

Star quality?

Check how well placed you are to develop your career

As the silly season of summer vacations is almost upon us, many IT salespeople will be considering their career; perhaps plotting how to gain that well deserved promotion, or escaping it all to run a bar on some Indian Ocean hideaway. Presuming you want to keep developing your career then the question is how well placed you are to progress from your current position.

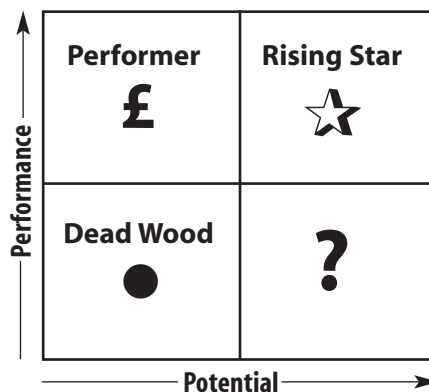
Whatever our personal motivations, we are all perceived in a certain way by our management. In many account or opportunity planning sessions, I use a simple tool borrowed from HR as an indicator of how individuals are perceived within their organisation. A quick quiz:

- 1 Over the recent past, has your headline performance been on or over target? If yes, go to question 2, if no go to 3.
 - 2 Do you believe your boss perceives you as someone who could be promoted at some stage? If yes, go to A, if no go to B.
 - 3 Do you believe your boss perceives you as someone who could be promoted at some stage? If yes, go to C, if no go to D.
- A You are most likely seen as a Rising Star.
B You are most likely seen as a Performer.
C You are most likely seen as a Question Mark. If you think you have been perceived this way for some time, go to D.
D You are most likely seen as Dead Wood.

The tool is the simple four-box model beloved by consultants everywhere, and this one is simple enough to be useful. It is based on looking at current performance and future potential.

Performance is very simple – it is a matter of whether or not you are above or below target. In reality most people will look at the performance averaged over the last few months or quarters. Potential is more difficult to define, and is a judgement based on managers' belief as to how well you could do a more demanding job – people/sector management or bigger/more complex accounts. The box gives a few tips on how you can enhance the perception that people have of your potential.

To illustrate the four quadrants in the model, I've described four actual salespeople (although I've changed their names to protect the guilty); hopefully



you recognise yourself and some colleagues in the descriptions.

Pat Performer is the salt of the earth; a good salesperson who has consistently made target for a long time. Pat gets on reasonably well with most people, and makes some contributions to the team. Not a superstar, Pat is regarded as someone who can always be relied upon.

Ronnie Rising is one of the stars. Successful with a great career in front of him, Ronnie is well liked, networks well with senior management and often takes the lead in team meetings.

Micky Marker is new to the team, having been recruited just a few months ago. Micky has got over the honeymoon period, and is popular with the sales and support teams but has yet to really

earn his spurs. Micky knows that being in the Question Mark box is not sustainable – results will have to be achieved fairly quickly otherwise Dead Wood is beckoning.

Danny Deadmann has unfortunately failed to make target for quite a while, and acts very jaded. This is not made any easier because other people in the team, while they may give private encouragement, do not openly support Danny in public. It is obvious to all that it is very unlikely that he will be a part of the team in the future. The big question is whether he will go of his own accord, be pushed, or can pull off a very high-risk piece of business.

The model has proven very useful in helping to understand customer buying teams and how they might behave, but is also useful in giving us a very simple way of thinking about how we are perceived. We can be content with being a Performer, revel in being a Rising Star, work hard to progress from a Question Mark, or start polishing our CV if we are Dead Wood. Or running a small bar on a sun drenched island may become even more appealing. Happy holidays. **SF**

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INCREASING YOUR POTENTIAL

While this sounds like the subject of some dodgy spam mail, it can be the key to promotion for most salespeople. In fact it should read "increasing the perception of others as to your potential" because career potential cannot be measured. As the model demonstrates, people don't get promoted just because they are doing a good job (although this is normally a prerequisite) – it is potential that counts. There are many things that you could do to increase how your potential is perceived, including:

- Publicising your successes – an email thanking your team for all their help in closing this tremendously difficult/challenging/competitive deal, is a great way to do this, obviously copied high and wide (so that the team get the kudos they deserve).
- Volunteering to be on special task forces – especially those that will be visible, have a high chance of success and involve senior management.
- Asking your boss if you can deputise for them at meetings or when they are on leave.
- While you don't want to be seen sucking up to the boss, you need to suck up to them.
- Hanging around with other successful high flyers, particularly in public.
- Keep your antennae tuned for the latest bandwagons and fads within your company, and champion them early; be an early adopter of ideas that senior management will favour, without getting caught out on the lunatic fringe.
- If all else fails you can try marrying the boss's daughter, making them an offer that they can't refuse, or blackmail has been known to work in the past.