

## **Hiring Sales Talent**

Everywhere I go, people have the same problem: How do I find good salespeople? I've got to come clean on this one—it's not easy. The only thing I can do for you here is to give you some tactics (not Tic Tacs—although that might help) that have worked more often than others.

**You're always hiring.** Pay attention to good salespeople you run into. Maybe you should even accept a few sales calls yourself on occasion—just to see if the person might have talent. You should have a bank of potential candidates so that you have a source to draw from when the need arises.

**Develop a success profile.** Look at your most successful salespeople and understand what (if anything they have in common). And try to think back about where they were when they joined your firm—not how they are today. What was their background? Their energy level? Their enthusiasm? What works?

**Start with a clear picture of what you want (and stick with it).** And I'm not talking about personality. Too often, people hire someone based on how they "fit," not understanding that a lot of people who fit well do not work well. Make sure that you have identified all of the attributes: previous work experience, education, previous successes, etc and try to hire as much of that as you can—even if the "fit" is not 100%.

**Make them work hard to get hired.** Put multiple interviews in your process. Give them a written assignment. Make them call you back. After all, this is what sales are all about and if they don't do a good job of selling themselves, they have little hope of selling your product or service.

**Check references and references from the references.** I can't tell you how many people do a lousy job of checking references. Always check them and listen to what they are "not" telling you. One of my little tricks is to ask the reference for one more name of someone that might know the candidate. You'd be surprised (or maybe you wouldn't) about the kinds of things you hear from the non-referenced reference.

**Look for success.** The fact that someone had a sales job is of little value. What happened when they had it? Did they grow their sales? Faster than the market? Without cutting price? In any job? Did they win awards? Contests? In short, are they any good? If you're hiring someone to grow sales, it would be nice if they had some proof that they had already done that—at least once.

Here's one specific trap that I want you to avoid. **Don't just hire product knowledge.**

A pretty common trap is that we often try to hire people who know about the product or service we sell. Now, you can't move too far away—for example, if someone sold financial services, even successfully, they might not be a good candidate for a sales job where the focus was on industrial products. But don't rule out good candidates from other industries. If they can sell one thing, normally they can sell another.

**Don't forget the most important thing...**the desire to sell. Look for people who want to be in sales. People who want to influence others. People who are not afraid of rejection. People who will get off the floor when they get knocked down. Too many people are hired into sales jobs that don't really want to sell. They take the sales job while they are waiting for the management job to open up...or whatever. Do everything you can to find people that want to be salespeople. If they were in sales in their previous job, ask them how they described themselves: if it was anything other than "sales professional," ponder long and hard before you hire them.

A lot of people really don't want to be in sales. Find the ones that do—give them the product knowledge and the sales fundamentals they need—manage them and coach them—and you will have the kind of sales force you want.

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