

# The Missing Link

**Companies looking to sustain change and maximize training investment take a new and innovative approach**

**By Scott Anderson**

*Managing Partner,  
Diamond Performance Group*

**and Chip Kudrle**

*Managing Partner,  
Diamond Performance Group*

**W**hat impacts the performance of strategic account managers? Once we set aside the external factors outside of our control, it almost always comes down to two things: skill and will.

Skill – a SAM’s ability to effectively execute all aspects of his job (e.g., account planning, quarterly reviews, executive-level relationships) – is diagnosed most often in performance evaluations. Therefore, skill is the factor that’s most frequently treated when someone is underperforming.

However, it’s important to address the critical second factor as well: will. Will, though often diagnosed, is rarely treated, thus hindering the SAM’s full capacity for development. In fact, not addressing someone’s will to be a top performer is the Achilles heel of most sales training today.

So, how important do you think will is to your business? Figure 1 includes a chart that lists skill along with four key attributes of will: integrity, accountability, attitude and motivation. Place a percentage next to each category, indicating the amount of importance that you believe each attribute has on SAM performance and thus the success of your business.

Many people have trouble determining the percentages that match with each attribute. For example, how important is attitude? Certainly, if a SAM has the wrong attitude, his chances for success drop significantly. But then, you could say the same thing about motivation. If he is not motivated to drive a certain level of activity, will he be successful?

Then again, how important is integrity in a strategic account position? After all, the more significant the cost of doing business, the more difficult it will be to separate the seller from the

actual product. Your integrity becomes your “personal brand loyalty.”

Lastly, how do you weigh accountability? On the first pass through this exercise it may

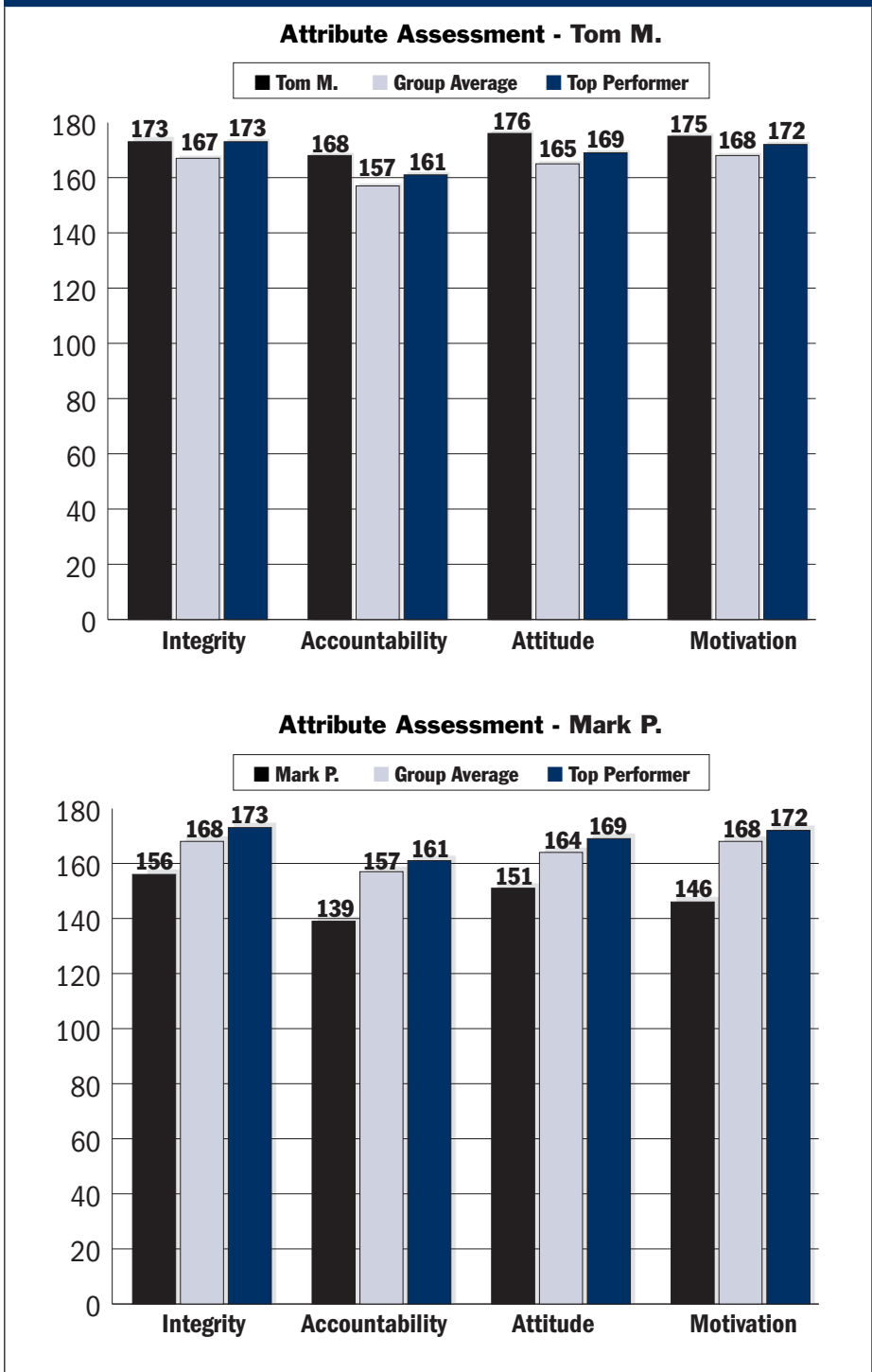
**Figure 1. Attribute Importance Chart**

Attribute	Importance
Skill	
Integrity	
Attitude	
Accountability	
Motivation	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Below are definitions of the four attributes linked to will:*

1. Integrity is an attribute made up of honesty, trust, conscientiousness, self-control and ethics.
2. Accountability is an attribute that pertains not only to a person’s willingness to accept blame for their own actions, but also to take responsibility for their own success or failure.
3. The purpose of the attitude attribute is to take a closer look at a person’s attitude in general, as well as to look at how attitude impacts a person’s competitive drive, ability to overcome rejection and ability to influence customer decisions.
4. The motivation attribute is made up of determination, persistence, discipline and drive. People who are highly motivated are usually people who set and follow through on their goals. That is not to say that they attain 100% of their goals.

**Figure 2. Diamond Attribute Assessment Tool for SAMs**



be easy to take accountability lightly, but if you really think about it, a SAM with a high level of accountability is far more likely to take ownership of his own skill development and hence both his and his company's success.

As you can see from considering each attribute of will during this exercise, performance is just as closely tied to will

as it is to skill. As Peter Dattoli, Group Manager of National Accounts, Allied Waste Industries, put it, "We knew we needed to make an investment in the skill set of our national account team, but we also knew that in order to get people to embrace these new skills, we needed to break down some of the will issues at the same time. If we had failed to break down will-related issues, I am confident

that we would have gotten 'lip service,' but not seen the true behavior change that we are seeing now."

But how can you impact a person's will? Consider these three critical steps:

**Step 1: Self-Awareness**

While it may seem easy to look at your coworkers and assess whether their performance-related problems are related to skill or will issues, our own will-related issues are often a "blind spot" that goes unidentified by the person who needs the information the most: you!

Utilizing a self-awareness assessment tool, SAMs are able to identify potential areas of development. The assessment used by the subjects for this article gives them "scores" in each of the four attributes. SAMs then have a better perspective on how they compare with the average score of their team, as well as top performers in the industry.

Figure 2 depicts the results from the Diamond Attribute Assessment for two SAMs in the industrial sector. Compare the results of the assessments of a top performer on the top with an underachiever on the bottom. This particular assessment tool is based on the output of a self-test of 118 questions pertaining to integrity, accountability, attitude and motivation that compares how the participant's answers compare to a control group of top performing sales professionals representing every major industry.

If individuals score low in integrity, it may be due to the way they answer questions pertaining to:

- Making promises they can't or don't intend to keep;
- Telling a small lie (or misrepresenting their product's capabilities) to make a sale;
- Giving their company less than 100% of their effort;
- Following up and following through on customer commitments; and
- Not standing up for what they believe in.

If individuals score low in accountability, it may be due to the way they answer questions pertaining to:

- Acceptance of responsibility for their own successes and failures;
- Willingness to take on additional responsibility;
- Perception of why other people might be more successful than themselves;
- Belief that becoming a top performer is not within their control; and
- Ability to focus on those factors within their control or influence.

If individuals score low in the attitude category, it may be due to the way they answer questions pertaining to:

- Dealing with rejection and failure;
- Handling frustrating situations;
- Having poise under pressure;
- Being an optimistic person;
- Handling competitive situations; and
- Utilizing positive self-talk or affirmations.

If individuals score low in motivation, it may be due to the way they answer questions pertaining to:

- Setting goals;
- Being self-motivated;
- Investing time in self-improvement;
- Relentlessly pursuing and closing the sale;
- Overcoming barriers to their success;
- Committing to excellence; and
- Driving a certain level of activity day in and day out.

How is this information leveraged? As Mark Strazzeri Director, National Sales of New York Life Investment Management, stated, "Assessing attributes gave me a perspective on my people that I never had before. In fact, I didn't think it was possible to get such a transparent look at what motivates each individual on my team. Now I am able to pinpoint the exact areas that need development, enabling me to provide specific coaching on how to improve each individual's performance."



## OUR OWN WILL-RELATED ISSUES ARE OFTEN A "BLIND SPOT" UNIDENTIFIED BY US.

Since it is possible for people to become defensive upon seeing their attribute scores, caution is taken to position the assessment as a development tool. For this reason, it is important that assessment results are not linked to performance measurement and compensation. Rather, such an assessment helps SAMs acknowledge and address deficiencies that were previously unrecognized.

### Step 2: Implementation

Once SAMs are aware of their opportunities for development, they need a road map to help guide them in the right direction. Often called a development plan, this type of tool can help them assess their contributions to their company while providing them with an outline for how to improve.

These development plans that take into account key strategies and tactics lead to stronger integrity, greater accountability, better attitude and increased motivation. Working in support teams, SAMs map out the specific actions they will take to drive improved skill and will in both themselves and their coworkers.

As John Rowe, Senior Vice President at a unit of UnitedHealth Group, put it, "In the past, we assumed that we were hiring the right people – people

who had the 'will' component figured out – but the truth was, many didn't. We've seen significant improvement in sales results as the result of the customized development plans we implemented."


### Step 3: Accountability

Without accountability, Steps 1 and 2 suffer greatly. Fortunately, there are several ways to help SAMs hold themselves accountable to the determinations in their development plans.

As part of one's development, it is recommended that each participant create a personal "Board of Directors." This Board of Directors includes all of the key people that

participants believe can make an impact on their success in both career and life. Participants then meet with their Board of Directors periodically to share their evolving goals and get feedback on what they have accomplished.

To supplement this Board of Directors support, those responsible for SAM development can ensure that each SAM stays in regular contact with the individuals responsible for helping him draft a development plan. This "support team" sets group goals that directly relate to the development plans of all its members, thus providing another opportunity for self-awareness and accountability.

The effective execution of these three steps results in higher levels of will. This, supplemented with strong coaching from either a manager or an outside performance resource, can greatly enhance individual development. 

Scott Anderson and Chip Kudrle are Managing Partners of Diamond Performance Group ([www.diamonddpg.com](http://www.diamonddpg.com)), a sales performance firm that aims to drive top performance at all levels of a sales organization through a unique holistic approach to sales and management development. Scott may be reached at [sanderson@diamonddpg.com](mailto:sanderson@diamonddpg.com) and Chip at [ckudrle@diamonddpg.com](mailto:ckudrle@diamonddpg.com). Either may be called at 952-233-5200.