

By Bob Schultz, Contributing Editor



Whether through ads, social media posts, or word of mouth, many sales managers look to fill positions with someone who has experience selling homes.

It's easy, it's the default, and it often seems to make sense. The challenge is that when it comes to sales, experience doesn't always tell you much about skill level—especially in a boom market.

Miami Dolphins coach Don Shula's storied career includes the NFL's only perfect season, as well as back-to-back Super Bowl wins in the early 1970s. When it was time for the NFL draft, an interviewer asked Shula what position he was going to use as his first pick. Shula responded that he was looking for the best athlete he could find—and that he would then teach him to play the position.

The anecdote is well-known to football fans and illustrates a brilliant move. Back then, Shula's strategy inspired me to consider hiring folks with experience outside the industry whom I could teach to sell new homes. Soon after, a physical therapist candidate piqued my interest, though her résumé didn't indicate that she'd ever sold anything. She worked in rehab, helping stroke patients recover. This sounded like a stretch, so to speak, until she described being in the business of getting people to do what they're hesitant about and then proving to them that it's in their best interests (as opposed to her own) to do so.

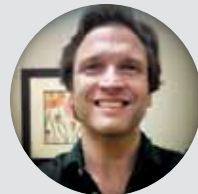
The best salespeople share key attributes: personal integrity, high energy, and great communication skills. They're highly coachable, intelligent, and socially mature. Experience is important but not always the best gauge of potential long-term success. Just because someone has spent years doing something doesn't mean they're great at it. I'll often pick a salesperson who has no experience selling homes over someone who does because a better predictor of success is selecting candidates based on transferable experience. As Don Shula might ask: Are you drafting for position or are you drafting for talent?

In drafting for talent, I've hired former flight attendants, personal trainers, and restaurant servers. I've made great choices in salespeople who have experience in pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, or automobiles. All had developed the characteristics, skill sets, and expertise crucial to new-home sales. Here are three recent stories of successful new hires from outside the home building industry.

THREE PROFILES OF RECENT HIRES PROVE THAT STANDOUT RECRUITS CAN COME FROM SURPRISING PLACES

UNEARTHING

GREAT SALES TALENT



TONY MEAZELL
Director of sales & marketing
TimberCraft Homes
Oklahoma City

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

Computer software sales, automotive sales

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

In the car business, every customer comes in looking for a deal. Most people who work in sales don't have to contend with this, but in home building, as with automotive, those who walk in the door expect to negotiate. At the table, you learn to separate the must-haves from the would-likes. You learn how to build value.

TECHNIQUES THAT TRANSLATE

- **Reducing to the ridiculous** is a technique that shows a customer how inexpensive an upgrade, option, or package is when spread out over a five- or six-year note. In new-home sales, with a note that averages 30 years, this is even easier. This is particularly useful on options and upgrades, which is where builders make the greatest margins. Spending \$10,000 on a fireplace works out to \$50 per month over the term of a 30-year mortgage. That's \$50 a month, or \$1.65 a day.
- **Controlling the presentation** is the skill of guiding without seeming overbearing and using people's natural deference and politeness to allow you to take them where you want to go, whether it's a test drive or allowing you to show them the model.



ANDREW MAZZIER
Sales representative
Thompson Homes
Owensboro, Ken.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

Pharmaceutical sales

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

When it comes to selling pharmaceuticals, you're interacting with highly informed, sophisticated people who are short on time, never available when they say they will be, are always running late, and have a high responsibility for what they're buying (in other words, physicians). You develop great skill at being empathetic and overcoming objections.

TECHNIQUES THAT TRANSLATE

- **Displaying superior product knowledge** by being able to process and retain large quantities of detailed information.
- **Memorizing for presentations**—opening, features, benefits, fair and balanced statements, status, and closing statement. Pharmaceutical reps are used to having sales managers go out on a route and watch them present to doctors. (By comparison, being mystery-shopped can seem like a piece of cake.)
- **Applying discipline** to master vast quantities of information, whether it's medicines or building science, demands rigor—rare in the sales field where those who are less than serious sometimes think charm is everything.



KAITLIN SMITH
Community sales manager
Two Structures Homes
Edmond, Okla.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

Restaurant server, personal trainer

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Customer service is everything in restaurants, and the most successful servers are commissioned salespeople—skilled at upselling, which, in turn, can be applied to selling luxury options in homes. Restaurant work teaches you not to waste your time or your customers' time. If you wait on 10 tables instead of eight and still give good service, you make more money. In personal training, knowing how to give a clear presentation to demonstrate a workout that motivates clients to get results is the goal. They'd sign up for a personal training package and then get a gym membership.

TECHNIQUES THAT TRANSLATE

- **Stating benefits** of how the sale will benefit the buyer, not the seller.
- **Gaining interest** via an intuitive ability to state the upsides of a particular package and why it's an ideal fit.
- **Breaking down payments** and showing the resulting savings. In new-home sales, this is useful in selling clubhouse memberships and maintenance packages.

There's no telling where new talent might come from. It could be the salesperson in a clothing shop who convinces you to try on a jacket when you wandered in looking for a shirt. But

if the skills are relevant and translate, you may have just met your next PHD candidate (Professional, Hungry, & Driven), with great potential to benefit from your sales training program. **PB**

Bob Schultz, MIRM, CSP, is the president and CEO of Bob Schultz & The International New Home Sales Specialists. Write him at bob@i-nhss.com.