How to Hire Salespeople Who Can Sell

OR...

Separating the Wheat from the Chaff

Brian Jeffrey

Tired of hiring duds? Here is a simple process and some ideas that will help you put together a powerful sales team. It's not hard to find winners if you do the right things.

Enjoy the read.

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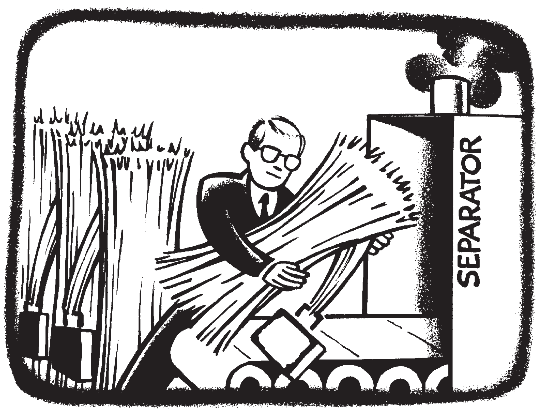


Separating the Wheat From the Chaff

One of the most critical functions you perform as a sales manager is putting together the sales team. The right people, working together, can make business life a pleasure. On the other hand — hire the wrong people and your life can become hell.

If you want a salesperson, hire a salesperson, not someone with no track record of sales success of some kind. Take your time to hire the best you can afford. The cost of a hiring mistake can be crippling. Too many managers fall into the trap of hiring the first or second warm body that comes along in order to fill the open slot.

Be careful of who and what you hire.

There's an old adage in sports that says "A" coaches hire "A" players, and "B" coaches hire "C" players.

When this happens in the sales department, and the "B" sales manager hires "C" salespeople, he soon complains about business being bad. It's not always the business that's bad, it's often the salespeople.

An "A" manager, sales or otherwise, is self-confident enough to hire people who can be or are better in a particular job function than the manager is himself. A "B" manager's ego won't allow him to hire someone who may show him up. "A" managers strive to empower their employees while "B" managers go for control.

For the best results, stop hiring losers and start hiring winners. Be an "A" sales manager who hires "A" salespeople.

The High Cost of Hiring a Dud

Many managers, in an attempt to either save time or money, will circumvent many of the steps that are listed below. This is often a false economy and may result with the hiring of an unsuitable candidate.

In addition to all the time you lose by having to work with your dud, there is the lost business from existing clients, and the value of the lost opportunities that a poor salesperson misses. Then there's the cost of your time in trying to discover why the person isn't performing properly and the impact of the non-performer on the rest of the sales team. Combine this with the costs involved in hiring the person in the first place, and the additional cost of having to replace the dud, and the investment becomes mind-boggling.

THE PROCESS

Not every company has the luxury of having a dedicated human resource or personnel department to guide and manage the hiring process and the task often falls on the shoulders of the sales manager.

Mistakes in the hiring process can be extremely costly. If sales managers did more planning before they set about hiring salespeople, less hiring mistakes would be made. There are two major reasons why sales managers make hiring mistakes. One, they don't know what the hiring process is or two, they know what the hiring process is but choose to ignore or, as mentioned above, they short circuit the process by leaving steps out. Here are the steps of the hiring process:

1. Define the job.
2. Develop a list of mandatory and desirable hiring criteria.
3. Prepare and run advertisements.
4. Screen initial responses.
5. Conduct initial interviews.
6. Develop a short list of candidates.
7. Conduct second interviews.
8. Check references.
9. Rank and/or eliminate candidates.
10. Conduct third interviews.
11. Select final candidates.
12. Conduct fourth interviews.
13. Make a job offer.

Here is a look at the process in a bit more detail.

1. Define the job.

Make sure you have a written job description. This should cover:

- Job title
- Immediate supervisor/manager

- Job summary
- Major job duties
- Minor job duties
- Additional responsibilities
- Performance expectations
- Territory/account responsibilities

Here is a straightforward example of a job description for an outside sales representative:

Job Title: Account Representative

Immediate Supervisor/Manager: Reports to Field Sales Manager

Job Summary:
Account Representatives (ARs) maintain regular contact with existing accounts, develop new accounts within their assigned territory, prepare sales proposals and assist in trade shows. ARs are responsible for maintaining up-to-date account information and sales records.

Major Job Duties:
1. Maintain or increase sales from existing accounts.
2. Develop new accounts.
3. Follow up on orders over $10,000 to ensure client satisfaction.
4. Other duties as assigned by the Field Sales Manager.

Minor Job Duties:
1. Complete call reports daily.
2. Submit monthly sales forecast updates.
3. Other duties as assigned by the Field Sales Manager.

Additional Responsibilities:
1. Attend trade shows.
2. Submit monthly expense reports.
3. Assist in proposal generation.
4. Attend weekly sales meetings.

Performance Expectations:

First year sales quota:		$750,000
Interim quota targets:		
	1st Quarter:	$100,000
	2nd Quarter:	$150,000
	3rd Quarter:	$200,000
	4th Quarter:	$300,000

All class A accounts to be visited at least once per quarter.
All class B accounts to be visited at least twice yearly.
All class C accounts to be contacted at least once yearly.
Ten percent of sales to come from new accounts.

Territory/Account Responsibilities:
Sales territory boundaries are Yonge Street to the west, Hwy 401 to the north, Pickering city limits to the east, and Lake Ontario to the south (see attached map). Assigned class A, B, & C accounts are listed in Appendix A.

2. Develop a list of mandatory and desirable hiring criteria.

To eliminate obvious misfits from the pile of responses you hope to get from your recruiting efforts, you need to have a filter through which you will pass the resumés and applications. You do this by developing a set of mandatory and desirable criteria. Some general categories of criteria are:

- Education
- Past applicable work experience
- Previous training (non-sales)
- Special skills
- Hobbies or interests
- Socio-economic level
- Personality traits
- Stability
- Sales training
- Organizational skills

Take the time to build a filter for a sales position in your company. Look at the categories above and decide which factors are "must-have" (mandatory) and which are "nice-to-have" (desirable) and build your list.

Rank your "desirables" as to what is most desirable, next most desirable, etc. This will help you select between candidates who may have many of the required criteria for the position (Table 1).

It's important to select your mandatory criteria carefully and thoughtfully. As you can see from the example, if a candidate came along with no computer skills at all or no formal sales training of some kind, the individual would be instantly disqualified no matter how many other criteria he or she met.

3. Prepare and run advertisements.

Here are the basic rules for making your advertisement reach out and grab prospective candidates:

Position/title.

If you're looking for a salesperson, say so. The official title for the position might be "Senior Account Executive" or "Marketing Representative," but if the person's primary function is to sell, make sure the words "Sales Representative" or "Sales Position" are prominent in the ad. You want salespeople's eyes drawn to your ad. You can include the actual title as well if you like.

List the minimum qualifications (your mandatory criteria).

Hopefully this will eliminate those people who are inclined to apply to every open-ended job ad. It also makes the thanks-but-no-thanks letters easier to write because all you have to do is state that they don't meet your minimum qualification requirements.

Tell what they will sell.

Briefly outline the products or services the salesperson will be selling. Some people are more comfortable selling one type of product

Table 1. Example of a typical filter that might be used by a company looking for a salesperson to sell high-end (expensive) accounting software.

Factors	Mandatory	Desirable	Desirable Ranking
Education			
Community college	•		
Undergrad degree		•	13
Applicable Industry-Related Experience			
Minimum two years' experience	•		
Five years' experience		•	1
Worked for a competitor		•	12
Previous Training (non-sales)			
Self-taught bookkeeping/accounting skills	•		
Has formal training in accounting		•	11
Computer Skills			
Uses a computer	•		
Uses Microsoft Office		•	3
Familiar with accounting software		•	2
Has used sales automation software		•	4
Hobbies or Interests			
Computers		•	5
Team sports		•	10
Socio-Economic Level			
Currently earning >$50,000/yr		•	17
Personality Traits			
Outgoing personality	•		
Team player	•		
High drive level	•		
Operates independently		•	15
Decisive		•	14
Stability			
Married		•	8
Owns home		•	9
Sales Experience/Training			
Minimum two years' sales experience	•		
Some formal training	•		
Formal training within last five years		•	6
Time management training		•	7
Organizational Skills			
Has successfully managed a sales territory	•		
Uses a time management tool (DayTimer, etc.)	•		
Uses a computer-based time management tool		•	16

or service over another. There's no use wasting time with a candidate who doesn't want to sell what you want sold. This is also where you sell the opportunity. Be careful you don't oversell or you'll succeed only in getting a pile of resumés from hopeful dreamers.

Compensation.

Briefly state the type of compensation plan and potential earnings. Be truthful. If you're offering a commission-only position, then say so. You might as well eliminate those people who don't believe they can earn good money for you and themselves. When mentioning potential earnings, give a range that is truly attainable. A good approach is to list a range with the "from" being the income of one of your average performers and the "to" being the typical income of your top performer.

Fringe benefits.

Mention their availability without going into detail. It's one of the little things that can make a big difference.

Include the company name.

I don't recommend blind ads (ads without company names) for several reasons, including: (1) Some people are not comfortable responding to a blind ad. They're concerned they might be applying to their own company! (2) You want competitors' salespeople to see the ad in case any are looking for a change. (3) Your image in the marketplace may be enough to attract some good candidates.

Call for action.

Last, but not least, state what you want the applicant to do; i.e., e-mail resumés to, fax resumés to, no telephone calls, etc. If you don't want to be bombarded by personnel agencies, you may also want to state "no agencies please" in the ad (Fig. 1).

Sales Representative
Softair Footwear Inc

We are looking for an Account Executive to market our line of upscale footwear to specialty retailers in southwestern Ontario. The successful candidate will have a minimum of five years's sales experience and be familiar with the retail/wholesale footwear market.

Attractive, open-ended commission plan with draw, expenses and car allowance. Company-paid benefit plan.

No telephone calls please. Email your resume to barry@softair.com or fax to 613-555-1212.

We thank all applicants, however only those under consideration will be contacted.

Figure 1. Example of a typical ad.

NOTE: Some people will apply to any and every position advertised in the paper, so you may want to add the phrase: "We thank all applicants, however, only those under consideration will be contacted." This eliminates the need to send "thanks-but-no-thanks" letters in response to the resumés you receive.

Where you place your ad depends on where your job candidates are most likely to be looking. Advertisements for retail sales staff, trade sales, telemarketing positions, etc, can often be placed in the classified section. High-profile sales, professional products or services sales, high-paying sales positions, etc, are usually placed in the career or business section of the paper. Check with your local papers to see what days are popular for running employment ads.

Posting your opening on the Internet may get you a huge number of applicants but the quality may be lacking. The web makes it easy for the average person to apply for almost any position whether or not they are qualified. They just sit at home and send off a resume to any and every opportunity they can find. It's a type of selective spam that will clog up your hiring process if you let it.

You might also consider placing the opportunity on your own web site if appropriate. If someone has gotten to your web site and is also looking for a job, you may have a winner there.

> ***NOTE:*** Advertising isn't the only way to find job candidates. There are other sources you should consider which I'll mention later.

4. Screen initial responses.

Attach a checklist to each resumé to help you filter the responses. Using your mandatory criteria, weed out and eliminate applicants that don't meet the minimum qualifications. Once you have enough resumés that meet your mandatory requirements, sort them again, this time in accordance to the desirable criteria.

If all goes well, you will have three piles: (1) interview; (2) maybe interview, and; (3) interview if none of the others work out. If things aren't going well, you'll have a fourth pile titled "you've got to be kidding!"

> **Pre-screen by telephone. If you don't like the sound of the person on the telephone, chances are your customers won't either.**

5. Conduct initial interviews.

This is not the interview where you sell the company to the applicant. This initial interview is your second pass at eliminating candidates for the job. Use it to disqualify candidates as much as to qualify them.

It's important to use a series of standard questions for use at the interview. I got so discouraged at watching managers mishandle the interview process that I developed a sales interview questionnaire to help them stay on track. The form has 17 must-ask questions to be used at the first interview and an additional 17 for the second interview, if you get that far. In addition to helping the interviewer stay in control, the form instills a degree of consistency to the process.

Here are just a few of the questions. The reasons for asking the questions are in italics.

What types of things have you sold in the past?
- *Any similarity to our product/service?*
- *What product knowledge training is necessary?*

What sales training have you taken?
- *If none, how serious is he or she about a sales career?*
- *If yes, was it company-sponsored or did the applicant pay for it?*

What do you feel would be good methods of finding prospects for our type of product/service?
- *Does the applicant know our market?*
- *Does he or she exhibit some creativity?*
- *Does the applicant already have some prospects?*

What's the worst day you've ever had in your selling career? How did you deal with it?
- *How quickly does the applicant think under pressure?*
- *Was the situation handled in a reasonable manner?*
- *Did he or she salvage a bad situation or make it worse?*

So that you don't have to reinvent the interview wheel and develop your own questions, I've included a copy of our Sales Interview Questionnaire in the Appendix.

Be particularly aware of your first impression of the candidate. If the individual makes a good first impression on you, chances are he or she will do the same with your prospects.

Try to suspend judgment during this first interview. But if you find yourself really liking a candidate, try to discover why and make note of it. Do the same for those candidates you aren't too keen on. This will help you when you're developing your short list for second interviews.

NOTE: Here's an interviewing tip. Sometime during the interview, I like to ask a candidate if he or she is a reader. The response will usually be "yes." Then I ask, "What types of things do you like to read?" I don't really care what novels the person reads, although I've picked up a few good titles that way. What I'm looking for is whether or not the candidate reads trade journals or other material that pertains to the industry. The responses are often interesting. I know of computer salespeople who don't read any of the major trade magazines and car salespeople who don't bother keeping up on car reviews. If salespeople are not dedicated to their profession, how dedicated will they be to their jobs, your organization, and your clients?

At the end of the interview, explain to the candidate what will happen next. Tell him what will happen should you want to pursue the opportunity with him, and also tell him what will happen should you decide to go no further with the process.

You could say something like this, "Thanks for coming in today. If we want to pursue this any further, we will be in contact within 10 days to arrange a second interview. If, on the other hand, we decide not to pursue it, you will receive a letter from us within 10 days." A word of caution: Don't make any promises you can't keep.

I like to close the interview by commenting on one or two of the candidate's strengths that I noted during the interview. I want the person to leave the interview feeling good about himself as well as my organization.

NOTE: The initial interview is also a good time to test the applicant's knowledge of sales and selling. You can use a simple competency quiz such as the one included later in this report, or you can develop your own to suit your particular situation.

As a general rule, I allow 45-50 minutes for an initial interview but I'll cut it short if I think I've got a potential dud. If I've got several people to interview, I try to bunch them together with about 10-15 minutes between interviews. I use the time between interviews to make notes on the previous candidate and prepare myself for the next one. I like to review the person's resume before I sit down with him. This allows me to get my mind around the person and ask even better questions.

6. Develop a short list of candidates.

Review the results of the initial interview and eliminate those candidates who didn't make the grade. You may want to have everyone back for a second interview, particularly if you don't have a large number of candidates to choose from.

7. Conduct second interviews.

This is when you go more in-depth with the candidate. Once again, use a set of standard questions to get started, but let yourself explore other areas of interest as well.

You want to explore past performance in similar types of positions. Look for patterns of success. If the person doesn't have a successful track record, what makes you believe she will be successful now? Encourage the candidate to sell herself to you. If she can't sell herself, she'll have problems selling your product or service.

Here are some typical second interview questions:

- What is your standing among the salespeople in your current (or previous) company?
- How do you go about organizing a typical sales day?
- Do you call on all your customers with the same frequency?
- Do you think it's necessary to keep records on people you see regularly? Why?
- Do you plan how long each call should take? How accurate are your estimates?
- Do you prefer selling tangibles or intangibles? Why?
- What factors do you consider most important to successful selling? Why?

Another popular approach is to ask “situational” type questions, a sort of “What would you do if...” question. For example:

- Tell me how you would handle a customer who is angry about delivery delays.
- Tell me about your most difficult sale. What made it difficult and what did you do about it?
- Tell me about your most gratifying sale.
- Tell me about a time when you had to turn down a sales opportunity.
- Tell me about a time when you had a personality conflict with a prospect and what you did about it?
- Tell me about your worst job and what made it that way.
- Tell me about a time when you didn’t see eye to eye with your manager and what happened.

The point of the situation-type question is to give you insights into how the candidate will handle certain situations. They also allow you to uncover potential problems before you hire someone, not after.

To *save* time, you need to *spend* time to do your hiring right.

8. Check references.

You would be amazed at the number of companies that don’t bother to conduct reference checks. Avoid this step at your peril. I usually don’t bother to check the references included with the resumé unless they are immediate supervisors. An applicant is not going to give you the name of someone who isn’t going to give them a glowing reference. Instead, obtain the names of past supervisors and/or co-workers and ask the candidate for permission to call them.

NOTE: You might ask the candidate what these people are likely to say about him. This question can provide interesting insights.

Consider using a questionnaire during your telephone reference checks. It will help you stay on track and you won't miss any critical areas. Some typical telephone reference questions are:

- We're considering Sally for the position of (job title). How well suited do you feel she is for this type of position?
- On a scale of one to ten, how successful do you feel Sally was when she was with your firm?
- What do you consider to be Sally's greatest job-related strength?
- What's one area where you feel Sally could improve?"
- Given the opportunity, would you rehire Sally?
- What would be your best advice to me on how I could best manage Sally?

This may seem obvious, but don't call the candidate's current employer. However, do mention to the applicant that any offer of employment would be contingent on verification of current employment and suitable references. If the person is lying or seriously stretching the truth, he or she won't accept the terms.

When doing telephone reference checks, don't just listen to what is said. Listen to *how* it's said. With good performers, previous employers generally are enthusiastic and give very positive references. On the other hand, with poor performers they will usually volunteer only limited information.

When you're doing reference checks, you are primarily trying to avoid hiring a dud or a problem. Some people are hesitant to give references, good or bad, but particularly a bad one because of the prevailing laws regarding civil rights, etc. What happens is that they end up giving you cautious, generic job references that, in the final analysis, mean little or nothing.

Here is a technique that may work at ferreting out a potentially bad candidate from a reluctant reference. Call the reference after hours or on the weekend in order to get his voice mail. Leave a message explaining why you are calling and ask him to return your call only if the candidate in question was outstanding. You'll learn as much from the references who don't call as from those who do.

9. Rank and/or eliminate candidates.

Review the results of the two interviews and the reference checking and come up with your second short list.

10. Conduct third interviews.

If you haven't already done so, this is the time to bring an interested third party into the interview process. Let this person ask his or her favourite questions and don't worry if they're similar to the ones you asked previously. Listen to see if you're getting consistent answers.

Immediately after the interview, take time to compare impressions. It's important to do your comparisons immediately after each interview, not after you have completed several. It gets harder and harder to recall each candidate as the interviews go on.

Consider having some of the candidate's potential co-workers sit in on this interview. It gives them an opportunity to feel a part of the hiring process.

Beware of the dreaded halo effect. This is the tendency for interviewers to ignore potential problem areas because they like a candidate too much. The three-interview process will help minimize this situation.

11. Select final candidates.

Now it's time to make a decision and develop your final short list.

12. Conduct fourth interviews.

The fourth interview may actually be a series of interviews where the candidate meets with various key people within the organization. The fourth interview usually is reserved for senior or critical positions.

13. Make a job offer.

If you have successfully narrowed the field down to one candidate, then it's time to make an offer. If you still have two or three good candidates, offer the position to your first choice but DO NOT tell the other candidates that the job has been filled.

If your number one choice decides to decline the offer, you want to be able to make an offer to your next best candidate without making that person feel like he or she was your second choice. Your first choice may be just looking for a written job offer that he can take to his current employer in order to negotiate a raise.

After you have a signed acceptance, inform the other candidates the position has been filled. If you were filling a senior position, you may want to inform them personally. You want to leave a good impression with those who didn't get the position. Who knows, your number one choice may not work out and you want to be in a good position to reapproach your runners-up. And while I don't condone lying, consider telling each of your runners-up that he or she was number two for the position. It may be stretching the truth, but it leaves the candidates with a better sense of self-worth.

Your letter of offer should include something to the effect that your final acceptance will be dependent upon satisfactory references from the candidate's current employer.

NOTE: Make sure you check the current employer after you have given an offer of employment. If the company seems delighted that you've just hired away one of their key salespeople, watch out! Maybe the person isn't such a barn-burner as was implied during the hiring interviews.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE TESTING

With the cost of hiring a salesperson ranging from $1,000 to $10,000 or more, making the right hiring decision is critical. I have found that psychological profile tests can be a valuable tool in the decision-making process. This type of testing is in addition to, not a substitute for, a well-conceived and properly executed recruitment program. I would never hire or not hire anyone strictly on the basis of one of these tests. At best, the results will confirm your feeling that you have a winner and, at worst, the results will raise a red flag that has to be put to rest during the reference-checking process.

Example: For over 20 years, I've used a hiring tool that I developed called the *Sales Temperament Assessment* (STA). On a recent consulting assignment, I was interviewing a candidate that looked good, sounded good, and had all the right experience. The STA, however, indicated that the individual might have a low drive level and be more inclined to socialize than sell.

When I did the regular reference checks, I got glowing responses until I asked the question, "I have the impression that Mr. Salesperson may spend a bit too much time chatting with prospects instead of getting down to business. Is that the case?" The response was revealing. The person started with, "As a matter of fact, that's very observant of you" and then went on to confirm a number of things that the STA had spotted. I was able to elicit this information because the assessment allowed me to ask a very pointed question.

A common sales management mistake is thinking that there are good and bad salespeople when, in reality, there are just people with varying degrees of certain traits — some of which can be managed and some which cannot. Some of these traits are well suited to the sales profession and some are not. A tool such as the STA helps uncover these differences. You don't want to hire a square peg to fill a round hole.

The *Sales Temperament Assessment* is also useful for evaluating current sales staff. By testing your best performers, you can develop a profile for a successful salesperson in your business. In addition to helping you know what to look for during the hiring process, the assessment can be used to maximize strengths and minimize weaknesses of your current staff. (For information on the STA, visit SalesforceAssessments.com.)

COMPETENCY TESTING

As a sales manager, one of your responsibilities is to hire people who will get the job done properly. However, finding competent salespeople is easier said than done. There is no process in place to certify that a person is capable of performing as a salesperson. Even auto mechanics must take a four-year apprenticeship and join their trade with a certificate of competency. Not so with the selling profession. Anyone can claim to be a salesperson — and many do.

While there is no single secret to finding competent salespeople, here's an idea that will help you separate the wheat from the chaff during the hiring process and come up with potential winners.

If you were hiring an auto mechanic, you'd want to be sure that the person knew what the timing chain was for, the firing order of the engine, how to adjust the brakes, etc. In other words, you'd want to know the extent to which the auto mechanic understands the basics of his trade. The same applies when hiring a salesperson. You want to be sure that he or she knows the basics of selling.

Listed below are 10 questions you can ask to determine if you have someone who knows something about selling. Some salespeople will claim to know the answers to these questions, but when push comes to shove, they don't. That's why they often screw up more sales opportunities than they close.

Seasoned salespeople will have a reasonable answer for most of these questions. Their answers may not be exactly the same as mine, but they will make sense. "Wannabe" salespeople won't have a clue about most of them. Watch for the ones who believe that BS baffles brains and try to snow their way through the quiz. They will do the same with your customers.

I usually start this part of the interview by saying something like, "I'm going to ask a few questions to assess your knowledge of selling. You'll probably find that some of my questions are right out of Sales 101."

Ask the questions in a casual manner and allow reasonable latitude in the answers. Being close counts. Those people who have had sales training will recognize that most of these questions are pretty fundamental, while others who have not had any training may be completely stumped.

The questions are listed in order of difficulty. If you don't get reasonable answers to the first four or five easy questions, don't bother with the rest. It will be too painful to watch.

Mini Competency Test for Prospective Salespeople

1. What three things do you HAVE to know to qualify a prospect?
2. Give an example of two popular closing techniques.
3. Define a trial close.
4. What is the fastest way to get a prospect's favourable attention?
5. When you are describing your product or service to a prospect, what is the prospect listening for?
6. What is a "Unique Selling Proposition" and why is it important?
7. What is the main reason for the price objection?
8. What is the first thing you should do when you get an objection?
9. When are the four times that you can handle an objection?
10. When is an objection NOT an objection?

If a sales candidate can't answer at least half of these questions to your satisfaction, beware. You may be hiring a problem, not a solution. Answers to this test are in the Appendix.

If these questions don't suit your particular situation, consider making up your own mini competency test for your type of selling.

Role Playing

I'm not a big fan of asking the candidate to "sell" me something like a pen, glass or whatever. Most salespeople don't like role-playing at the best of times and a job interview is certainly not the best of times. The advantage of this approach is that it gives you an opportunity to see how fast the person can think on his feet. This puts a great deal of pressure on the other person and if he survives the ordeal, he probably deserves the job.

The disadvantage of this approach is that too often the interviewer doesn't really know what to watch for and if the candidate doesn't "sell" the way the interviewer "sells" the candidate fails the test.

Nevertheless, the "sell me" exercise can often give you interesting insights into how sharp a person is. I know of one situation where the salesperson was asked to "sell" the interviewer an ashtray. He began to extol the many benefits of the ashtray, one being that it was virtually unbreakable. At that point he demonstrated by dropping the ashtray on the floor where it shattered to pieces. The salesperson looked at the interviewer and said, "We need to tighten up on our quality control a bit." Now that's fast!

Role playing doesn't need to be elaborate or complicated. Two sample role play scenarios are included in the Appendix, along with a checklist and some ideas on how to do the dastardly deed. If the scenarios don't suit, simply make up your own.

The interesting thing about having a standard role play that you use consistently is that you get to know what to expect and his helps in the post-exercise evaluation.

The Audition

An extension of the role-play scenario is to do an audition. This is where the candidate is given some product information and asked to come to the next interview prepared to "sell" the product to the interviewer.

The advantages of this approach are that it gives the candidate time to properly prepare for the "sales call" and it gives the interviewer a better idea of the type of questions the salesperson uses to qualify a prospect (or to see if he qualifies at all).

The disadvantages of this approach are that you don't get an opportunity to see how fast the candidate is on his feet and it requires an additional meeting.

Hire for attitude and train for skill.

WHERE TO FIND GOOD CANDIDATES FOR THE JOB

As mentioned earlier, advertising isn't the only way to find suitable job candidates. There are other sources worth considering. Here are some possibilities:

In-house.

Earlier in this report I said, "If you want a salesperson, hire a salesperson…" Well, there is an exception to this rule. If the sales position in question is an entry-level one, you may have some ideal candidates right under your nose.

People within the organization know the company, are familiar with its products and services, and understand how you do business. Current customer or sales support people can often make an easy transition into the sales function. Service technicians or engineering staff usually have excellent product knowledge, and the person who has been typing up proposals may surprise you with his or her depth of knowledge.

Employee recommendations.

Your current salespeople and others within the company may have friends or neighbours who would be delighted to work for your firm. When people read an internal job posting, they don't always think beyond their own interests or needs. Make sure you ask the question, "Do you know a friend or neighbour who may be interested in this position?"

Some companies offer a financial or other reward to staff who recommend suitable new employees. You may want to make the reward system multi-tiered. For example, you might pay $20 for anyone who is recommended and makes it to the interview stage, an additional $50 if he or she gets hired and a further $100 if the new person is still on staff at the end of one year.

Former sales staff.

If you had someone in the past who was a performer but left for greener pastures, consider giving the individual a call. Sometimes the grass isn't always greener, but the person might feel embarrassed about approaching you. Even someone who was a marginal performer may be worth talking to again. Time and experience may have matured the individual.

Personal contacts with other sales managers or networking groups.

Talk with other non-competing sales managers. Ask if they've seen or interviewed any potential candidates that they could pass along to you. If you belong to any networking groups or breakfast clubs, make sure the members know you're looking for someone. Bring along copies of your employment ad or job description to leave with interested parties.

Competition.

Don't be afraid to approach a competitor's salesperson. The advantages of hiring one are:

- he knows the product or service
- he knows the territory
- he requires less training investment
- he comes up to speed quickly, and
- you weaken a competitor while strengthening yourself.

Two cautions:

(1) Be careful about starting a raiding war. You don't want your competitor to start raiding your staff. Make sure your people are content and loyal.

(2) Be careful when interviewing a competitor's salesperson. He may be there only to find out as much as possible about you and your

operation. Make sure you do the listening and he does the talking, not the other way around. Also watch to see how much talking the person does. Is he giving information about his present employer that you wouldn't want given out about you? Is he discreet?

If you want to approach a competitor's salesperson, it may be better to do it anonymously through a recruiting firm or neutral third party.

Customer recommendations.

Talk with some of your best customers. Who do they have calling on them now who have created a good impression? It doesn't have to be a competitor's salesperson, just someone who impresses your customer.

Recruitment agencies.

Agencies can be costly — 20 to 40 percent of the estimated first year's income — but they can save a lot of time. The good ones will take the time to understand your real needs and attempt to make a reasonable match between the candidate and those needs. The poor ones will simply send you a pile of resumés with the hope that something catches your eye.

If you decide to use an agency in addition to conducting your own search, make it clear to the agency that if you are approached by a candidate as a result of your own efforts and that candidate is subsequently recommended by the agency, you reserve the right to deal directly with the candidate and no agency commission will be paid. Put it in writing or expect a potential lawsuit. I recommend this approach even if you are using an agency exclusively.

If you use recruitment agencies, consider negotiating their fee, term, or guarantee. It's a tight, highly competitive marketplace and they want your business. Despite the danger of two or more agencies sending the same resumé to you, use more than one agency unless you're filling a high-level position and the agency is going to have to really work for its fee. Be sure to date-stamp all incoming resumés.

I feel that most agency guarantees are borderline useless. Most have a 90-day replacement guarantee but only if you pay the invoice within

30 days. If the person doesn't work out within 90 days, the agency will find you another body. Now think of it. The first body didn't turn out so why should the second (or third) shot at it be any better?

For most professional selling jobs, it takes a lot longer than 90 days to discover you have a loser. Winners, or top performers, usually surface quickly, often well within the 90 days. These people are rare, however. Most average performers take anywhere from six months to a year to reach their stride and come up to speed. By the time you decide the person isn't going to cut the mustard, the agency's guarantee period is long past. Unfortunately, during that time a poor choice can do a lot of damage.

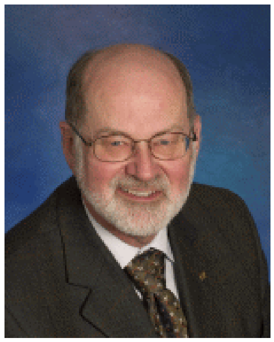
Your best guarantee is good hiring practices. Take the time to hire right. Tell the agency that you don't want its guarantee and negotiate a reduced fee. You can self-insure by conducting thorough interviews and reference checks.

FINAL THOUGHT

So there you have it — how to hire salespeople who can sell. It isn't an easy task, but it's a critical one. It's the one task that, if not done properly, will cause sales managers to get a copy of my ebook *How to Fire a Salesperson Without Getting Burned* — something that I hope you never have a need to read.

Remember, hiring mistakes can be very costly. Not only in lost sales, but in lost customers and lost customer goodwill — to say nothing about your lost time. Cut potential losses by hiring smart.

Good luck!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Jeffrey is a sales management consultant and former sales trainer with over 40 year's experience. He's the author of *The Sales Wizard's Secrets of Sales Management, The 5-Minute Sales trainer,* 18 ebooks, and over 100 articles on selling and sales management.

Brian provides sales management consulting, coaching, and mentoring to business owners and sales managers. He has had many sales successes (as well as a few spectacular failures) and has learned what works, what doesn't, and why — information he readily shares with others.

Find out how Brian helps companies maximize their sales at **www.Quintarra.com.**

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