

THE INTANGIBLES OF SUCCESS

Understanding the parallels between athletes and sales professionals to build a competitive sales force.



AuctusIQ[®]

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IN BOTH SPORTS AND SALES, success is often attributed to a combination of tangible and intangible qualities. Tangible skills, such as physical strength and technical ability, are essential, but it's the intangible qualities—like mental resilience and the ability to thrive under pressure—that truly distinguish the good from the great. This white paper explores how to harness intangibles to build the sales force of the future.

THE POWER OF INTANGIBLES

Tom Brady, considered to be one of the greatest quarterbacks of all time, appeared on FOX for an interview before Super Bowl LIX (2025). He reflected on his first Super Bowl as a broadcaster and shared his advice for young athletes looking to elevate their skills.

He said, “The sustainable qualities that you have as an athlete, like your work ethic, your discipline, like your determination, and competitiveness, those are what people would call **intangibles**.”



He highlighted traits like determination, discipline, and competitiveness—qualities that cannot be measured in a physical assessment but are essential for longevity in any career. Similarly, in sales, while skills like communication and negotiation can be taught, the internal drive and ability to adapt define top performers. These intangibles ensure that individuals can sustain performance over time, regardless of external challenges and market shifts.

ASSESSING THE INTANGIBLES

Through years of research and experience in working with both professional athletes and sales professionals, the scientists at AuctusIQ have identified four core “intangibles” that determine long-term success:

<p>MOTIVATION</p> <p>The internal drive that pushes individuals to excel. Salespeople and athletes alike must find motivation within themselves to keep improving and pushing through obstacles.</p>	<p>INTERACTION</p> <p>The ability to connect with and influence others. Whether it's a quarterback building trust with teammates or a salesperson earning a client's confidence, interaction is at the heart of sustainable success.</p>
<p>COGNITION</p> <p>The capacity for strategic thinking and problem-solving. Athletes must think several steps ahead, just like sales professionals who navigate complex negotiations.</p>	<p>EXECUTION</p> <p>The ability to follow through and deliver results. No matter how much potential someone has, success ultimately comes down to taking action.</p>



Breaking these areas down allows organizations to assess individuals beyond their resumes, understanding what truly makes them excel. Companies that can measure and cultivate these intangibles will be in a better position to build elite teams.

SHIFTING TRENDS IN SALES TALENT

Traditionally, sales hiring has focused on competitive and aggressive individuals—those who could “kick down doors” and push deals forward. However, post-pandemic trends have shown a shift towards more consultative salespeople who act as advisors, understand client needs, and build trust over time. This shift has led companies to prioritize traits such as:



The modern sales landscape requires professionals who can personalize interactions, work across multiple stakeholders, and navigate long sales cycles with precision. It’s no longer just about making an aggressive pitch—it’s about developing a meaningful relationship with the prospect.

THE ASSESSMENT STORY: UNDERSTANDING THE SCIENCE OF TALENT

Over 26 years ago, a groundbreaking assessment company was founded to help businesses identify and develop top sales talent. The company quickly grew to become one of the largest assessment firms in the world, pioneering a data-driven approach to understanding sales potential.

At its peak, the company was acquired by a global technology leader. They soon realized that while they valued the technology, the assessment business did not align with their strategic focus. Eventually, the original founders repurchased the business and reinvested in refining their methodology, focusing exclusively on sales assessments.

This experience underscored the power of understanding sales intangibles. By leveraging over 1.3 million assessments, the company was able to identify patterns of success in sales professionals across industries. The data-driven insights not only helped companies make better hiring decisions but also enabled them to tailor training programs that directly addressed skill gaps.



THE ROLE OF COACHING

In professional sports, teams have a high coach-to-player ratio to ensure continuous development. However, in many organizations, coaching is often an afterthought. Sales managers are expected to be mentors, strategists, and motivators, yet many lack the necessary training to develop their teams effectively.

Organizations that invest in coaching and structured development programs see better performance and higher retention rates. Rather than merely hiring “born salespeople,” companies should focus on identifying potential and nurturing talent through structured coaching and training programs. A great sales coach can identify strengths, work on weaknesses, and help individuals reach their peak potential, just like a sports coach guiding an athlete to greatness.

Effective sales training goes beyond one-time sessions; it requires a structured, ongoing approach that reinforces learning over time. The best training programs focus on both the tangible and intangible aspects of sales development, helping teams refine their skills through continuous application. A key component of successful training is aligning it with data-driven insights about individual salespeople, ensuring that coaching is tailored to their specific strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles. By leveraging data to personalize training, organizations can drive more meaningful growth and build high-performing sales teams.

PREDICTING AND DEVELOPING SUCCESS

The ultimate goal is to predict success by identifying which individuals have the necessary intangibles and providing them with the training and support they need. Historically, talent was believed to determine 70% of success, with only 30% attributed to training. However, this dynamic has evolved, creating a greater balance between tangible and intangible qualities, with a growing emphasis on structured learning and development. Some key ways organizations can better predict and develop success include:

- **USING DATA-DRIVEN ASSESSMENTS TO IDENTIFY KEY STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES IN SALESPEOPLE.**
- **PROVIDING ONGOING TRAINING TAILORED TO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS RATHER THAN GENERIC, ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL PROGRAMS.**
- **ENCOURAGING A CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS LEARNING WHERE SALES PROFESSIONALS REGULARLY REFINE THEIR SKILLS AND ADAPT TO MARKET CHANGES.**



LESSONS FROM COACHING GREATS

The best coaches in history, whether in sports or business, have understood that success is not just about technical skills—it's about unlocking human potential. A great example is legendary football coach Jimmy Johnson, who won 170 games in his career. He attributed his success not to Xs and Os, but to his deep understanding of human behavior. Jimmy knew how to push his players to dig deep and give their best even when they were exhausted.

Johnson said: “Let the mind control the body, not the body control the mind.” and “...In the game of life, attitude is everything.”



Similarly, sales managers who understand how to motivate, develop, and inspire their teams will always achieve better results than those who simply focus on hitting quarterly targets. The best sales leaders don't just manage; they coach, mentor, and cultivate a winning mindset in their teams.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The key takeaway is that success, whether in sports or sales, is not just about natural talent (intangibles). It is about leveraging the right intangibles to build the tangibles, through coaching, and continuously adapting to industry shifts. Organizations that prioritize these elements will build stronger, more resilient teams poised for long-term success.

From a business usage standpoint, the AuctusIQ assessment provides four key business use cases.

- **Map Your Sales Organization:** Understand the baseline readiness of your sales force.
- **Coach and Onboard New Talent:** Use our playbook to support coaching existing team members and onboarding new hires.
- **Selecting Your Talent:** Leverage data to hire and onboard more like your best.
- **Develop Your Existing Talent:** Inform your training and measure its effectiveness over time.

Just like building a championship team in sports, assembling a high-performing sales team requires understanding each individual's intangible strengths to develop their tangible skills. AuctusIQ's data-driven assessment provides clear pathways to success, helping you measure progress and build the sales force of the future.



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IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A PROVEN WAY TO ENERGIZE YOUR SALES FORCE, LET'S TALK.

"Auctus" is Latin for growth. "IQ" means smarts. Combined, AuctusIQ means smart growth. AuctusIQ is a sales data and science company. Our mission is to provide the right data, on a technology platform that allows you to put talent in your tech stack. Doing this solves your three biggest challenges: selecting and retaining exceptional talent, coaching to ensure readiness to meet or beat quota, and most importantly making sure everything you do is tied to winning more deals.

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