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# WHY GROWING YOUR OWN TALENT IS THE ONLY SUSTAINABLE RECRUITMENT MODEL FOR I.T. COMPANIES – AND HOW TO DO IT WELL

COACHING THE  
GOOD TO BE GREAT,  
AND THE BEST TO  
BE BETTER

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## WHY GROWING YOUR OWN SALES TALENT IS THE ONLY ANSWER TO LONG TERM BUSINESS GROWTH

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In order to help them boost their business performance and shareholder value, organisations in every industry are investing heavily in I.T. The impact of this was laid out by the Bank of England recently who stated that up to 15m jobs in Britain could be at risk of automation.

This unprecedented demand for sophisticated I.T. solutions, particularly in the areas of Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and the Internet of Things (IoT), is creating a shortage of skills right across the I.T. industry – including but not limited to the salespeople that work within it.

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Whilst many in the I.T. industry would say they feel there is a shortage of skilled talent, this view has been validated by a number of sources.

Stephen Isherwood, CEO of the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR), noted that frustration existed for many trying to recruit into this specific sector: **“They just can’t get the right quality of people coming through who can do the work they need.”**

This view was reiterated by Capgemini’s Head of Talent, Applications Services UK, Anouska Ramsay: **“There aren’t sufficient numbers of I.T. graduates coming out of universities who actually have any I.T. background that’s suitable for us ... we can’t get the volume of graduates.”**

**THERE IS SIMPLY NOT ENOUGH TALENTED I.T. SALESPEOPLE CAPABLE OF KEEPING UP WITH THE DEMAND.**

This not only impacts their customers, but their employers too as they can’t grow their businesses at the rate they would like.

**The shortage of I.T. salespeople is leading employers to evaluate and embrace the ‘Grow Your Own’ (GYO) talent model as the only viable long term and sustainable strategy to business growth.**

Rather than continuing to try to fix the shortfall by poaching “experienced” and costly salespeople from the competition, for no guarantee of a successful return on investment, some organisations are instead turning their attention to developing new ways of recruiting, developing and retaining talent – raw talent.



## GROW YOUR OWN TALENT

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This view is shared beyond the I.T. industry too. Arkadi Kuhlmann, founder and CEO of ING Direct USA, has recruited thousands of employees to his organisation and has made a point not to look to his competitors as a source of talent. “If you want to renew and re-energize an industry, don’t hire people from that industry. You’ve got to *untrain* them and then retrain them. I’d rather hire a jazz musician, a dancer, or a captain in the Israeli army. They can learn about banking. It’s much harder for bankers to unlearn their bad habits.”

As Kuhlmann and others have demonstrated, employing inexperienced “raw” individuals and investing in them through ongoing learning and development can deliver exceptional results and encourage loyalty and long term commitment.

Within the I.T. industry this is no truer than at Softcat. Unlike most of its competitors Softcat has been pioneering the GYO model for many years and by doing so has grown at a faster rate than nearly all of them whilst picking up many employee satisfaction gongs.

Whilst GYO and developing in-house sales talent can look easy from the outside it comes with its own challenges, such as:

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- How to find the raw talent (where to look)
  - How to gain their interest in you (this is particularly true with younger people as they are less interested in money and more interested in training and personal development opportunities)
  - How to assess them – this can be a challenge when they almost certainly wouldn’t have worked in a B2B sales environment before
  - How to set the right expectations for them, and for your Management team
  - How to on-board them
  - How to support them
  - How to recognise and reward their success
  - How, and how often, to give them feedback (younger people in particular need feedback constantly – several times a day – without this, motivation levels can quickly diminish)
  - How to keep developing them through their career
  - How to turn them into brand ambassadors
  - How to keep them for as long as possible
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Whilst this list may seem daunting, the reality is many of these considerations are true with a “poaching” strategy too. The challenge with the latter however is that as the talent comes with a higher salary there is an assumption, often then wrong assumption, that the new hire can be simply “plugged in” and left to get on with the job. This is rarely the case, however because this is so often the perception it is also the majority view that addressing all of the above points with a GYO strategy is difficult. Consequently, many put it off until “tomorrow”.





## PLANNING FOR SUCCESS – THE 3 CORE PILLARS

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As Benjamin Franklin so notably said, “**By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail**”. This is certainly the case with a GYO strategy. Without due consideration the incoming talent and Management teams will soon lose confidence in the strategy, resulting in certain failure and a lasting view that such an approach will never work. Once again, Softcat are the obvious reminder that such a view is simply wrong. They have prevailed where so many have failed – and why? - because they invested time and resources in the development of their GYO strategy and had complete Management buy-in to it – right up to the CEO.

In addition to having complete Management buy-in, without which any GYO ambitions will fail fast, any successful GYO programme must include the following three core pillars:

- *PILLAR 1: RECRUITMENT*
- *PILLAR 2: ON-BOARDING*
- *PILLAR 3: ON-GOING DEVELOPMENT*

Let's explore each of these in turn.

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## PILLAR 1: RECRUITMENT

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As Harvard Business School so succinctly put it, when it comes to recruiting new talent best practice is to “Hire for attitude, and train for skill.”<sup>1</sup> Assuming this to be true, any GYO strategy must include a robust way to source and assess candidates with the best attitude.

### SOURCING

There are specialist recruitment firms, such as the aptly named, “Raw Talent Academy” [www.rawtalentacademy.com](http://www.rawtalentacademy.com) whose business is focused on finding future sales champions, so one way to fast track the sourcing process is to work with organisations such as them.

The other is to do it yourself. In this instance you can leverage the many online job boards and advertise directly

within colleges and universities. This approach is sometimes preferred as it is considered less expensive, however often the reverse is true as if the initial recruitment wave proves fruitless the process will need to be repeated until appropriate candidates are found.

### ASSESSING

Equally as important to the sourcing phase is the assessment phase – particularly in light of the “Hire for attitude, and train for skill” recommendations of the Harvard Business School. Once again, organisations such as Raw Talent have an effective competency based assessment process in place which addresses this, however, you may also wish to do this yourself.

If you do take on this phase it is advisable, as a minimum, to have a professionally developed and verified assessment programme. What you don't want is to have a simple 2-3 stage interview process where each interviewer is broadly reviewing the same things. A professionally verified programme will include all manner of assessment activities and questions designed to ensure the individual possess the behaviours and competencies needed to succeed. It will also include the provision of behavioural-oriented role specifications which the assessors can cross-reference as required.

The important thing is to leave nothing to chance. The preaching's of Benjamin Franklin once again spring to mind.

## PLANNING FOR SUCCESS – THE 3 CORE PILLARS

### PILLAR 2: ON-BOARDING

The on-boarding process, or more broadly speaking, the on-boarding **experience**, is critical in creating the right first impression for all new employees. It's also arguably the part that requires the most effort as creating a great on-boarding experience requires the buy-in from a lot of people – many of whom will be part of the senior management team.

A great on-boarding experience requires many things to be great, such as:

- The physical environment – is it engaging and in-line with, or better than, expectations?
- The people (at all levels) – are they friendly, welcoming and in-line with, or better than, expectations?
- The processes – are they logical, efficient and easy to follow?
- The technology – younger people, particularly, expect to have access to the best technology as they are used to collaborating and communicating using digital platforms. Is the technology on offer therefore in-line with, or better than, expectations?
- The training – is it comprehensive and in-line with, or better than, expectations?
- The goals – are they clear, achievable, and able to be met?
- The feedback – is it structured, forthcoming, and able to be acted upon?

By thinking of the on-boarding process as an experience it opens up a wider and more comprehensive discussion that will ultimately lead to a much better and engaging programme which in turn will result in happier employees, and improved results.

Whilst each of the elements listed above requires due consideration, the area that is often executed poorly is the training.

#### TRAINING

If the recommendations of the Harvard Business School have been adopted and the recruitment process is centred around hiring people with the best attitude, the initial training programme needs to focus on three key areas:

- The skills needed to do the job
- The knowledge needed to do the job
- The behaviours needed to do the job

Far too infrequently, and particularly with regards to the development of salespeople, the training is wholly inadequate in lots of ways, such as:

- The training content is predominately focused on sales skills, so how to navigate the buying and selling cycles, and misses out the equally important behavioural development aspects, so how to build rapport, how to be resilient, how to be creative, how to establish trust etc etc
- There is too much reliance on back to back classroom training which is based around outdated “cramming” methods that are not conducive to how adults learn. A better approach is to develop a programme that is made up of a series of varied learning interventions that take place over a number of months and which provide the trainees with the opportunity to try things out over time
- There is an assumption that the trainees have worked in an office before and understand basic office etiquette – which is often not the case

- The training content is too heavily geared around traditional sales methods and not enough on social selling
- The tools are often impractical, particularly Account plans
- Sales Management teams are unaware of what is being taught so can do little to embed the learnings (we'll come back to this point later)
- Commission plans are out of kilter with the learnings and the needs of the business
- There is no or an inadequate sales process to underpin the learnings
- The value proposition is not as developed or as different as it needs to be (organisations such as Boost Performance, [www.boost-performance.co.uk](http://www.boost-performance.co.uk), can help here) and so much of the training is redundant

**56% OF NEW EMPLOYEES SURVEYED DID NOT RECEIVE FULL TRAINING OR HAVE A SUFFICIENT INDUCTION<sup>2</sup>.**





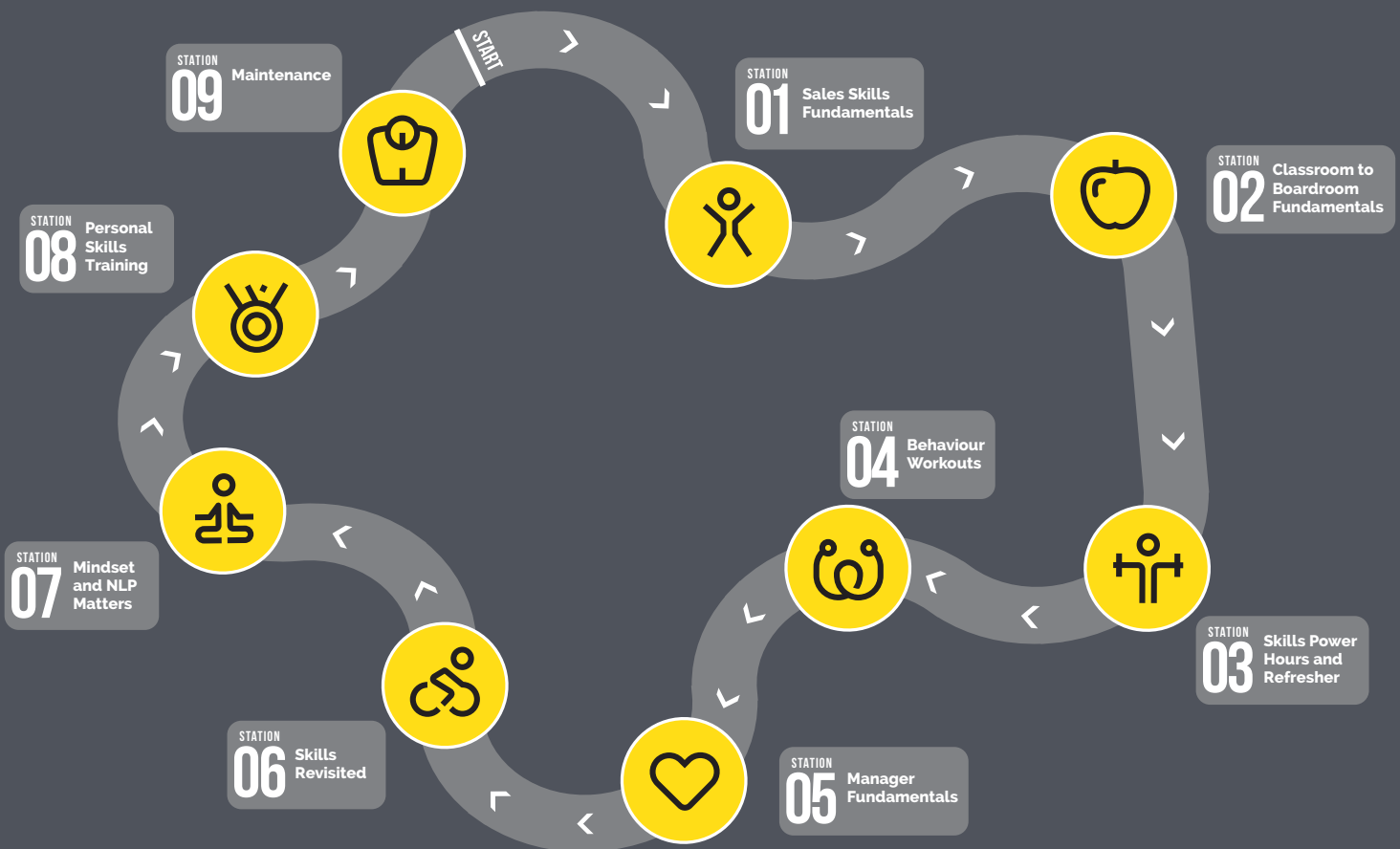
## PLANNING FOR SUCCESS – THE 3 CORE PILLARS

When it comes to knowledge training, this too is often inadequate as rather than helping the trainees understand the business value that the products or services they are required to sell delivers (or the priorities or problems that they address), they are instead subjected to product training that focuses simply on features and technical jargon. Whilst this may have been sufficient ten years ago, today the mind-set of senior I.T. professionals is very much a matter of “business first, I.T.

second”. Salespeople therefore need to communicate and build relationships with their customers from a similar standpoint.

It is no surprise, given that this is a SalesGym 360 publication, that the SalesGym 360 Sales Training Circuit programme addresses all of the above points. It is deliberately designed with GYO strategies in mind and offers organisations virtually everything they need to deliver an exceptional learning experience for their raw talent – in a box.

## THE TRAINING CIRCUIT



## PLANNING FOR SUCCESS – THE 3 CORE PILLARS

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### PILLAR 3: ON-GOING DEVELOPMENT - THE ROLE OF THE LINE MANAGER

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The final pillar that needs due consideration is how the GYO talent is going to be effectively supported beyond the initial on-boarding period and through the life of their career. This is not an area that is confined to GYO strategies of course, as the same is true with every approach to recruitment and with every employee.

Whilst the heading makes for simplistic reading, the solution is far from it, which is why it is categorised as a core pillar.

#### THE BASICS ABOUT HOW PEOPLE LEARN

In order to offer guidance in this area we must first recognise that people learn in different ways and as such, each employee, whether they are raw or otherwise, needs feedback, encouragement and support that is relevant to them and how they learn.

Each employee needs to be treated as an individual who has individual strengths and problem solving strategies. Instead of telling them what to do therefore, we need to provide them with direction and then let them figure out how they can contribute.

This requires a mature approach and one which invariably is the responsibility of the Line Managers, many of whom have had little or no training on how to coach.

Coaching models, such as G.R.O.W. need to be explained properly to Line Managers so they understand how to apply the learnings and as a consequence be more effective at developing their teams. They should also have an appreciation of the more general 70/20/10 learning framework<sup>3</sup> and understand their role within it. They should also understand how to set S.M.A.R.T. goals, and equally as important they should understand exactly what sales training their team have been on and how they can better support the learnings and embed the various models and tools into the everyday operating model.

As way of guidance:

- Sales training for raw talent alone doesn't work
- Sales Management training alone doesn't work
- The introduction of sales tools and sales processes alone doesn't work

For a lasting GYO strategy to deliver long term and repeatable benefit it needs a cohesive solution that brings together all of the above. One solution that is perfectly executed.

Once again, and we make no apology for re-iterating this, but this is achievable via the SalesGym 360 Training Circuit as it encompasses all of the above and more.





## A FINAL WORD

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Just like any transformational strategy, GYO is not easy. It should not be approached half-heartedly and should not be considered in isolation of the Senior Management team. In fact, without an Executive sponsor it will almost certainly lose momentum and fizzle out.

That said, the results when considered just like any other strategic priority can be material, and can provide a more predictable operating model that is no longer dependant on having to hire high-risk external salespeople, despite their perceived "experience".

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### SUMMARY CHECK LIST

When deciding on a GYO strategy, remember:

- ✓ Appoint an Executive Sponsor (ideally the CEO/MD)
  - ✓ Decide on your sourcing strategy
  - ✓ Decide on your assessment strategy
  - ✓ Over-think and over-plan your on-boarding experience
  - ✓ Ensure your on-boarding training programme is relevant to how adults learn
  - ✓ Make your Line Managers the axis of success and train them well
  - ✓ If in doubt, call SalesGym 360
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### REFERENCES FOR FURTHER READING

1. <https://hbr.org/2011/02/hire-for-attitude-train-for-sk>
2. <http://www.personneltoday.com/pr/2017/09/over-a-third-of-new-starters-admitted-to-having-bad-employee-onboarding-experiences/>
3. Charles Green

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## **ABOUT SALESGYM 360**

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SalesGym 360 improves the performance of sales teams through specialist consultancy and their proprietary 9-station Training Circuit programme. The Training Circuit adheres to the very latest Learning and Development best-practices, and improves the skills, behaviours and mindset of salespeople and Sales Managers. The Training Circuit includes a range of complementary tools, resources and Apps, each designed to maximise long lasting behaviour change and business performance.

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## SALES GYM 360 LIMITED

26 Dover Street, London W1S 4LY  
T : 0333 305 7639  
E : [info@salesgym360.com](mailto:info@salesgym360.com)  
W : [www.salesgym360.com](http://www.salesgym360.com)