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Best Practices For Recruiting a High Quality Sales Force

A SalesDrive, LLC Whitepaper

SALESDRIVE LLC



5 Steps to a Better Sales Hiring Process



Companies around the world have had to rein in expenses to remain competitive through recent economic turmoil. Due to sustained slow growth, some have cut costs as much as possible. Now they must grow through sales, but this is naturally a difficult and anxiety-ridden process.

A sales department is the engine that drives a company to success, but that means every part must be in operation at all times. When your company does not recruit its sales force in the right way, it will be forced to incur costs far greater than the salary paid to a single successful hire.

A delicate balance must be struck between efficiency and the need for in-depth information about candidates. Without suitable rigor or the proper skills for identifying the best candidates, you may move forward on applicants, only to find out later that they are a wrong fit for your sales team. Yet a time-intensive hiring process means leaving your sales team short-handed as it tries to cover the vacant position with current staffing levels.

Step 1: Identify the Right Candidates Early

Never allow your managers to make “gut” decisions when it comes to recruiting sales talent. Interviews are an important part of the hiring process, but not for assessing the innate skills that are crucial for long-term sales success.

With a comprehensive pre-interview applicant selection process, your company can dedicate the majority of its time to the candidates most likely to succeed in sales. This eliminates the opportunity to pass along those who may lack certain requisite abilities.



How to Screen Your Candidates Prior to the In-Person Interview

After reviewing resumes, it is helpful to include a 20-30 minute phone screen into your interview process to shed some light into the candidate’s personality and potential fit within the company.

Once you have completed the phone screen, have the remaining applicants take a specially developed online sales assessment. Well-developed sales assessments are essential tools for recruiters and hiring managers in filtering out those candidates who do not possess the inherent skills that make up a highly successful salesperson: *Need for Achievement*, *Competitiveness* and *Optimism*.

The few candidates who score high on the sales assessment have a much higher potential to help your company’s sales soar.

Step 2: Conduct Thoughtful, Yet Rigorous In-Person Interviews

The candidates that have performed well in the pre-interview process are now ready to be brought in to meet with your sales managers. An in-person interview can shed a lot of light on the potential of each candidate, such as culture fit, sales tactics used to close deals and how they might deal with rejection.

By training management in the industry-acknowledged best practices for recruiting and hiring sales staff, organizations can optimize the time spent during the hiring process. A comprehensive interview guide that clearly and concisely spells out how to conduct every interview and exact measurement criteria give the sales managers an objective basis for comparison.

All too often, managers may want to take an informal approach to interviewing. This generally leads to uneven interview quality, where time is not used effectively and different questions are asked to separate candidates.

Leading questions that provide easy answers for candidates are a common, but costly, mistake. It is always better for sales managers to speak as little as possible, so that candidates give answers without prompting. When they hit on key concepts and ideas, take note and proceed with the interview.

What to Look for During the Interview

Once you have your interview questions and strategy in mind, it is time to sit down face-to-face with the sales candidates. The Harvard Business School developed a list of the key characteristics¹ of successful salespeople that your team should look for during the interview:

- ❑ Can converse with strangers and overcome possible discomfort
- ❑ Responsibility for results, regardless of quality
- ❑ Self-guided, with exceptional control and willpower
- ❑ Highly empathetic with customers
- ❑ Focused on goals
- ❑ Flawless ethics and honesty
- ❑ The ambition needed to succeed and the Drive to get there
- ❑ Can take “no” for an answer, but does not let it slow down the pitch

Step 3: You Have to Train Them Properly



The onboarding process for recently hired salespeople is too often abbreviated or nonexistent. Belief in the myth of complete “on-the-job training” persists, despite much evidence and simple common sense that says it is a bad idea to throw a salesperson into a new environment without any support from management and expect success.

Letting newly hired salespeople “sink or swim” often brings terrible results. Most often they sink, and when they do, they go to other companies and tell the staff there that they were not given adequate resources. It is hard to recruit top talent with a reputation as a bad employer.

Further, high turnover often means your business will incur costs equivalent to as much as 150%ⁱⁱ of an employee’s compensation when recruiting and training replacements.

With careful attention during the onboarding process, a business can get the most out of new hires in the first 90 days. Provide new salespeople with a comprehensive look at every aspect of the business they are now a part of to really set them up for long-term success.

Good training provides numerous contexts for learning and applying skills. The reason sitcoms mock corporate training is because it is so frequently a meaningless and uninspiring process.

The last thing any sales company should do is force their new hires to sit through hours of lectures and projected slides. Invigorate them by incorporating role-playing, elevator pitches and other interactive lessons.

Give your new hire homework and frequently assess their skills throughout the training process. This refocuses them on the process and helps demonstrate forward progress.

A good training program sets clear expectations in addition to providing a foundation for success. Employees who are properly trained will understand the company they work for and how their work relates to overall company goals. Furthermore, they will have the clearest understanding possible of how their own performance will be assessed.

Step 4: Track Your Hiring Results

For many sales companies, the hiring process ends after the last training session, if there even is one. Workforces are made of evolving people that have different expectations and goals. So if your company fails to track the efficacy of its hiring practices, you will never truly understand what it takes to find the right salespeople.

Periodic evaluations during a probationary period and the first year of employment are opportunities for sales team members to form mentorship relationships with management. This is also a time to reset expectations and refocus on goals, since the first job of management is always to provide the right conditions for success.

A continually evolving hiring strategy is necessary to ensure that your company keeps up with the current trends that salespeople will be looking for. So many companies miss out on attractive employees due to unwillingness to address the needs of the modern workforce.

Step 5: Get It Right the First Time

The great innovations in hiring techniques and the increasing quality of sales aptitude tests for screening applicants means you can only focus on the best sales candidates. Without the waste and hassle of outmoded hiring processes, a business can turn back to growing and meeting the needs of its clientele.

Contemporary employees want greater support and resources from their employers. Managing staff in a high expectations environment like sales will only get harder in the future.

The best way to have a high-performing sales team is to find the right candidates in the first place. Carefully lay out criteria and standards of the position before the job is ever posted and have a thorough, strategically developed hiring process.



About SalesDrive, LLC

SalesDrive is the world's only sales assessment organization exclusively dedicated to helping companies in virtually every sector select and hire Driven salespeople.

Our online sales assessment leverages 80+ years of research in the personality traits of high-performing salespeople and is now used by more than 500 companies worldwide.



**600 W. Drummond Pl.
Suite 505
Chicago, IL 60614**



(866) 704-7205



<https://salesdrive.info>



Sources

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² J. Bruce Tracey, Ph.D., Timothy Hinkin, "Contextual Factors and Cost Profiles Associated with Employee Turnover" (Cornell Quarterly 2008), <http://cq.sagepub.com>