

C H A P T E R
5

RECRUITING, INTERVIEWING, AND HIRING THE VERY BEST

This chapter will guide you through the maze that ultimately leads to hiring the best candidate for the job. In this chapter you will see the process from finding sources for new recruits to the interview itself, extending the offer, and then signing on a new sales team member. In your own career, you have likely only been on the outside working your way in; here you will be on the inside looking out, identifying and incorporating new sales professionals to strengthen your current team.

ENHANCING YOUR CURRENT TEAM

You might think that in order to build the perfect sales force, you need to build your team from scratch. Unfortunately, you probably won't have that kind of luxury unless you work for a new business or a new sales unit within a larger one. The reality probably is that you already have a team in place and will need to enhance or adjust the current team. Firing the entire team is rarely an option, nor a good idea. Your recruiting realities may include a combination of hiring and firing; they may be done in a short time frame or in a longer, more gradual way. The good news is that while you might

be inheriting difficult personalities or marginal or low performers, you are likely also getting some very talented sales professionals. Whatever the case, what is best for your team from this time forward will vary based on many factors. The following are some of the core areas to consider:

- Existing competence level of team members
- Changes in business direction (introducing new products/services or expanding into new markets)
- Regulatory changes (possible need for a new skill set)
- Corporate mandate (due to increased or decreased budget)
- Corporate culture (how the sales force fits in with the overall corporation)
- Economy (recession or growth)
- Major industry changes (mergers, acquisitions, expansion, contraction, etc.)

Add to this list by thinking about the areas that affect your sales team and what might cause the need for minor shifts or broad changes in your current staff.

DEVELOPING SPECIFIC CRITERIA FOR THE SELECTION PROCESS

You have heard the advice to “think before you act.” When it comes to the recruiting process, this especially rings true. Too often sales managers post job descriptions based on the requirements of the position but then just select the candidate whom they feel they can get along with best. This is a selection based on emotion rather than reason. While it might have its place in your social life, you really need to remove the emotion and base your decision to hire someone on specific criteria that you have set up and that the candidate then meets.

Before searching for a candidate, managers must know whom they want for the position. A starting point would be to consider the characteristics best suited for the position, and how the person in the position needs to fit with the team.

In analyzing the territory, the sales manager must look at both functional skills and other requirements for the job. For example, the sales manager must consider the territory itself and the strengths

and weaknesses of the team as a whole. It is only by having goals and objectives and sticking to the plan that you will hire the right person for the job, and as a bonus, you will also avoid turnover, which is just as important due to all the costs in money and time associated with hiring and training.

Some core questions to ask are:

- Is this a new territory?
- If so, is it similar to any other territory?
- Is the territory open due to either turnover, termination, or promotion?
- What worked with the person who represented the territory?
- What areas need improvement?
- What personality styles would best fit this territory?
- Will it require a significant amount of prospecting or will it require more servicing and relationship building?
- What technical expertise, if any, is required?
- Is this an isolated territory where the salesperson needs to be an independent self-starter?
- Is this a territory that requires teamwork?
- Has the candidate already offset any potential weakness?
- What training will be necessary (immediate and long-term)?

By proper planning, these and other questions can be addressed early on in the recruiting process. Sales managers with no plan usually make the mistake of hiring in their own image. This is only successful when it matches what is needed for the territory. So odds are that you are not getting the right candidate when you hire in this fashion.

One way to help you with this is to make a list of your specific criteria. Once you have this, it is critical to stick to it (assuming no major changes in the sales environment are taking place). Of course, you will never find someone who fits every single criterion to perfection. One way to help keep you on track is to rank criteria and to correctly weight the categories.

For example, if you are looking for someone who has specific technical knowledge, you can rank each candidate (1-10, with 1 being very weak and 10 being very strong). You could then give a

weight to technical knowledge (for example, 3) whereby it is 3 times as important as something with a weight of 1.

You would end up with something like this for a candidate:

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Rank (1–10)</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>Weight (1–3)</i>	<i>=</i>	<i>Total</i>
Ability to Read Financial Statements	7		2		14
Ease at Cold Calling	8		3		24
Industry Contacts	6		3		18
Total:					56

This means that candidate X got a ranking of a 7 (out of a total of 10) for her ability to read financial statements, a job requirement. Of a total of 3, it is considered a 2 (of medium importance). When you run the numbers, you get a total of 56 for candidate X. Then you can see how she stacks up against the other candidates. We will look at the interview process more in a moment.

You will also notice that this criteria fits in nicely with the sales skills model (technical knowledge, business acumen, communication skills, market experience). This ties in to the fact that the exceptional salesperson is what you inherited, are training someone toward, and/or are looking to bring on board.

In fact, those companies that excel at hiring today are more and more hiring to plan. So if a candidate does not have X years' experience doing Y, then he would not be a strong candidate. While this may seem overly stringent and could keep some potentially strong applicants, it helps you to maintain focus and hopefully bring to the top of the list those with the highest degree of matching skills and background, thus lowering the burden on training, coaching, and other areas. At the same time, remember that in most cases you are legally required to allow anyone interested the chance to apply, and always be sure that each candidate is properly and fairly considered.

Before getting the posting out into the marketplace for candidates to see, the sales manager needs to take the time to ensure that she is familiar with all of the key elements of the position. Ideally you should have some part in writing the job description. Fortunately this serves you as a sales manager as well as the candidate, because the job description sets the stage for many things, including delegating, motivating, and counseling, among other areas.

Below are some of the questions you should be asking to ensure an accurate job description that will be useful in the interview itself.

Education and Experience

What formal skills and knowledge are needed to function well in this job?

Why are these skills and sets of knowledge important?

Could someone without these skills do the job well?

Are there parallel skills that would substitute for what is listed?

Do the requirements coincide with the job description?

Are the requirements fair to all applicants?

What is most important of all of them?

Reporting Relationships

Where is the position on the organizational chart?

Who will the candidate report to, and will the candidate supervise anyone?

What compatibility is needed?

Are there also informal or dotted-line reporting relationships?

Work Environment

What will the working conditions be?

Is this job permanent? Will the description be changing soon?

Is there travel involved? How often? What is the duration?

Are there specific work hours? Do they rotate? Is there regular overtime?

Salary

What is the starting salary? Any flexibility or room for negotiation?

What is the commission structure? Is there a bonus plan? Merit versus across-the-board increases?

When is the salary review period? Are there opportunities for raises before the standard review?

Benefits

Is there health insurance, life insurance, dental insurance, auto insurance, etc.?

Is there a profit sharing, 401(k), retirement, or pension plan?

What is the vacation, holiday, sick day, and long- /short-term disability policy?

Do we offer specific training or other education programs as well as tuition reimbursement?

Growth Opportunities

What is the company policy on promotions, and are there inter-departmental promotions and/or lateral transfers?

Can a promotion be turned down? Will that impact future offers?

Special Requirements

What else is expected and/or provided—for example, company car, tools, uniforms, dress code?

Behavioral Analysis

What communication style did the previous person to hold this position exhibit? What were the strengths and weaknesses?

What type of communication style would work best for the opening? with the territory? with the existing sales team?

What are the probable strengths associated with this pattern?

Will this pattern help compensate and/or offset any weaknesses on the team?

Internal Motivators

What is the ideal internal motivator for a person in this job?

What is a secondary motivator?

What are the internal motivators of others on the team?

Will they be compatible and/or complement one another?

Of course, the job posting will not need all the answers to these questions, only those most pertinent to the job. Think of them as

the need to know versus the nice to know. For example, if travel is a large percentage of the time and requires a car (that the company will not provide), then this should be stipulated in order to be able to focus on the appropriate candidates. After all, omitting pertinent facts or responsibilities on the job description, while not always purposeful or misleading, could prove to be a waste of the candidates' time as well as yours.

OPTIMAL SOURCES FOR RECRUITING

The recruiting process is an ongoing effort and responsibility of most sales managers. Though a corporate structure may be in place vis-à-vis human resources to generate candidates and to conduct the initial screening, being aware of exceptional people is part of a manager's ongoing function. Successful sales managers will take a proactive stance when recruiting to support the larger corporate effort. That being said, there is no greater misuse of time than sorting through pages of unqualified candidates because the initial screens were not in place. Hopefully you have a human resources department that can help with this process. Either way, there should be some involvement on your part, so having a plan and maintaining the discipline to stick to it will be up to you.

Below are some of the major sources to consider for recruiting.

- Campus recruiting
- Contingent staff
- On-line job sites
- Company Web site
- Job fairs
- Newspaper ads
- Recruiting firms
- Trade associations and magazines
- Referrals by company employees
- Internal candidates

Campus Recruiting

The advantage of campus recruiting is that the candidate pool is wide and enthusiastic. A great opportunity exists to hire potential winners at entry-level salaries.

The disadvantage is the risk of early turnover because the candidate cannot do the job or discovers that the job is not what they anticipated.

Maximizing Campus Recruiting

- *The Internet.* Many online job sites provide a specific category for posting jobs for college students or recent graduates. Here you can fine-tune your search and post a position only with the schools you preselect. Also, you do not have to spend the time going from campus to campus posting a position, as it can be disseminated centrally to all the chosen schools via the site. It may also be a good idea to go directly to some of these schools, as they sometimes have a specific area where they post opportunities.

- *CD-ROM Presentations.* Most all campuses give students access to computers for job searches. A CD will give the candidate an overview of the company history, products, services, work environment, and frequently asked questions. CDs are excellent substitutes for the expense of a campus visit.

- *Video Conferencing.* Certain campuses today have facilities to interview candidates through closed-circuit video. The advantages are time and money savings, that several managers can observe the interview, and that the interview can be taped (with permission) for managers in remote locations to observe. One disadvantage is a lack of the human element. Students report being uneasy about the scrutiny on camera and feel anxious about being taped.

Contingent Staff

Certain staffing firms specialize in contingent staff or employees who work on temporary assignment. They are similar to more traditional temporary (temp) agencies, except that the candidate profile is often more specialized. Lawyers, teachers, accountants, and specialized consultants are a few examples. The employee works for the staffing firm, not your company.

This type of firm may also provide a complete sales force for special one-off projects. A company will use this option when adjusting for seasonal trends, national launches of products, trade shows, or spikes in business. The advantage is that there is no need to hire people and get them registered for employee benefits when

it is a short-term project. Companies turn to such outsourced workers to control the ebb and flow without the hassle and expense.

The major disadvantage when working with contingent staff is training. Although the jobs that fall into this category might not require significant job training, there is likely still certain procedural and product training. Lack of employee loyalty can also be an issue. As you will see later in Chapter 6, the motivation level of different types of sales staff can vary, and it is up to management to come up with a plan to address all types of employees.

Maximizing Contingent Staff

It is important that the staffing firm's representative(s) understand as much as possible about your company's business and customers.

It is necessary to provide honest estimates as to the length of the employment or assignment. A sudden or abrupt cutoff can cause significant morale problems.

Make advanced arrangements with the firm for potential hire of a contingent worker. If someone is compatible and a full-time position opens, "stealing" the firm's employee could cause ethical and/or even legal issues. Waiting until the opportunity arises is never the best approach, as it limits options and can only cause more problems.

Online Job Sites

This is where the "volume" of résumés comes from today. Limitless sites are available to advertise job openings. HotJobs.com, Monster.com, and Careerbuilder.com are some of the major ones, but they only scratch the surface of what could be out there for you to take advantage of in your industry and/or job function. Many industries have specific online job sites (i.e., those that specialize in financial services, the entertainment industry, etc.). Glocap.com is one example of a site that offers jobs with a special emphasis on the financial services industry. You are probably already familiar with those that are in your industry and just need to decide where is the best place to expend your time and money. There is also an array of job Web sites that are based on functional areas (e.g., specific for marketers, human resources professionals, project managers, accountants, etc.). SalesLadder™ (sales.theladders.com) is a job site that specializes in opportunities for high-level salespeople as well as sales executives.

Advantages

- The cost is low.
- The cost for job seekers is typically nothing, or a very low cost. A job seeker can send out an infinite number of résumés.
- Job postings are easily categorized. This is convenient for the recruiting company and the candidate.
- Electronic transfer eliminates the waiting time for a response to a newspaper ad via regular mail.
- Paperwork is dramatically reduced. Many government agencies require that companies hold résumés for a certain period of time. Storage of paperless résumés is obviously more convenient.
- The target market is extraordinarily large.
- On these sites you can take one of two approaches. You can either post a job, then see who responds, or search for candidates yourself, selecting your own determined criteria and then browsing through résumés that are posted.

Disadvantages

- While almost everyone in the workforce today works to some extent on a computer, it is possible that a great candidate does not feel comfortable searching for hours through Web sites applying for positions of interest.
- A disproportionate number of unqualified candidates respond due to the ease of résumé submission. A job posting can get hundreds of responses.
- There is typically a cost to companies to post positions and to search for candidates (this can vary greatly from service to service).

Company Web Site

Companies that utilize their own Web site and include a job opportunity section can dramatically increase their chances to find qualified and motivated candidates.

Also, you can utilize your own Web site as well as linking your career opportunities page to online job sites, getting both those who seek you out directly and those who do not. The great thing about having jobs located on your Web site is that candidates that already

have an interest in your company have direct access to apply for any open positions. They can also readily search your site for more information, company background, etc.

It is likely that your human resources department will have certain information to provide and also that needs to be filled in for all candidates. It is a great way to keep track of them and maintain the information for future reference (e.g., should a more appropriate position become available). Some of the information typically requested is about the candidates' educational background, current and former employers, references, salary history, special skills, and so on.

Maximizing Company Web Sites

- *Make searching for jobs easy.* An “employment” button in a prominent place on the home page should be available. Offer a résumé builder or a form that is compatible with the database management system.

- *Make the site navigable.* Speed and easy access are crucial. Slow loads and dead ends are frustrating and will lose even an experienced browser.

- *Respond quickly to the applicant.* A confirmation of receipt, a rejection due to lack of qualifications, or a “next step” response should happen right away.

- *Continually update the Web page.* Leaving already filled jobs online creates a series of unnecessary problems.

- *Screen out unqualified applicants.* Utilize a candidate profiler so that you can automatically help to identify those candidates who most closely match the criteria.

Job Fairs

One of the most proactive methods of recruiting is the use of job fairs. Companies can interview numerous candidates over the course of a few days. Generally the candidates are specialized and motivated.

Often, companies sponsor their own job fairs. Most companies participate in fairs hosted by others. In this case the company pays a flat fee to participate. Job fairs are often sponsored by colleges and universities.

Maximizing Job Fairs

Limit the time with each candidate. The objective is to use the fair for screening interviews as opposed to hiring interviews. Limiting time allows the recruiter to see more people.

When applicable, have full job descriptions made available. If you have set up a schedule to meet with people (in advance or on-site), be sure to stick to it. This demonstrates professionalism to the candidate, and a follow-up can always be scheduled if a mutual interest is evident.

Newspaper Ads

The main advantage of a newspaper ad is that it can get a fast and large response. But a newspaper ad can be expensive and, depending on the state of the economy, could elicit varying results. For certain positions they are more useful. But, for highly technical jobs they are not usually the best resource. Blind ads, ads where the company name is absent, generally generate the poorest results.

Maximizing Newspaper Ads (Advertising Costs)

- Use a headline to get the job-hunter's attention.
- Select a prime location for the ad.
- Use graphics where possible.
- Allow for "white space" in the ad so that it is not too cluttered.
- Display the company logo.
- Use color if the newspaper provides that service.
- Put in enough information to dissuade the unqualified candidate and to stimulate the interest of the qualified candidates. The main categories are duties, responsibilities, and requirements.

Recruiting Firms, Employment Agencies, and Search Firms

The main advantage of using an outside firm is the ability to fill a position quickly and from a labor pool that would otherwise be inaccessible. They can also provide a service for which your company does not have the internal resources to adequately handle. Costs can vary depending if they are on retainer (retained search firm), or they are paid on a commission by the employer when the

right candidate is located (contingency search firm). Retained firms generally work with an exclusive agreement, whereas employers often use more than one contingent firm. Some companies choose to work almost entirely with outside firms like this, and others use a mix of their own hiring function complemented with one or more of these additional resources.

Maximizing Recruiting Firms

Develop explicit guidelines for the job requirements. The recruiting firm can screen to very specific criteria or be more open to exceptions based on your guidance.

A long-term relationship with a recruiting firm allows the firm to get a good understanding of the company operations and environment.

Invite agency representatives to tour the company facility and meet people from different departments.

Note: Retained firms are generally used to fill higher-level positions or more intricate roles that require more research, which a contingent firm would not have the time and resources to handle.

Trade Associations and Magazines

You are likely already familiar with the publications and associations that relate to your industry. Sometimes the field is very specialized, and other times it is a very broad community made up of buyers, sellers, vendors, dealers, and so on. Assuming you have a relevant association for your industry it is always a good idea to stay involved with it.

An association should be able to provide you with insights into what is happening in the field and can serve as a resource for finding talent. In fact, many associations are starting to have their own online job resource centers. The National Automated Merchandising Association (NAMA) is one example of a resource that serves the vending, coffee service, and food service industries.

Trade publications fit into this category as well, and many have either a print and/or online version of their magazine with a career section. *The Hollywood Reporter*, serving the entertainment industry, is an example of this. Other magazine resources are *Selling Power* and *Sales and Marketing Management*. Both serve the sales professional and have online resources as well.

Referrals by Company Employees

Employee referral programs are used to recruit prime employees. The program can have the added benefit of boosting morale and increasing employee loyalty, as employees feel their suggestions are valued by the organization. In fact, many firms go as far as offering a reward or monetary compensation for referring an employee who is ultimately hired. Typically the new hire must stay for at least a prespecified amount of time (e.g., three months) before the compensation can be paid.

The sales force itself is one great place to get referrals, but this could also include those in other departments as well. A salesperson who makes a referral is in the unique position of actually knowing the positives and negatives of working in the sales department. The main challenge with employee referrals is that it can be awkward if you do not hire that person. Not to worry, though; most people understand if the referral does not pan out. If you stick to your criteria, the right candidates will rise to the top of the list.

Internal Candidates

The potential for internal candidates is of course dependent on the type of sales position and whether or not there are well-qualified candidates in other sales roles looking to make the change or other department members looking to get into sales. However, it is also a corporate culture question. Does your company prefer to promote or reassign from within or does it more often than not look to the outside? If the latter is true, you might want to challenge this policy. It is usually a smart idea, not to mention a morale booster for employees in general, to know that additional opportunities are available within the company should their current position not be optimal for them. Your company will likely have requirements around timing for how to post jobs both internally and externally in order to accommodate corporate strategy and the law.

That said, depending on whether you are looking for a high-level sales representative for national or key account sales or just someone eager to hit the pavement selling, your strategy for recruiting will vary greatly. For example, in some instances the person might need to be so specialized that you have only one or two places to really look for solid candidates. At other times you can utilize a broad mix of resources for new candidates.

A note about posting the salary range: This is often a sticky point for many companies. You will find examples of both out there. If industry and title in that industry already dictate a range, then it is not necessary to post but still an option. Also, your company might not want to invite attention to what you are paying for everyone to see, including competitors, vendors to your industry, customers, and other stakeholders. Also, if the range may vary dramatically based on experience, then you might opt to leave it out. Furthermore, your company might have a policy about this, or the requirement to post or not may be governed by law.

In the absence of these situations or mandates, you might want to consider including the salary range. Furthermore, you can also identify the base and potential commission. This could help either attract or reduce the amount of inappropriate candidates. After all, it is tough enough narrowing down the search already, so why add one more challenge to the process?

If you do choose to include salary information, be sure to be accurate in your wording, so as not to mislead. Also, make sure you have some standards in place as to what you mean by *experience*. There is also the question of whether or not you ask for the salary history from the candidate right away. If you do post the salary and choose to ask for their salary requirements up front, you will likely find candidates who state that based on their experience they are entertaining positions in a specific range (this will more often than not be on the high side, if not slightly above your range). If you do not post the salary range yet still ask for their salary requirements, you will at least be able to match this with the reality of the job. There is no exact science to this, as human nature often has both parties trying to maximize their negotiating position. Always remember to be as fair, up-front, and consistent as possible, and everyone will benefit in the end.

THE NUMBER ONE RULE IN RECRUITING: CONSTANTLY RECRUIT

Managers should not rely on knee-jerk reactions to fill an unexpected vacancy. Good managers already have a list of people in their database to call. These may be people they have met on a plane, on a train, or through a casual conversation. You might have found their background and experience to be well suited, but there were no openings at the time. They may not be interested in your posi-

tion for themselves, but there is a chance they know someone of equal caliber who does. These can be some of the best referrals you will receive.

Also, when networking at industry events like conference and trade shows, make a mental note of anyone who is visible and impresses you. You may hear a speaker in your industry who possesses great public-speaking skills, something that is part of your criteria. You might wish to either approach her at the event or follow up with her afterward. At the same time, keep in mind any noncompetes she may have or other legal/ethical considerations if she works in the same or a related industry.

ENSURING A POSITIVE INTERVIEW PROCESS

A well-run interview benefits everyone involved—you, the candidates, your team, the organization, and the customer. The number of highly qualified recruits will only increase if your company has a good reputation, as you find more and more candidates will be seeking out your organization as their desired place to work.

Reviewing the Résumé

Depending on your human resources department, you may or may not have an active role in the selection of candidates. If you are a part of the first screen phone interview in conjunction with human resources, you will likely eliminate certain candidates even before the actual interview. In either case, reviewing the résumé prior to both the first screen and actual interview is very important. The review might just be a refresher to the candidate's background and qualifications or it can help you to prepare for questions to ask during the interview.

In a way, résumés are like a sales pitch sheet on behalf of the applicant. It is important that you take them very seriously. Someone who cannot sell himself well on a résumé has a lesser chance of stellar selling for your company. That said, be careful not to judge certain nonessential elements of the résumé. For example, style and layout will vary from applicant to applicant, so don't think there is one best approach.

When screening résumés, you will certainly find red flags. These will not necessarily rule out a candidate but can cause some concern

or at least trigger the need to question. The following is a basic list of what to look for in a résumé:

- Overall appearance
- Typos or unprofessional use of language
- Blanks or omissions (e.g., missing dates or education information)
- Gaps or overlaps in time
- Frequency of job changes
- Job titles and responsibilities (lack of progression)
- Consistency or inconsistency between career experiences
- Vague job description

Again, it is common that either you, your human resources department, or both conduct an initial screening interview by phone. This is typically not the time for in-depth interview questions.

The purpose of the telephone screening interview is typically to:

- Determine if the candidate's qualifications match job requirements.
- Establish the interest level of the candidate.
- Set up a face-to-face interview.

If it is determined that an in-person interview is warranted, this is where your more elaborate preparation and interviewing skills will be required.

Conducting the In-Person Interview

There are typically three parts to interviewing: finding out about the person and how they react to certain situations; going over their background (as it relates to the position); and making the offer. All three parts could be handled in the same interview; however, this is rare. For example, with higher-visibility positions, the interview process will more likely require several meetings and could spread out over days, weeks, or even months. Also, depending on the position, it could require that anywhere from one to numerous people in the company meet with the candidate to give their feedback and/or approval. Of course, this could be for a new sales position or an

existing one where the territory has been left open and the customer could suffer, so timing and urgency may vary.

The interview is not just a method of hiring; it's an important tool that managers utilize to build an effective organization. It also further establishes the corporate image.

The first part, finding out about the person, is probably the most important. It allows sales managers the opportunity to learn about the individual in terms of judgment calls, internal motivators, and her behavioral style.

Interview Styles to Avoid

- *Sticking to the Résumé and Nothing Else.* Typically, an interviewer will take the application or résumé and start asking questions that relate to that information. The applicant then repeats the same information on the résumé, and the interviewer discovers that the interviewee knows or seems to convey only what relates to the application. This offers a 180-degree understanding of the candidate at best.

- *Giving Away All of the Answers.* Another style that managers often use is to first describe the intricacies of the position, the work environment, and the corporate/department culture to the applicant. However, in this case, the interviewee will likely pick up on what the interviewer expects him to match up to, and will then try and become that person. Then the manager is surprised to later find that the person she hired is quite different from the person she envisioned, and his performance is not at all what she expected.

- *Boring and Canned Interviewing Questions.* You have likely heard of questions like these:

Can you tell me a little about yourself?

If you came to work for us, what assets would you bring to our organization?

What is a weakness that you have that you would like to change?

While these questions will elicit some helpful information, they are not going to get to some of the nuances and potential concerns, nor will they necessarily help you get to the behaviors you are looking for in the ideal candidate.

This is where the idea of “behavioral interviewing” comes to be so important.

The premise behind this style of interviewing is that past performance in similar situations is the most common predictor of future performance. Behavioral interviewing is a way to delve deeper into the candidate’s decision-making process. The style of questions probes in a way to elicit a far greater amount of useful information than a traditional interview would. Not only is it important to become better at this approach, but keep in mind that many candidates have likely practiced this as well. The good news is that it is difficult for the interviewee to practice, and if an interviewer uses this approach correctly, no amount of practice can help certain weaknesses or areas of concern from coming to the forefront.

Below are sample behavioral interviewing questions. They should, of course, be modified for your organization, but they will give you a very good idea of the types of questions that you should be looking to use.

- Tell me about a situation when you had to sell an idea internally to your coworkers.
- Describe a time when you disagreed with your boss and how you handled the situation.
- Tell me about a time when you had to think creatively in order to get a job done.
- Tell me about a time when you were overloaded with responsibilities and how you prioritized the work.
- Describe a situation when you tried to achieve something and it failed.
- Tell me about a time when you had to conform to a corporate policy that you did not agree with.

It is also beneficial to relate some interviewing questions to the criteria you are seeking in an exceptional sales professional (one who possesses strong technical knowledge, communication skills, business acumen, and market experience). For example, you can try and gauge the interviewee’s communication skills through questions such as:

- Tell me about a time when you had to make a presentation to multiple buyers.

- Describe a time when you had an objection from the buyer and you found it to be unreasonable.

The other key to this interviewing technique is to utilize the information you received to probe even further. For example, if the question is, “Describe a time when you tried to achieve something and it failed,” and the candidate says that her boss was a roadblock to achieving the goal, you could ask why, how, and so on.

As mentioned, though candidates might have had some training in answering these types of questions, the main benefit to this technique is that it is very difficult to practice. Questions are unpredictable in nature, so the answers are difficult to have prepared. That said, you will find that some candidates attempt to use a similar answer to different questions because it is within their comfort level. Here is where having a list of questions in different categories will be helpful.

One other category of questions that is very important is motivational questions. While the overall style of behavioral interviewing will lend itself to identifying what motivates a sales candidate, there are certain more specific questions you could ask as well. The following are some examples:

Tell me about a situation when you outperformed your peers.

Describe a time when you were able to make a difference within your company.

Here you will find out how important pure monetary compensation is versus status, public recognition, or other motivators.

Some additional considerations to be aware of and practice (or avoid) during the interview are:

- *Make sure the environment is very professional and not distracting.* There has been some debate over the type of environment in which to best conduct an interview. Some have even suggested trying to catch the candidate off guard by using tricky tactics like making an interviewee uncomfortable. While some useful information could come of this, it is not recommended. The interviewer should try his best to set a favorable environment for the interviewing process. There is no need to create any unnecessary stress or uneasiness on the part of the interviewee.

Also, by acting professional, you enhance your own as well as your company's reputation.

- *Don't react too quickly.* The answers that the interviewee gives may not be the same answers that you would give to the questions. However, that does not make the applicant wrong—it makes her different from you. That difference may be exactly what you need to offset a weakness that you may have and to fill a gap on your current team or a particular territory. Remember, you are trying to hire based on the preestablished criteria. You are not looking for your mirror image; falling into that trap almost always backfires.

- *Avoid prejudging or stereotyping.* Similarly, trying to categorize or lump people together too early is a surefire way to damage the integrity of the process. For example, because applicant A is neatly dressed and well groomed, it cannot be concluded that this person is a detail-oriented, careful worker. Similarly, because applicant B is a football star, we cannot conclude that he is aggressive or competitive in a work setting. In both cases, more information is needed in order to reach such conclusions. Again, sticking to the plan is what will help you get past any preconceived notions you may have. You will find that you will often be way off base and pleasantly surprised by taking the more disciplined approach.

- *Always seek sufficient information.* Frequently, interviewers reach conclusions about people's abilities based on insufficient or invalid information. For example, many managers make false assumptions related to the interviewee's current salary. At first it might appear that the candidate is earning 15 percent more than the company is willing to pay. The candidate, however, may be paying personally for benefits that your company would be covering. Conversely, the candidate might be earning a significant percentage less than you are willing to pay. In this case, many hiring professionals might discredit this person or value them less. Keep in mind that while salary history and current compensation have some weight as to an applicant's current market potential, it is not necessarily an accurate indicator of future success. In fact, a candidate might possess all of the qualities you are looking for and is in looking to move out of his industry into yours specifically for this reason, to increase his earning potential.

- *The interviewee should do most of the talking.* This is perhaps the most frequent interviewing error. When the interviewer does most

or even half of the talking, the interviewer cannot be effective in gathering pertinent information, observing the interviewee, and truly learning about them. Otherwise, as the majority of people who lack sound interviewing skills find, there will not be enough information to draw valid conclusions and then not enough time to accurately interpret and evaluate the candidate. You will then feel pressured and make impulsive decisions.

Keep in mind that this is similar to the “discovery” or “needs assessment stage” in the sales process, where you should be listening a great deal more than speaking. This still requires discipline because many people have a tendency to comment on every response and then go off on a tangent from there.

You can counteract the tendency to talk too much simply by asking a great deal more open versus closed-ended questions. This should automatically get the interviewee to do most of the talking. Also, as you saw in the behavioral interviewing examples, you will get more information out of open-ended questions.

The Résumé Has Its Limitations

While having a list of questions to begin a dialogue is important, reading directly from it is very limiting. In fact, you will likely skip right over important need-to-know information or other clues or red flags that you should have picked up on.

Furthermore, by asking too many questions directly relating to the résumé you are getting a minimal amount of new information and likely playing right into the strengths of the candidate. After all, he wrote or worked with someone to write it in that way. Furthermore, it tells the interviewee that you have not done your homework and are not interviewing based on a plan.

So while you might have specific questions that you must ask based on corporate policy or the résumé at hand, don't get so caught up in routine that you forget the true goal: to find the best candidate for the job.

Avoid “Leading” the Candidate

It doesn't take the smartest of candidates to realize that you are looking for a certain response. Asking a question like “Tell me about a time when something was really going wrong with a sales call and how you handled it” is fine; however, if you continue with

the question by saying: “And did you need to think out of the box to handle it?” you are giving up the right answer.

To further clarify, in the first instance, you will be able to determine how organized the candidates are and what they consider to be most important, and you will likely get responses that go well beyond what is provided on the résumé. In the second example, the interviewer has in essence told the interviewee to discuss a certain topic (in this case out-of-the-box thinking) that may be important to the interviewer but not necessarily a strength of the candidate. However, now the candidate knows to make it a priority. Remember, you are trying to hire a sharp salesperson, yet the irony is that almost anyone can catch on to this.

Rushing the Final Decision

Of course, the opposite holds true with. You might have the urge to immediately dismiss someone you feel is different from you. This is something of great concern. For example, it might be something as simple as someone who worked in a certain industry or for a certain company that you were not very fond of, and for that reason you are more apt to discredit the candidate. However, at the far end of the spectrum, this practice is either subconscious or overt bias or discrimination. I do not have to tell you here how wrong this is, morally, and it is very possibly illegal as well.

On the other hand, you might find that the interviewee has something in her background that you really appreciate or can identify with, and this seems to resonate with you even before you have gone through the full interview process. This is a tendency that must be brought to a conscious level and guarded against. There are many examples of interviewers saying, “I liked this guy the instant I met him. I think we should hire him.” Odds are, their behavior patterns were exactly the same. People like people who are similar to themselves. This is where the expression “hiring in one’s own image” comes from. Another example is when the job vacancy might just seem so important to fill that you feel pressured to move quickly. Remember: A hasty decision is rarely a good one.

Rather, we must continually remind ourselves that effective personnel selection is in the best interest of both the applicant and the company. In fact, harm can be done both to the individual and the company when an unqualified person is hired and set up for

failure. It is simply not in the best interest of anyone involved to place someone in a position for which they are poorly suited and that will ultimately end in failure.

The purpose of this part of the interview is twofold:

1. To observe obvious discrepancies in the candidate's image or personality, according to the intended plan and criteria.
2. To determine what areas might be needed in order to further train, develop, and motivate the individual once hired.

Unless there is an obvious mismatch, managers should, at this point, avoid either hiring or not hiring.

The other area to explore relates to specifics about the individual in terms of work, school, and any other pertinent information that could relate to the position. Here you can use the résumé or application to ask about certain specifics, for example:

1. Clarify those "red flags": gaps between jobs, horizontal moves, several moves, major salary changes, etc.
2. Clarify positions held: job description, duties, accomplishments, etc.
3. Some useful questions to ask that relate to his job (if currently employed) are:
 - What do you like about your job?
 - What do you dislike about your job?
 - In what areas do you know you excel and how?
 - What is the greatest challenge for you, and how do you try and overcome it?
 - How do you think your coworkers would describe you?

Answers to these questions could further help to expose the concerns, strengths, weaknesses, and motivational factors of that individual.

Of course, while a candidate should feel comfortable asking a question at any time, it is at this stage that you would more formally solicit questions from the interviewee. Keep in mind that her list of questions might very well shed even more light on her. For example, an interviewee might ask questions such as:

Does the company have and contribute to the employees' 401(k) plan?

How many vacation days are there in the first year?

Is there opportunity to move to other departments within the organization?

These questions might demonstrate to you a candidate's additional concerns or motivators, and, at the same time, could either strengthen or weaken your interest in her as the right fit for the job, assuming her questions go counter to the objective criteria you have in place for the position.

After answering any questions and finding that there is still mutual interest by both parties, you will move on to the next area of the interview. Here is where the candidate will likely want to know what the company really has to offer him and if this is a place he could see himself working. Not at any time should you embellish or try to overglorify the job. The object is to reiterate the mutual benefit of the position for both the candidate and the company. At the same time, if as a manager you have handled the process well so far, you should know the applicant's key desires and motivators. By using this knowledge, you can explain the position and the opportunity in terms that are most relevant to the applicant.

Now you have reached the time for the more formal offer. In many circumstances the position will warrant a written offer. The formality of it will often depend on the position being filled. The procedure could also be governed by law or corporate policy. Furthermore, other parties might have a vested interest, such as a contingency search firm.

THE WRITTEN OFFER

The offer typically covers the total package and not just salary, including any and all of the other benefits that are being offered. In fact, it is important to show the total package as opposed to just salary, as it could further validate the benefits of the position versus another offer she may or may not be considering.

The Job Description

A complete and thorough review of the job should be reiterated at the offer, in order to be sure there are no last-minute surprises.

Again, be careful not to try to oversell the position here. A major complaint of those who leave the job within the first ninety days is that if they would have known in advance about certain responsibilities of the job, they would likely not have accepted the position. You could end up losing what you felt was an ideal candidate at this point. However, if instead you hired this person and she then either chose to move on very quickly or just never did produce up to expectations, then much of the effort put into recruiting and hiring was for naught.

Furthermore, when factoring in the cost in time and money to hire and train an employee, mistakes like this can be very expensive. Also, even if the employee for whatever reason (lack of other opportunities, financial security, etc.) chooses to stay, low productivity and cynical, negative behavior could result, and will be a major issue for not only the new employee, but will affect you, others on your team and around the organization, and your customers.

Performance Forms

Some companies choose to give an example of their company's performance review, evaluation, and or other measurement documentation at this time. This form or forms are typically used to set objectives that the employee will be expected to achieve in a certain time frame, and then results will be matched up to track performance and evaluate their work.

Other Important Interviewing Considerations

Multiple Interviewers

When others are involved in the interview process with you, be sure they understand the criteria you have in place and what you are looking for. All too often, they are not prepped and merely come back with a one- or two-word opinion on the candidate. Not only does this lead to inappropriate subjectivity but could even lead to unethical or unlawful consequences. Make sure that others in the process are a benefit, not a threat, to sound hiring practices.

Embedding the Candidate

Some companies choose to test out the candidates either on a trial basis or through formal or informal interactions with the sales team

in their working environment. While this is usually with good intentions and could help both the company and candidate get to know one another better and see if there is a fit, it can also raise additional legal concerns, as it is more difficult to ensure objectivity in the process. It is therefore also something that should not be implemented without sound human resources and legal consultation.

Screening Tests/Exams

Testing candidates up front is becoming more and more common in the interview process. These tests take anywhere from a few minutes to even a full day. In fact, some companies even pay the interviewee because of the lengthiness of the process. There are many companies specializing in preemployment testing, and while they cannot gauge everything—like attitude, passion, and determination—they can help to weed out many candidates that do not possess the types of skills or even ethical standards that you are seeking. Like everything else in the interview process, be sure you are consistent, and if you implement a test, do so across the board for all applicants.

Checking References and Credentials

Diligent verification of references is typically in the domain of the human resources department. However, in certain companies it may be left up to the managers themselves. References are tricky in that personal ones, from friends and relatives, are typically not very useful. Also, certain employers are not able to give out any information that isn't strictly factual and are therefore not able to share any opinions about your applicant. In any case, you should do your best to verify the facts and ask some open-ended questions if allowed to try to get what you are able to. Furthermore, at the end of the reference check, ask if there is anything that was not covered that they would like to add about the candidate.

The Basics of the Law

Always stay current on the law. This chapter is intended to give you many of the core skills and practices for recruiting, selecting, and hiring top candidates, but it is not intended to substitute in any way as legal advice nor for any company policies with which you must

comply. It is your job to stay abreast of current law through your human resources department, company legal counsel, and any other governing bodies associated with your industry and business. It is typically the role of your human resources department (possibly in conjunction with the legal department) to educate you on the interview and hiring process. In fact, in many cases these departments are not just there for training but to work with you during the entire process, and they often take the lead in certain if not all parts of the process.

The law prohibits you from asking questions relating to certain topics such as:

Race

Age

Religion

Marital status

Sexual orientation

Physical disability (certain exceptions apply)

Criminal history

Country of origin

Financial status

Veteran status

Another important piece of advice worth reiterating is consistency. When participating in the interviewing and hiring process, it is critical to maintain a level of consistency so as not to bias or favor unjustly one candidate over the other. Each person should have a fair chance and be assessed according to the standards that your company has put in place. You would not want to show up for an interview and find that you are being judged according to a different set of standards and practices than another interviewee, and nor should anyone who you are interviewing. Not only is it just plain wrong but it could very well be illegal. So be sure to maintain consistency and act on objective standards as they relate directly to the position, not on any personal or other non-job-related predispositions, biases, or prejudices. You, your company, the new recruits, and your customers will all be the better for it.

FIRING IS INEVITABLE

Firing someone can be a traumatic experience for both parties involved. It is something that everyone fears, whichever side of the drama they fall on. Keep some core things in mind that might make the process somewhat easier and will hopefully put the inevitable into perspective.

First of all, excluding the case of across-the-board layoffs, in most cases a termination should not come as a complete shock. Employers are asked to document problems along the way. In fact, documentation on all employees is important. This is twofold; it gives the company a record of any discipline issues and also it allows the employee a chance to improve or rectify the problem. Of course, there are issues that by law do not require either verbal or written warnings. Some of these categories are:

- Stealing
- Destruction of company property
- Criminal behavior
- Extensive absenteeism
- Gross insubordination
- Falsifying timekeeping records

However, most other problems require that the employee is given the benefit of the doubt and has sufficient time to comply with standards and/or improve performance. This could even be the case with “at will” employees (those that the company has hired and have less of a responsibility toward, should management wish to terminate them). Performance review forms often will contain pertinent information and maintain a record of performance or other issues as well.

Human resources and/or legal counsel should play a very active role if termination becomes necessary, not only to train you, but quite possibly to handle certain parts, if not all, of the process, depending on the situation or severity. Never engage in firing an employee without their direct involvement.

While firing may be extremely difficult as well as emotional, it is a necessary part of management. Also, keep in mind that it is being done for the good of the company and is intended to be of

benefit to the entire team in the long run. In most cases, improved performance, productivity, and team morale are the result.

Recruiting and hiring is a great challenge to managers. Yet if done correctly, it can be a very rewarding activity and one that you might even look forward to participating in. Always remember that you are working to bring on new talent, with the objective of improving productivity of both the individual contributors as well as the overall team. Later we will look at ways to ensure that both new and existing employees are trained and up to speed on all necessary aspects to perform their job at a high level. Now you will take a look at motivation and the critical role it plays in the success of you and your staff.