The Rookie Wasn’t the Problem

What struggling new recruiters can tell you about your performance infrastructure

Recruitment businesses often assume that when a new consultant isn’t progressing quickly enough, the problem sits with the consultant.

They’re not making enough calls. They lack confidence. They’re struggling with business development. They’re not asking the right questions. They need to be more commercial.

So the response is often more activity, more targets, more observation and, eventually, more training.

But after more than 20 years working in and around recruitment businesses, I’ve learnt to ask a different question.

What if the rookie isn’t actually the problem?

The familiar approach

A new recruiter joins the business.

They’re introduced to the CRM, processes and systems. They may be given scripts, call structures and some initial training.

Then comes the bit I’ve seen countless times:

“Sit with Sarah. She’s one of our best billers.”

It makes sense. Surely one of the best ways to learn recruitment is to watch somebody who is already very good at it?

The problem is that the rookie is watching the **finished performance**.

They hear Sarah ask a great question, but they don’t necessarily understand why she asked it.

They hear her challenge a client, but they don’t know what she heard that told her it was appropriate to challenge.

They watch her handle an objection naturally, but don't see the years of experience behind the response.

And when they try to copy it, it often doesn't sound anything like Sarah.

Because it isn't theirs.

What needs to happen instead

Good rookie development needs structure, but the objective shouldn't be to create a team of recruiters who all sound identical.

People need to understand the thinking behind good recruitment conversations.

Why am I asking this question?

What am I listening for?

What does that answer tell me?

What should I explore next?

When should I challenge?

What commitment am I trying to gain from this conversation?

That means breaking recruitment capability down into behaviours that can actually be **understood, practised, observed and coached**.

In the recruitment sales programmes I deliver, we work with real conversations and situations rather than simply teaching sales theory.

Consultants practise questioning, listening, handling resistance and moving conversations forward. They get the opportunity to try things, get feedback and try again.

The intention isn't to give them somebody else's personality.

It's to give them enough structure to develop their own capability.

What recruiters themselves tell me

The feedback I've received from recruitment training participants is often less about learning another sales technique and more about confidence and practical application.

One participant described the training simply as:

> **“Brilliant training! Improved my confidence in sales and consultancy.”**

Another said:

> **“Really helpful workshop from John, taught us sales techniques I’ve not heard of before. But are beneficial to what we do.”**

And following education recruitment sales training:

> **“John delivered some great training for education recruitment giving excellent advice and top tips. Really valuable to my desk.”**

That matters.

But the training itself is only part of the answer.

What happens on Monday morning?

This is where rookie development often falls apart.

Someone can leave a training session knowing exactly what they want to do differently.

Then they go back to their desk.

The calls start. Jobs need filling. Targets need hitting. Managers are busy.

Within a few weeks, old habits can easily return.

That's why I increasingly look beyond the training intervention itself.

Are managers listening to calls?

Is feedback happening regularly?

Do one-to-ones explore capability and behaviour, or simply review numbers?

Does the manager know what the consultant is trying to improve?

Are people being coached between training sessions?

And crucially, **how does the business know that someone's capability is actually improving?**

The wider performance problem

If one new recruiter struggles, there may well be an individual capability issue.

If rookie after rookie takes too long to become productive, struggles with the same conversations or becomes overly dependent on their manager, I'd look at the system around them.

Because telling people to make more calls won't necessarily fix it.

Neither will another generic sales course.

The problem could sit in induction. It could be management capability. It could be coaching. It could be expectations, processes, feedback or the way success is measured.

This thinking sits behind the **NBS Recruitment Performance Architecture™**.

Rather than beginning with:

“What training do people need?”

I prefer to begin with:

“What's actually happening?”

Then we can work out what needs to change.

NBS Recruitment Performance Diagnostic™

If you're responsible for a recruitment team and performance isn't where you want it to be, the starting point isn't necessarily another training course.

The **NBS Recruitment Performance Diagnostic™** is designed to help identify where the real constraint may sit across **Behaviour, Delivery, Business Development and Leadership**.

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