerated Start-Up Program**, now is the time to find out! For example, being in a sports league, pursuing time-consuming hobbies, outside interests such as dog trainer, cosmetics or vitamin sales may not allow him/her to devote the 60 hours per week required to successfully go through your 90-day **Accelerated Start-Up Program**. If so, move on to candidate # 4. (If you only are interviewing one, two, or three your probability of success is low.)

This means **YOU** must be prepared to carefully control their time, assign work, review progress, critique demonstrations and presentations and monitor results. This means you should have a well-organized **Accelerated Start-Up Action Plan** that will keep your bright new candidate filled with productive high-impact assignments in the eight critical performance/knowledge areas, 10 hours a day, 6 days a week, through holidays, weekends, bad weather, good weather and stomach aches. **He belongs to you! His time belongs to you! You OWN his time for the first 90 Days.**

Advantages: You want them to learn essential knowledge and skills very quickly. You also want to know very quickly if your new candidate can meet muster and live up to job learning, presentation requirements and daily call coverage intensity. As sales manager, you cannot afford to let a hiring mistake hold you back. He could easily put your annual sales quota in jeopardy for a year or more with mediocre or sub-par performance. If he fails to complete daily or weekly assignments as required, on time, you need to know **now**. If you get excuses for incomplete work, like “I had to take my grandma shopping,” you know you are in trouble and you need to pull the plug **NOW**.

Disadvantages: His spouse, dog, children, fishing buddies, golfing partners will not have the pleasure of his company very much at all during this high-intensity sales orientation and training program. He will be very occupied while he is earning his stripes.

You also will be required to jump start and accelerate your own supervisory, training, coaching and counseling skills. You must also make a big personal time commitment

to make your fresh new candidate a success. It will take a lot of intense supervision on your part. And, surprisingly, many sales managers are just too busy fighting fires or just too indifferent to focus on nurturing and developing this very expensive and important new human asset. If a new sales rep is flagging, I first look at sales management and the dealer's hiring and on boarding procedures.

2. Structure a tightly-controlled sales training and development program.

The successful candidate joins your organization full of energy and enthusiasm, willing to learn, eager to please, happy to make sacrifices and commit whatever time it takes to succeed. He/she is interested in moving ahead quickly. So, it is up to you to make certain you have a tightly structured 90-day program. Your Start-Up program should lead the way for your new sales rep to rapidly reach the following eight competency goals:

- ① **Learn company policies and procedures**
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Now you are ready to start building your own Start-Up Plan. Just make sure you have activities and reviews scheduled from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm daily with formal private Progress Review Sessions at 7:00 am every Monday.

NOTE: I have worked with many individual Sales Managers to help them flesh out details of their Start-Up program. If you would like to discuss how I might be able to help, contact me: walt@mcdonaldgroupinc.com. I can work on site with you to guide you through the steps needed to build a highly effective and robust program for new machinery as well as new aftermarket field sales candidates. We will develop a daily and weekly Action Plan schedule to pull it all together and to properly deploy your program. We will begin with the information requirements to structure each of the eight critical sections of your Accelerated Start-Up Program.

Suggested Additional Reading:

How to Hire & Develop Your Next Top Performer by Herb Greenberg and Harold Weinstein.
Why Employees Don't Do What They're Supposed to Do by Ferdinand F. Fournies

About the Author.

Walter J. McDonald is President and Founder of the [McDonald Group's Institute for Dealer/Distributor Development](#). Walter has conducted over 2,650 dealer sales and management training workshops all over the world in the fork lift, construction equipment and other machinery industries. Walter recently published his 375-page [Achieving Excellence in Dealer/Distributor Performance](#), now available on AMAZON.COM. This article on *Accelerated Start-Up* originally appeared as part of the *High Probability Recruiting Workshop Module* in Walter's [Executive Sales and Sales Management Workshop](#). Contact Walter directly to discuss his Accelerated Start Up Process for new reps or for information on his popular dealer workshops at Walt@mcdonaldgroupinc.com. His web site is www.mcdonaldgroupinc.com.