


STRYKER SELECTS TOP TALENT

DEVELOPING A RIGOROUS SELECTION PROCESS BASED ON RECRUITING PEOPLE WITH THE RIGHT INNATE QUALITIES FOR THE ROLE HAS HELPED GLOBAL COMPANY STRYKER TO ENHANCE ITS ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE *by* RACHEL SUFF 

For more than 20 years running, Stryker — a company specializing in surgical and medical devices — has delivered at least 20% organic growth annually. It attributes this achievement largely to recruiting people who have the right innate talents to drive the business forward.

In partnership with the consulting firm The Gallup Organization, the company has developed a talent-based selection technique for candidates to determine what is involved in great talent. The company operates in a fiercely competitive niche market, and the relationships that its sales people develop with surgeons and other customers are paramount.

RESOURCING FOR GROWTH

Attracting and retaining a high-performing and self-motivated workforce is central to Stryker's corporate strategy. As Donna Lewandowski, HR director, explains: "The company continues to grow at a significant rate year-on-year, and in the five-plus years I have been here we have never not been hiring. It is not just the company's expansion that drives our resourcing plans. We are constantly searching for new talent because Stryker is very keen to develop and progress people on to the next challenge, so we need to 'backfill' those roles."

Stryker was founded in the United States, but now operates globally. It has operations and, therefore, recruitment requirements, in more than 20 countries — including the United States, South Africa, Ireland, Holland, and the United Kingdom, where it is one of four main suppliers to the National Health Service (NHS). Its resourcing strategy is tailored to meet the cultural and economic conditions specific to each national labor market. For example, the current low level of unemployment

in the United Kingdom means that the main challenge is attracting a sufficiently large number of good-quality candidates.

Yet, while the practical application of Stryker's resourcing strategy may vary slightly according to local conditions, its overall ethos remains constant. Maintaining its culture of "sustained excellence," which has reaped such impressive financial results for the business, means settling for nothing but the most highly motivated and talented people. "The company strives to attract the very best, and we would rather not recruit than lower our expectations because we know the business depends on it," Lewandowski says. "We take a long-term, rather than a short-term, view to recruitment."

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BELIEF IN THE BUSINESS

Stryker's organizational culture is dynamic and focused on outcomes, but it is also one that is characterized by a strong belief in what the company does and the difference that its products can make to people's health. As a developer and manufacturer of spe-

cialized surgical and medical devices — such as joint replacements and trauma, spine, and micro implant systems — Stryker's products can help people to lead fuller and healthier lives. Its core business and mission is one that can carry a strong appeal to potential job candidates. In today's competitive graduate recruitment market, Stryker may not be a household name, but it is finding that there is a "ground-swell" of graduates who want to work for an employer where they can make a difference.

"A very important part of our attraction strategy is to talk about the personality of Stryker," Lewandowski explains. "We aim to be an

employer of choice. We want to attract people with the desire to succeed, but are also very ready to develop and progress them through the business.”

An important feature of Stryker’s employment ethos is to retain staff by offering them a range of different career opportunities. Succession planning represents a key resourcing priority, as does the provision of opportunities for employees to develop by taking on more diverse roles and greater responsibility.

While the emphasis in many organizations has shifted from job security to “employability,” Stryker believes in removing occupational barriers to progression and providing employees with the chance to take on new challenges within the company.

“It may no longer be fashionable, but we do want to hire and retire people,” advises Lewandowski. “We make a conscious effort not to pigeon-hole employees into fixed careers, unless that is what they want. Because our emphasis is on talent, and because of our size and growth, we have the capacity to offer employees a range of different career options over their lifetime.”

TALENT-BASED RECRUITMENT

Talent underpins every facet of Stryker’s approach to recruiting and developing people. It is implicit in the company’s recruitment advertising — by appealing to prospective applicants who are “intrinsically motivated” and who welcome a challenge — and it is explicit in the sophisticated screening and selection tools that have been developed in partnership with the consulting firm Gallup.

As Lewandowski explains: “Stryker recruits for talent. We can teach people to acquire skills,

such as how to interview or be technically proficient in an area, but no one can teach someone to be enthusiastic or have integrity or be a good influencer. It is not possible to manufacture talent — you have to recruit it in the first place.”

It is a view that chimes closely with that of Gallup. The consultancy firm has been researching human behavior for decades and strongly believes that every individual possesses talents inherent to their nature.

Its work is built on the premise that people are happiest and most productive in jobs that enable them to make the greatest use of that

natural aptitude. “It is important that employers position individuals in roles that capitalize on their strengths, because people have intrinsic qualities that are not trainable,” says Peter Flade, managing partner of Gallup.

“The strength of an individual in a particular role rests on a combination of factors, such as experience and education. But the key limiting factor to how well

they perform in that role is innate ability. It is not an organization’s role to make people talented, but for the organization to make something of that talent, or it remains latent potential.” He defines talent as “a recurring pattern of thought, feeling, and behavior that can be productively applied.”

TALENT-BASED SELECTION

Placing talent at the center of the recruitment process is based on the principle that an individual’s talents are strongly predictive of future performance. As a company aiming for world-class performance in a fiercely competitive environment, Stryker knows that

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ORGANIZATION PROFILE

Stryker is a global company that develops, manufactures, and markets specialized surgical and medical products, such as joint replacements and trauma, spine, and micro implant systems. The company was founded in 1941 in Kalamazoo, Michigan, by orthopaedic surgeon Dr. Homer Stryker. When he found that certain medical products were not meeting his patients' needs, Dr. Stryker invented new ones and, as interest in these products grew, he started a company to produce them. The company's goal was to help patients lead healthier, more active lives through products and services that make surgery and recovery simpler, faster, and more effective. Today, Stryker is listed as a *Fortune 400* company, its annual sales are approaching \$5 billion, [£2.8 billion GBP] and it employs around 16,000 people worldwide, including in Europe. In the United Kingdom, the company is based in Newbury, Berkshire, and employs around 240 staff.

hiring people who possess the innate qualities to deliver high-level performance is critical to its business success. The company has worked closely with Gallup to design predictive validation selection tools to achieve this overarching resourcing aim.

The selection techniques that have been developed are bespoke and tailored to the different types of roles that are most common at Stryker, such as sales, clerical and administrative, managerial, professional, and leadership.

As a producer and seller of medical devices, the organization naturally has a strong sales focus. "Over half of the 100 or so new recruits we hired last year were recruited to sales-oriented positions," Lewandowski says. "Two years ago, we refined our selection approach for this key employee group using the very solid research base that Gallup has built up and the in-depth research it undertook within Stryker."

The sales people employed by Stryker need to be highly sophisticated in their roles. The products

they are selling are usually complicated medical or surgical devices, and their main customers are surgeons. The relationships that they build

with their target audience often involve developing an emotional bond. This requires natural talents that transcend the typical qualities associated with many sales roles, such as "courage," "responsibility," and "belief."

To develop the talent-based selection tool for Stryker's sales roles in a number of European countries, Gallup set out to replicate the "best-in-class" sales performers in

the company. It undertook interviews with top managers and ran in-depth focus groups with high-achieving sales staff to pinpoint precisely the innate talents that differentiated the best performers from the rest. Gallup asked questions about how people were motivated, what they liked about their job, and how they related to customers, among others.

From this research, Gallup was able to identify that around 80% of the "talent themes" needed for the sales role were consistent across the dif-

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ferent European countries falling within the scope of the project. Interestingly, the study also showed that the ways in which those inherent qualities should be identified during the selection process differed slightly across the countries.

For example, in Holland, the sales associates felt that an essential part of building powerful customer relationships with surgeons was to be knowledgeable not just about the products that Stryker produced, but in the medical procedures associated with them. In the United Kingdom, other talents came to the fore, such as tenacity and determination.

These cross-cultural variations were taken into account when role profiles were developed. Specific questions under each talent theme in the prediction validation selection tools vary according to the results of the Gallup research and how Stryker can best identify the talent it needs according to the customs and social behavior dominant in that country. As Lewandowski

points out, the screening questions are “culturally sensitized.”

The new selection technique consists of a telephone interview administered by Gallup using “item level scoring,” but before it was rolled out, the consultancy undertook a trial to test its validity and reliability. The pilot involved testing the tool on a number of existing employees and comparing the results with other data, such as performance profiles.

“Stryker is only interested in selecting the top-quartile performers, and so the questions were refined following this exercise to ensure that the interview actively differentiates between

those candidates with potential to perform and those who have the potential for radical performance,” Flade explains. In order to validate the selection tool, the performance of those employees who were appointed as “full recommends” has since been tracked against those who were not, with impressive results.

STAGE BY STAGE

Selection at Stryker involves a rigorous process and consists of several stages. Following a preliminary sifting of applications, the first stage is a telephone screening interview carried out by Stryker. This initial interview also focuses on talent, but has a broader approach

than the predictive validation technique that follows, focusing on areas such as potential cultural fit with the organization and more practical issues such as mobility.

Typically, less than half of the candidate pool is referred to Gallup for the next selection phase. Trained analysts ask identical talent-themed questions of the candidates. Their answers are “live

coded” and the results are used to determine whether or not a candidate is recommended. Stryker receives a graph charting the responses of every candidate and has the opportunity to discuss the findings with the Gallup analysts if necessary.

Lewandowski characterizes Stryker’s selection process as an hour-glass. Such a vessel is wide at the top, as is Stryker’s initial candidate pool, but narrows significantly — the Gallup predictive test — before widening again. As she explains: “When candidates are referred back to us as ‘full recommends,’ we are happy that they have the potential fit with the organization and

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possess the right qualities so we can open the selection process up a little.”

The next stages involve a range of different face-to-face interviews between the candidates and HR and the candidate’s prospective line manager. Stryker regards recruitment as such a crucial activity that the HR director, and usually the managing director, will meet each candidate in the final selection phase.

The company makes careful decisions about whether or not it decides to appoint. “It is our employees that the success of this company rests on, and therefore it is a very important decision whether we decide to hire someone,” Lewandowski says. “We only appoint if that individual is right for the role.” Typically, from an initial field of around 100 applications, Stryker may “take a closer look” at approximately 20 and around eight of these will be referred to Gallup.

ENGAGING AND DEVELOPING STAFF

Stryker’s rigorous approach to resourcing does not end with the hiring decision. Induction is taken very seriously, and the company is currently developing an extended three-day program to ensure that new recruits are quickly familiarized with Stryker’s history and values.

Retaining the talent that it has worked so hard to recruit is another obvious imperative for the company. Firmly convinced of the link between employee engagement and performance, Stryker regularly measures the extent to which its staff are committed to the company by using Gallup’s Q¹² survey, a tool to measure employee engagement (see box for details).

“We carry out the survey once a year, but live and breathe it for the next 12 months,” Lewandowski says. “The MD [managing director] meets with every team for two hours to interpret and discuss its results. An impact plan is drawn up, and the action points are fed into the quarterly staffing reviews that every employee has, in order that line managers can discuss personal development needs.”

Bearing in mind that Stryker encourages a climate where employees can have long and varied careers with the company, developing people so they are able to progress and take on new roles is important for the business. A key priority for HR is putting in

place effective succession planning at a European level that identifies potential at an earlier stage. 🍌

“The salespeople employed by Stryker need to be highly sophisticated.”

THE GALLUP Q¹² METRIC

Gallup has studied human nature and behavior for more than 70 years. Gallup's Q¹² is a 12-question survey that measures employee engagement and links it to key business outcomes, including staff retention, customer engagement, productivity, profitability, and safety. It is the product of a global research effort involving hundreds of focus groups and interviews with thousands of employees.

Q¹² pinpoints 12 universal employee needs that, when met, evoke strong feelings of engagement. Employees who take the survey respond to each question on a scale of 5 ("strongly agree") to 1 ("strongly disagree"). High Q¹² scores indicate that employees have most of their needs met at work and are therefore fully engaged in improving workplace productivity. Middling scores indicate a workforce that is not engaged — individuals whose needs are largely unmet and who are therefore less equipped, and less likely, to boost performance. Low scores reflect active disengagement on the part of employees whose needs are largely unmet and who can actually discourage productivity.

"What sets Q¹² apart from other surveys is that it does not just act as a barometer of workplace sentiment," Gallup's Peter Flade explains. "Rather, it is designed to promote two broad management objectives — ongoing improvement and measurement. In line with the first objective, the survey opens up dialogue over aspects of engagement, such as recognition and communication, that the organization can take steps to improve if scores are low. By focusing on measurement, the second objective, Q¹² translates 'soft' issues such as employee attitudes into hard measures of engagement that can be reliably linked to business outcomes." Employee engagement is a core constituent of "The Gallup Path," a management model that describes the link between each individual's contribution and the organization's ultimate financial performance.

Examples of Q¹² questions:

- Do you know what is expected of you at work?
- Does your supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about you as a person?
- Do you have a best friend at work?
- In the last six months, has someone at work talked to you about your progress?

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