

The Noble Profession:

Insights on the Future of Human Capital Development



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As leaders in the Human Capital Development industry, we are proud of the accomplishments we have made in what we consider to be the “Noble Profession.” But, since the entire industry of human resources, recruiting and consulting seems to be going through a rather rapid evolution, we thought it would be useful to step back for a moment and look at where our profession has been—and where it seems to be headed—for better or for worse.

To begin with, a few basic explanations of what we mean by the “Noble Profession” seem to be in order.

First, people in the human resources industry—whether they are consultants, recruiters, trainers, payroll professionals, or niche players in any other segment of the business—must first define who they are.

Some people in the industry may refer to themselves as an “employment” or “staffing” agency but that is a term that Headway has gone to great lengths to avoid. The reason is this—too many “employment” agencies, per se, have a notorious reputation for looking out for their own interests and for routinely ignoring the best interests of the job-seeker or employer. In other words, there is a stereotype out there that says an “employment” agency is an organization that shovels human bodies in the direction of employers with little thought as to whether the candidate is right for the company or the company is right for the candidate. Unfortunately, this stereotype is oftentimes an accurate assessment of “business as usual” in the staffing industry—and it is true that some agencies are much more interested in collecting fees than they are in giving thoughtful analysis to the needs of candidates and employers.

At Headway, we prefer to use the term “Human Capital Development” as the industry category we serve because that better defines the amount of work and planning we put into helping both individuals and companies achieve the goals they want to achieve.

That focus helps to better explain what we mean by the “Noble Profession.”

**Beyond Psychology:
Skills of the Noble Profession
Defined**

Like a good psychologist or coach, any human capital professional worth his or her salt takes the time to form an in-depth relationship with every client or individual that crosses his or her professional path.

When working with individuals who are seeking to find a better job or improve their careers, human capital professionals seek to find answers to many of the same questions a good psychologist will explore:

- What does the individual aspire to?

- What kind of talent defines the individual?

- What kind of passion defines the individual?

- What are the obstacles holding the individual back in terms of fulfilling their aspirations or making the most of their talent?

- What can the individual do to overcome those obstacles?

- How can the human capital professional help them to overcome those obstacles?

When we say that our profession is “Noble” we mean that it is noble when professionals in our industry are truly living up to their responsibility, putting the needs of the individual and client first, and doing everything in their power to achieve the last goal stated above—the goal of helping individuals overcome any and all obstacles to their personal growth, fulfillment and career development.

That also takes the impact of our profession one step beyond psychology. Like good psychologists or coaches, professionals in our industry can listen with sensitivity to the setbacks, frustrations, obstacles and thwarted dreams that have impacted everyone from the candidate, to his or her employer, to his or her family members, friends and loved ones.

But people in our profession can also do something that everyone from Freud to Erickson, to Dr. Phil and everyone else in between has suggested is the single most empowering, self-actualizing, family-preserving, stability-building, relationship enhancing, and life improving service on the face of the earth: we can find them the right job. But not just *any* job—a job that helps individuals *and* the companies they work for to better themselves by providing a perfect match between individual aspirations and company goals.

The achievement of that perfect match between aspiring individuals and aspiring companies will never happen, however, without a great deal of thoughtful analysis and consummate dedication to the skill sets required of people working in the “Noble Profession.” It does not work when you thoughtlessly shovel people into companies and situations where they do not belong—this only hurts the individual and the companies that hire them. Yes, it may be more difficult to work harder in this profession, to listen more carefully and more scientifically to the needs of candidates and clients, to methodically study the needs of all people concerned and then make educated and knowledgeable recommendations that put the genuine interests of others before your own. But, if you are to hold your head up and say that you are a member of the “Noble Profession” that is what you must do—you must

slow down, you must listen, you must evaluate and you must judge. And in your judgments you must always ask if you have done everything in your power to bring your candidates and your clients one step closer to success.

In the next section, we will show how we have applied a new level of analysis and thinking to one segment of our work, and that involves benchmarking, sourcing and recruiting sales people for specific industries and very specific jobs within those industries.

The “Character-Connection” In Sales

In sales selection and recruitment, we have discovered that it is a person’s **character** traits, more than skills and knowledge, that will ultimately predict success in a particular sales job.

We continue to research the connection between character and performance excellence in many other professions as well, because we detect that strong character traits (including commitment, courage, dedication, etc.) may be the strongest predictor of success in many fields.

Our initial studies of the characteristics of top-performing sales people (as we have examined the literature and tried to assess the

significance of the most important research in this area) have already demonstrated this.

**Character-Based
Sales Selection:
A Frontier in Assessing
Excellence**

When one of our clients asks us to help them build or add to an existing sales force they are entrusting us with a tremendously important job. For most companies, the hiring of sales people who properly mesh with the company's culture and who can predictably be expected to add to the company's bottom line is a critically important task.

The problem is that too many companies are used to dealing with "employment agencies" that have little or no scientific knowledge of the psychology of sales performance, and that conduct "business as usual" by just flinging any and all candidates with a sales resume at the employer.

Our studies of performance in sales psychology (stemming from Snyder's book on the subject (*How to Mind Read Your Customers*, Snyder, AMACOM, 2001) shows that predicting sales performance by industry is an infinitely complicated subject that requires a virtually microscopic look at the particular experiences, skills, character traits, attitudes and

attributes that can predict whether a person will succeed in a particular sales environment.

In other words, a sales person may thrive in one environment but fail miserably in another. So, the first point of analysis in sales hiring is this—what is the sales environment and what are the specific characteristics and traits of the person who will most predictably succeed in that environment?

Sales recruiting is made even more complicated, however, because of the fact that most companies who seek help in building sales forces, also have other needs that must be analyzed and considered before the sales recruitment process can even begin.

Here are a few questions that we almost always need to have answered before we begin recruiting sales people for the organizations that seek our help:

1. What is the company's strategy and plan for growth?
2. What are the priority markets or regions that the company is targeting and most importantly, what is the urgency of filling each region?
3. What is the complete picture of the current sales structure and the compensation plan and model of the existing sales force?

4. What is the company looking for in terms of Benchmarked traits, skills, aptitude, and experience?
5. What are the opportunities for advancement at the company?
6. What is the complete hiring process, individuals involved, and the decision making process to be used?
7. What is the company's benefit package?
8. What aspects of the company's own culture and value proposition would make the best "sell" to worthy candidates?

Only when such questions (and many similar ones) are successfully answered, can we begin to look at the model of screening, sourcing and recruiting that will enable us to place the best possible candidates on the company's sales team.

Following is a description of the basic principles and scientific procedures that we use in this process.

The Reasons for Emphasizing "Character" In Sales

Because a number of leading studies have shown that "character" traits such as optimism, energy, follow-through, serious-mindedness and

thoughtfulness are the actual benchmarks of top-grossing sales professionals, Headway takes a meticulous two-pronged approach to benchmarking and recruiting sales professionals.

1. Assessment of the Job.

In the first part of this phase we conduct interviews with the client to assess strengths and weaknesses of the current sales force and to draw a meticulous portrait of the type of character traits, skills, qualifications and experiences that are required in order to meet the company's goals. Therefore, we will always work to help the client first establish a competency analysis of the specific traits and skills that are required for a specific sales job.

2. Assessment of Candidates

Once the assessment of the job is accomplished, we then use a wide range of tools including assessment tests, live interviews, and even writing exercises (as needed) to precisely evaluate the full range of character traits, behavioral traits, personality characteristics, communication skills, data analysis skills, critical thinking skills, knowledge, qualifications and experiences that each candidate brings to the table. We also consult with other assessment experts nationwide as

necessary to make sure that they are recommending the absolute best fit for the sales position that has been described.

First Steps

The first phase of this process—the job assessment process—is critical.

A study done by one of our strategic partners at a Fortune 500 company with more than 5,000 sales people found that a large number of account executives were actually mismatched for their jobs and that high stress and lower than expected performance were the results.

In brief, the study showed that the needs of the account manager role in that corporation had evolved into a job where high consultative selling skills, patience, analytical reasoning and a “high touch—high listening” sales style was required. Interestingly, many of the account executives that had been recently hired before the study had been hired based on an older model emphasizing aggression at the expense of “analysis” in the sales process. This led to the hiring of many highly aggressively sales people who unfortunately lacked the natural predisposition and character traits of a consultative seller. This mismatch was discovered to be one of the key reasons for underperformance in the sales force.

When we are working with sales recruiting clients, it is our job to make sure that we have done everything humanly possible to avoid this kind of mismatch and to use every tool at our disposal to provide an accurate and meaningful match.

That, in essence, is one benchmark of quality that defines the skill sets of professionalism in the “Noble Profession.”

In the concluding section, we will describe skill sets of professionalism in our industry that impact other professions as well.

Implications for The Industry Overall

One of the most customer-centered services we provide occurs at the individual level, and this is the level where we try to help our candidates to “build their own brand.”

Building your own brand as an individual is a time-consuming but vital process that involves looking well beyond the resume and exploring a full range of high-tech tools and processes that will enable an individual to make the best possible “presentation” to the world. Some of

the tools we have developed along these lines include PowerPoint Presentations as part of an individual's **Personal Marketing Kit**© and other high tech tools that go far beyond cover letters and resumes.

All of these tools that help the individual build their own brand, of course, become immediately important to any company that is trying to build its own brand and is looking for team members who share same the “brand quality” in terms of aspiration, vision, determination and passion.

One of the most powerful and most “noble” services that we can offer, as a matter of fact, would seem to be in the area of guidance, and counseling, and just good old-fashioned listening. A large-scale study of high school students conducted by Snyder and his research colleague Scott Dellana of East Carolina University showed that quite a few young people were not so ecstatic about the level of career counseling and guidance they had received in their lives so far.

But the study did show there is a relationship between the level of guidance received and one's future outlook and also one's performance. To make a very long story short, many of us in this profession are serving a noble role merely because we are filling in the cracks, in many cases, for people who have been ignored and neglected their entire lives, from a

career guidance perspective. And if we do not take the time to listen to them and find out what they are good at and encourage their growth and development, who will?

As we seek to help those people who are starved for professional guidance, the concept of uncovering “passion” is key. “Passion,” in fact, may one of the most important but predictors of success in every sector of need that presents itself to our profession.

Defining the Importance and Relevance of Passion

Words such as passion and values have been used so often that they have lost some of their original meaning and impact. When you are looking for superstar performers you need to take a *scientific* approach to assessing what type of passions and values you need in your workforce.

Some of the most fascinating research in the area of workplace values was done by German psychologist Eduard Spranger who published a groundbreaking study in the 1920s titled *Types of Men*. In his work, Spranger suggested that a person’s attitude, not personality type, created a feeling of success in the world. The attitudes, or values

Spranger researched are now of great interest to organizational psychologists.

It's our belief that in the future career building and human performance will increasingly focus on the nature of passions as predictors of an individual's success in a chosen career. A person's personality is not a good predictor of success in any job; a person's passions are. At Headway we have a motto: "Brains are important, but heart makes the difference." Skill, knowledge, and personality are all important, but all of these attributes stem from the head. They enable you to determine whether a person *can* do the job but they don't give you an idea of how well they *will* do the job. The bottom line is that people will not pour themselves into a career and create a reputation for innovation if their *hearts* are not in the job.

When you look for the traits that will predict how much energy people will give to a job – the type of energy that leads to innovation – you need to look at the passions and character traits required for successfully completing that job. As we mentioned before, we devote an immense amount of time to researching the passions and character traits necessary for jobs that require a high level of innovation and ingenuity. We also have a highly sophisticated process for finding the right people to fill those jobs once the passion has been identified.

We use many tools, techniques, and assessments to help us identify people with a passion for solving problems; usually we can tell what kind work environments or challenges will spark their passions and unique abilities. What is unique to Headway is that we separate the wheat from the chaff, so to speak. We carefully screen out people who are more likely to take more than they give. Innovative people are more likely to give more than they take. Individuals characterized by self-interest and laziness react negatively when asked to do something beyond the call of duty. They tend to respond by thinking or saying “That’s too much to ask” or “I’m too busy” or “What’s in it for me?” But there are also those people who possess what we call the “magic.” They leap at the chance to show you what they are made of and to tap into their passions. They want to go beyond the call of duty; they take pride in proving themselves. And their drive to demonstrate their abilities and talents is more important than their self-interest. From this magical mix comes innovative thinking and innovative behavior in the workplace.

**Defining Success
In the Noble Profession:
What Corporate Clients are Looking for**

Corporations are moving rapidly to two types of workforce: a

small, embedded team of managers, and a workforce that's far more flexible. A workforce that's project-oriented and flexible means that a person could work sixty hours one week and ten hours the next, or work six months one year and twelve months the next. As companies vie for the most talented, flexible people, individuals will find themselves working much differently during the next ten years. In some cases, the competition for talent will force companies to offer more flexibility. And at the same time, workers will simply have to learn to adapt to more flexible working environments and hours. It will be unrealistic to expect that they will be working every day from nine to five, and adhering to the kind of rigid, predictable schedules they may have gotten used to. The changing work environments will force individuals and companies alike to view the process, pace and flow of work differently. There will be much more of an emphasis on achieving results, and much less of an emphasis on just showing up for a certain number of hours to fill up a chair, so to speak.

The Future of Human Capital Development: Focusing on Human Potential

As we have tried to make clear in this essay, there are certain hallmarks of successful innovative thinking that apply to all individuals

and all companies. Headway is dedicated to the fundamental principles of innovative thinking which may be summed up as follows:

In all cases, individuals and companies must learn how to identify, define and clearly spell out exactly what it is that they care most deeply about, what they want to protect, what they are proud of, and what they want to be known for in the history books. Then, those same individuals must have the courage, commitment and dedication to do what they know is right, no matter how hard that is to do.

When you take people who will do everything in their power to do the right thing in this world—as their passion, conscience and talent guide them—and put them together with companies that are just as committed to their own sense of purpose, and the match is perfect, then you can lend a hand in creating a better history for all us.

If we can do anything to help the process run smoothly for both the individuals and the companies we serve, then we may truly be able to say that we serve in a “Noble Profession.”

Yet, we realize that in order to stay noble we must stay eternally vigilant. The moment we become complacent, in any fashion, is the moment we began to let our clients down. We must all remember that

the most important and noble truth that binds us together is this—we must all do everything in our power to insure ourselves that we will become just a little bit better tomorrow than we were today.

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