



## **The B Player Problem:**

Why B-Players Are Your Biggest Challenge and Biggest Opportunity.



## **You have your A players, your B players and your C players.**

A players are your stars. They're your top-performing salespeople who bring in killer deals month after month. They're who you send the big leads to because those deals have the potential to bring in so much money—so you as a leader can't trust just anyone with that.

Salesforce co-CEO Marc Benioff shares that his A reps do all the heavy lifting.



About half of Salesforce account executives brought in more than 95% of deals,” he told employees at an all-hands meeting, according to two who were there.

**Marc Benioff**, *Salesforce co-CEO*

Then you have your C players. The low performers. The ones you bring in for additional training, provide performance improvement plans (PIP) and watch closely before bringing down the ax. It's not a pleasant part of your job, but it's just part of sales.

## **But what about those middle-of-the-road B players?**

B players have the potential to do well. While they're not consistently your top performers, they have the occasional great month—and mostly just steady “good” ones. They could be such strong contributors, yet most of the time, they fly under the radar. Candidly, a lot of great managers don't quite know why their B players are B players; and the idea of turning them into A players? Well, that feels off the table.

This guide is for all the managers who'd like to help their B players rise to the occasion, but aren't sure how to do so. We'll take a deep dive into the B player problem and show you how to solve it. We'll cover:

- The difference between A and B players
- Why you should never ignore your B players
- How to elevate your entire team

Keep reading for an in-depth look at the B player problem—and how to solve it.

## The problem with B players: Good-to-great is better than bad-to-good

Who are you and your other sales managers spending the most time with? You're likely celebrating and supporting your top-tier salespeople—the A players. They bring you big deals, ask more of your time and live at the top of the sales board.

Plus, A players often remind leaders of themselves. They're ambitious problem-solvers who want to move quickly up the chain—just like you.

But your C players take too much of your time, focus, and emotional energy. They're the ones struggling the most. Maybe they're new and need to learn the skills of the trade, or maybe they lack that killer instinct. Whatever their reasons, you have to dedicate time to lifting them up or managing them out so they don't drag down the business.

What do you do with the B players? They're often ignored or even lumped in with the C players. They're left feeling underappreciated and stuck with few growth opportunities.

### Who are your B players?

B players are often characterized by what they're not—they're not stellar salespeople (yet), but they also don't have one foot out the door. According to data that global pharmaceutical company Novartis, a Quantified customer, gathered in 2021 on more than 5,000 of their global sellers, top performers were 2.1x more productive than their average sales rep. If you ask Monkhouse & Company, that difference is on the lower end; their surveyed CEOs say the productivity difference between A and B players is closer to 5–10x.

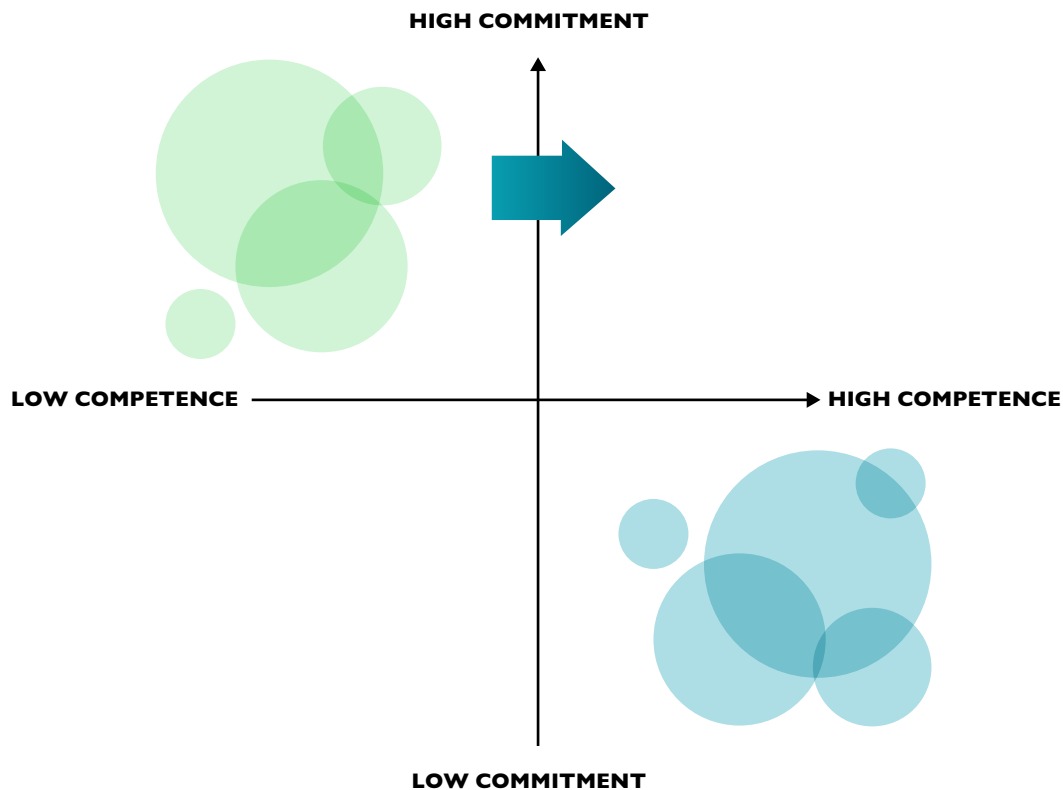
Because of this, the perceived value of B players is low, despite the fact that with the right level of guided practice and coaching, they could become A players. In more situations than not, B players are A players waiting to happen. We have a problem of unharnessed potential on our hands. Even though B players often value team camaraderie and work-life balance over career achievement, if you ask us, these admirable values can indeed live in tandem with productivity and sales expertise.

Let's take a look at the different types of B players. While there are nuances that these buckets don't capture, most B players typically fall into one of these two buckets:

**1. Low commitment, high competence:** These B players have all the makings of an A player but lack the right mindset. They can pass the test without studying and they know exactly what they need to do, but they don't do it. This is a problem of the will and the heart. For these reps, a dramatic change in perspective and motivation is required to move forward.

**2. High commitment, low competence:** These players are coming into work early and staying late, but something still isn't clicking. They've demonstrated the will to succeed. They're hungry, humble, and ready to make it happen, but the results aren't there yet. If you're a sales coach or leader, these are the folks you'll want to spend most of your time on. It's your job to suss out the missing links and devise a plan to unlock their potential.

This is the opportunity. By improving the skills of the team members in this quadrant, you can shift some of them right, into the A Player quadrant.



My first question is, are they putting in the reps? Because I want to spend my time coaching, and I have the best chance of moving B players up to A players if they're putting in the effort. That means they're probably more open to coaching and guidance, too, because they have already shown me that they want to change and they're willing to do the work.

**Katie Pariseau**, Head of Enablement, TrustRadius



Your B player profile

Characteristics	Wants	Generally lacks	Needs
Dependable	Recognition for their achievements	Confidence	Clear expectations and goals
◆	◆	◆	◆
Solid work ethic	Opportunities for growth and development	Self-Awareness	Guidance and support from their manager
◆	◆	◆	◆
Knowledgeable	Positive feedback and reinforcement	Immediate Rapport with Buyers	More at-bats and practice opportunities to improve
◆	◆	◆	◆
Does what's required	A sense of belonging and camaraderie within their team	Mastery of Message	Resources and tools to perform their job effectively
◆	◆		◆
Team player	A healthy work-life balance		Constructive feedback and coaching
	◆		◆
	Interesting and challenging work assignments		A sense of purpose

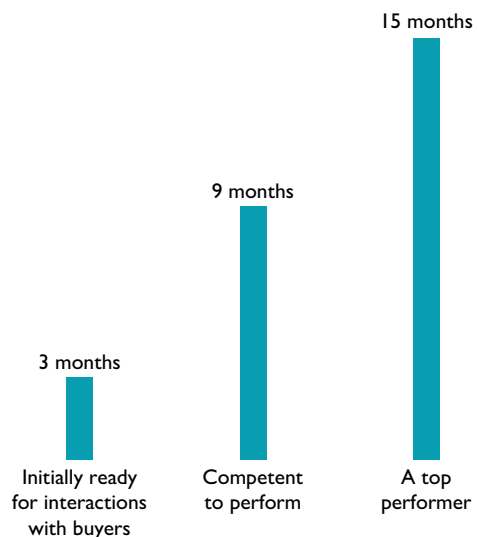
Why should you care about B players?

If B players are happily coasting at their continued pace, why do you need to spend your time on them at all?

Fair question. While building a team of A players is the goal for many sales leaders, your team needs that supporting role.

The middle B players are the ones with the highest potential for growth. Shelley Cernel, VP of Marketing at Thirty Capital, notes that it's much easier to make your good salespeople great than it is to onboard new folks or help your underperformers hit an acceptable level of performance. Research from RAIN Group reinforces this same idea.

### Time to Onboard New Sellers



Rather than focusing on the leaders and the laggards, coach the middle two-thirds of reps who have both the room for improvement and the incentive to be top performers.

**Shelley Cernel**, VP of Marketing at Thirty Capital,

And with a troubled economy, you can't afford to spend time on unmotivated, unproductive C players. To strengthen your sales team, you need to boost your solid B players to turn them into far-and-away As.

## What makes a top-of-the-line A player?

Maybe you're not trying to turn all B players into traditional A players, but you can help them develop the skills to be at the top of their game. So let's dive into the skills that make A players the star sellers of your team.

A players aren't necessarily smarter than B players. They're more likely to differ in personality and skills.

There are two schools of thought when it comes to creating and curating talented sales teams:

**1. You have it, or you don't:** Let's call these folks the "nature" folks. People with this philosophy believe stellar salespeople are born, not made. There's something in their nature that you can't replicate, whether it's grit, self-discipline, or just that "it" quality. Many people with this idea believe that many aspects of sales can be taught, but you can't train people to be top-dog sellers.

**2. Everything is teachable:** Then, there are the "nurture" believers. They say every aspect of sales is easily broken down into learnable skills, as long as people have the willingness to learn.

Kyle Coleman, Vice President of Marketing at Clari and former VP of Revenue Growth and Enablement, falls strictly into the second category.

"'Unteachable qualities' are a myth," he said.



It's about mindset, passion for the work, and the resources that companies provide (tech, training, coaching, etc). Everything is learnable, but it takes a mutual commitment from the rep and manager to make it happen.

**Kyle Coleman,** *Vice President of Marketing at Clari*

Many sales leaders fall somewhere on the spectrum between these two ideas—and we lean heavily on teaching ability. Why? Because, although nature and nurture are both factors, only nurture gives the sales leader an option to improve existing team members. Stay attuned to nature in making hiring decisions. But once team members are on board, focus on the things that can be changed or improved to help them succeed.

So, let's break down what makes top salespeople so great. There are certain qualities and skills that A players have that B players need. Some are teachable, but a few are difficult to replicate. At Quantified, we focus on three overarching categories: knowledge, process, and rapport. The following skills fall into one of those three buckets every time.

- **Knowledge:** Always be prepared isn't just a motto; it's a mantra. A players have looked at data, perused LinkedIn profiles, polished off decks and gathered all the information they need to be successful at their next meeting.
- **Adaptability:** Not only do they have to adapt to work in different sales situations, star sellers also have to adapt their sales tactics based on who they're selling to. This is where the difference between memorization and preparation come into view.



[Being a people person] might get you the meeting, but that might not get you the deal.

**Amy Slater,**

*Vice President, America's Partner Sales at Genesys*

Amy Slater is a seasoned expert on enterprise sales strategy, sales operations, and sales methodology. She's learned what she knows by working for some of the greatest brands in tech: Palo Alto Networks, AT&T, Cable and Wireless, Cisco, Salesforce.com, Acxiom, Rovi and TiVo, to name a few.



- **Process:** A players always have the discipline to follow through on basic sales techniques. They reach out to new prospects, follow up consistently, and deliver prepared and personalized presentations.
- **Time management:** Top salespeople know how to schedule their days—but it's more than that. They can look at their roster of leads and identify where to devote their time and energy to land a successful deal.
- **Creativity:** If one tactic doesn't work, how can they approach the problem from another direction? Persistence and creative problem-solving pair well together and help salespeople close deals.
- **Determination:** A recent study by LinkedIn revealed that 72% of top performers (sellers who met quota by 125% or higher) said they "always" put the buyer first. They're persistent, but not pushy. Instead of looking for a way to sell the products, A players search for a way to solve their prospects' problems.



Through my qualification and my reading those opportunities, I know how to instinctively put 80% of my time into these three and 20% of my time into these eight.

**Eric Nelson,**

*Founder of RevDimensions, previously CRO of HireVue*

Eric Nelson is a leading SaaS revenue professional with a deep understanding of go-to-market excellence, revenue team buildout and optimization. After decades of SaaS revenue leadership, he pivoted and founded RevDimensions in 2018. His consultancy works specifically with early-stage SaaS companies to optimize their go-to-market sales strategies.

- **Charisma:** Charisma is more than just magnetic charm; it's the ability to build trust with new people quickly. In sales, you don't just need people to like you (otherwise you're always stuck in the friend zone). You need to prove you're reliable.
- **Coachability:** Not only do they take coaching well, but they're eager to absorb all the knowledge and feedback that will make them a better salesperson.

Combining these skills help top sellers execute throughout an entire deal, from open to close. They can assess the customers' needs and leverage the entire organization to get them to sign on the dotted line.

## How to pinpoint why reps aren't closing more deals

Why isn't your team as a whole closing more deals? If your mind went straight to "it's because of our below-quota C players," you're partially right. But sales success is about more than individual rep performance; it's about the team dynamics, too.

As you know, coaches and leaders can't be everywhere at once—you have to allot your time according to your teams' goals. So where should you put your time?

Matt Bauman, VP of Commercial Sales at ClickUp, recommends spending your time on those who bring in the most money.

"Leaders should feed and invest time in the winners," he said.



That means A players get the most time, B next and C the least.

**Matt Bauman**, *VP of Commercial Sales at ClickUp*

## Dive into team dynamics

Despite competitive natures, sales teams can bring each other up or drag each other down. Team dynamics influence motivation, enthusiasm and ultimately the number of deals your reps close. Above all, getting to know how your team works together, and as individuals, will improve training and performance results.

Amy Slater, Vice President, America's Partner Sales at Genesys, has worked with many successful sales teams over the years. She says numbers get you the business—but you need to know the team dynamic.

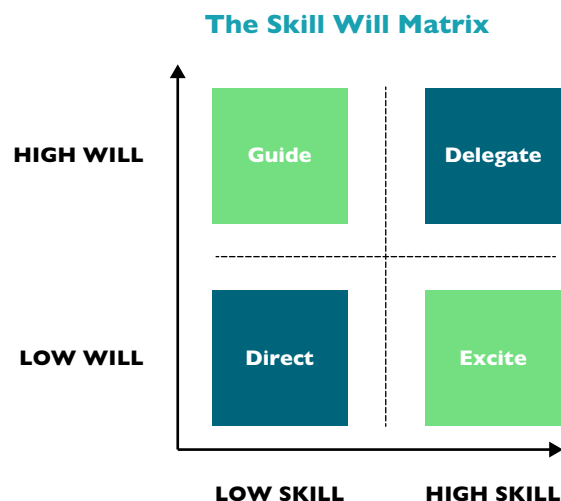


If you don't know your team and what makes them tick, it doesn't matter how hard you push them," Slater said. "But if you know your team and ask them questions about how they're doing and how they're feeling, then the business flourishes.

**Amy Slater**, Vice President, America's Partner Sales at Genesys

## Get to know your reps

Before you can begin to elevate your B players, you need to know their weaknesses. What are they missing that's keeping them from closing deals? The Skill Will Matrix is a common way to determine what's holding back salespeople on your team, and how you should address it.



Simply speaking, your A players are those with high skill and a high willingness to put in the work. They're motivated, knowledgeable and talented enough to close a deal.

Your C players are on the low skill/low will end of the matrix. They need the knowledge and experience to do better and see their path forward.

But B players fall into both high will/low skill and low skill/high will. Their quadrant will determine whether they need more training or motivation—and how you attack it.

“We invest the most time with A players that are high skill/high will, then B players that are high will, low skill,” Bauman said. “You can teach skill.”

## Identify weak points in the sales cycle

From prospecting through post-purchase handoffs, top sales professionals need to be adept throughout the pipeline.

- **Prospecting:** While many sales teams have passed prospecting along to artificial intelligence tools, top salespeople should thoroughly understand prospecting goals.

Salespeople weak in prospecting may not understand your customers, their motivations or where they hang out online.

- **Lead qualifying:** This is where that innate grasp of time management factors in. Identifying leads worth your time and effort is a key skill for top salespeople. If sales team members aren't asking the right questions about a prospect's needs and budget, they could waste their time and lose their motivation.

- **Presentation:** The sales presentation is where many good salespeople fall short—and it's a key point in the sales process. It's hard to recreate the high-stakes experience.

When salespeople are weak at the presentation stage, they might have poor communication skills, use lots of jargon or not understand their customer's unique needs.

- **Objections:** Handling objections is tough for some salespeople, but A players know how to overcome them head-on. Salespeople weak at this stage may dismiss objections or get defensive.

- **Closing:** Negotiating and closing the deal is the most important part of the sales process. Sales team members with good people skills may be able to get this far on their own, but without true sales skills, they'll fall short.

Low performing salespeople may not be able to ask for the sale with urgency and authority, struggling to push prospects over the decision hump.

- **Post-purchase handoff:** A sale isn't complete until the customer is happily using the product or service. Top salespeople ensure the customer knows the next steps and sets them up for success. Salespeople who just dump prospects once they become clients could be missing out on big referral potential.

## How do you make your Bs better?

B players are the base of your business. While they're less likely to bring in ace deals, they're also less likely to leave for greener pastures, making them invaluable to your business's organizational memory and ability to deliver sustainable results.

Training shouldn't be a ship-up-or-ship-out situation. If B players are your foundation, raising them up brings up the entire business.

So instead of transforming your B players into As, let's look at ways to make them the best they can be.

## Tips for leveling up your B players

Pumping up your B players isn't easy, but it's worth the investment. Here are some tips for coaching your base:

- **Understand the kind of learners they are:** Are they hands-on learners that need to do to absorb? Do they work better through asynchronous and virtual learning? Avoid putting everyone into the same mold and train them in the way that's best for them.
- **Create team learning opportunities in your organization:** When an organization is built for learning and mentorship, every team member succeeds. In Slater's experience, creating roles for growth, like Junior Account Managers, has been effective.

“They couldn't go in and screw things up because they were junior, but they were like an apprentice. They learned from the more experienced sellers,” Slater said. “It was phenomenal.”

- **Pair A players with B players:** By pairing a B player with an A player, you can see if the B player lacks the skill or will to improve. From there, you can make better decisions about their training and future with the company.
- **Identify A-player behavior:** How do the top players perform the way they do? Take a deep dive into the habits that make your top performers successful. Only then can you start to replicate that success.
- **Opt for a coaching program:** If there's enough will in your B players to learn and get better, hire a coaching program. Businesses that have a sales coaching culture perform 17% better than those that don't, according to Training Magazine.



Reps need very clear and defined feedback as to where they stand and what's expected of them/what they can work on/improve on.

**Matt Bauman**, *VP of Commercial Sales at ClickUp*

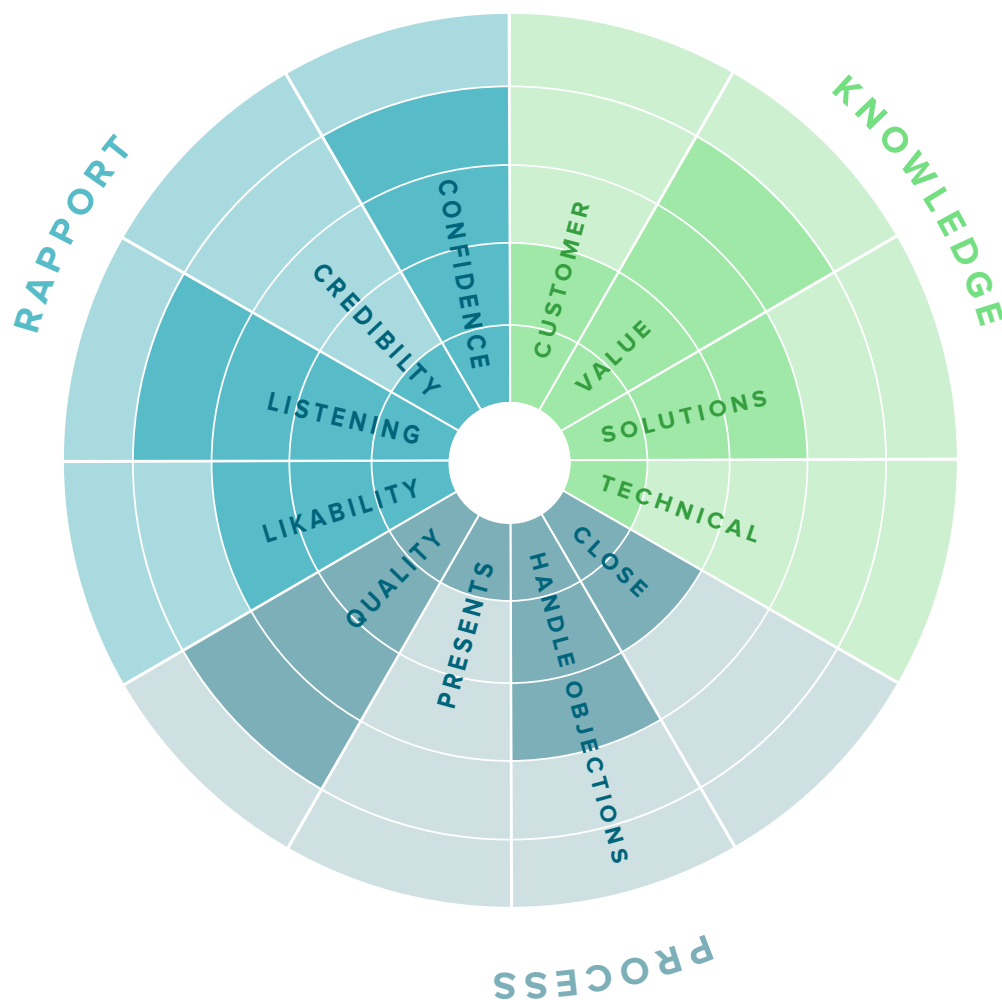
## Decipher the secrets to your A's success—and replicate it—with Quantified AI

You won't always be able to transform your Bs into As, but you can elevate them to be better. You'll get more out of taking your Bs up a notch than lifting up your Cs to meet basic standards.

Turning your Bs into As takes a lot of work, and you don't have time to listen in and coach on every sales call or presentation. Quantified AI is a personalized, experiential and fun AI-powered simulation and coaching platform that turns your B players into your best sales reps.

By practicing with an AI simulator, your sales team will get insights into their sales effectiveness and ways to improve. Quantified AI touches on three main skills:

- **Building Rapport:** This measures your reps' behavioral and listening skills and their ability to build relationships with your target market.
- **Knowledge and Messaging:** How well do your reps know your product? This measures how well your reps carry your target messaging, from discovery to objections to close.
- **Advancing the Sales Process:** This explores how well your sales reps work prospects through the sales pipeline. Are they following your sales process? Are they asking the right questions? Negotiating well?



Quantified AI helps sales organizations objectively measure these sales skills—without bias—by facilitating and quantifying rep behavior during roleplays. It also scales coaching efforts and empowers reps to control their own progress and success.

More than that, Quantified can identify your top performers and the non-verbal behaviors that make them successful. Quantified AI deployed this method with a global pharmaceutical company and saw immediate results.

68% of sellers saw immediate improvement



25% improvement in rep selling skills

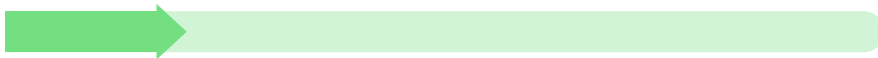


57% improvement in positive call outcomes



That's just one organization's success story, too. Across our entire customer base, we're seeing numbers like:

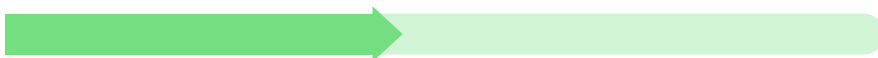
19% increase in revenue per sales rep



21% lift in customer NPS scores



42% reduction in time to client readiness



## Want these results for your own sales team?

We've helped Dell, J&J, Spotify, and many of your other favorite brands shift from potential to performance. Schedule your demo with Quantified AI today.