



How to Hire the Best Sales People

“... what I am concerned with is detail. I asked you to go get me a packet of sweet-n-low, you bring me back equal. That isn't what I asked for, that isn't what I wanted, that isn't what I needed, and that s*#@ isn't gonna work around here.” Buddy Ackerman (Character) played by Kevin Spacey in the movie, *Swimming with Sharks* (1994).

Trailer <http://www.imdb.com/video/screenplay/vi4052156697/>

I love this movie. It is a great life lesson in how not to manage people. But Buddy Ackerman is right when it comes to the importance he placed on “**details**”. Buddy’s detail philosophy applies to all aspects of business and that includes recruiting sales people.

When recruiting the best sales people the “devil is in the details”. Your “gut feeling” about an applicant is no guarantee of success. Nor is the practice for “throwing mud up on a wall and seeing what sticks”. Successful sales recruiting is all about paying close attention to the details. **Studying and carefully defining what you want, asking the right questions and listening critically for the right answers.** The stakes are too high to fill an open sales position with a warm body just to keep your budgeted sales positions filled. It would be much better to have fewer positions filled with successful sales people than to run the risk of a costly error in hiring a sales person who will never deliver on their quota.

What is the cost of a bad sales hire?... well, you can do the math for yourself. On average it takes 3 to 4 months to find the “right” sales person. It may take another 2 to 4 months for the new sales person to be trained and begin producing. If the sales person does not perform; it may take another 4 to 6 months to identify the problem, document their poor performance and get them out the door. So conservatively you are looking at a loss of a good 12 months of sales. When considering the sales person’s total compensation, cost of recruiting, cost of training, and the cost of a 12 months loss in sales, it becomes shockingly apparent that there is little room for error when recruiting and hiring the right sales people.

Hiring sales people is like shooting craps, but the odds are not near as good. But don’t blame the sales applicant. It is the nature of a sales person to

sell; to spin their product in ways that make it look the best to the prospective buyer. The sales applicant does the same when selling himself/herself in a job interview. Your job as the hiring manager is to work your way through all the self-indulgent hype and determine ... can this person sell.

There is no magical solution to selecting successful sales people but there are a few things you can do to improve your odds.

1st Begin by seeking applicants who possess the following personality characteristics. Hire people who are not only **Smart** but who are **Conscientious, Enthusiastic, Competitive**, possess a strong sense of **Integrity**, can **Operate Independently**, and have good **Communication Skills**.

2nd Only interview the top three applicants who respond with the best answers to the following written screening questions.

Qualifying questions to be completed in writing and submitted by fax or through the internet:

- ✓ Please list industry(s) and primary products/services sold.
- ✓ What is your territory and type of customers that you have called on?
- ✓ How do you qualify a lead as having high; medium or low potential?
- ✓ When a potential customer asks a question about your product or service that you don't know; what do you tell them?
- ✓ What have you found to be the best source for finding new prospective customers?
- ✓ On average; how many face-to-face sales calls do you make per day and per week?
- ✓ Briefly describe how you organize your day.
- ✓ Briefly describe your most significant professional achievement and how it benefited your company.
- ✓ What is the typical size sale make in your current job; and what is your average sales revenue per month?

*Income History	2008	2009	2010	2011
Expected Earnings				
Base Salary				
Total Earnings				
Incentive as a %				

***The above income history must be supported by copies of annual W-2 forms.**

3rd Use Behavioral Interviewing when interviewing your top candidates. (It is important to remember that when hiring for a sales position in which you use the screening and behavioral interview program; you must continue using these tools through the entire process. Should you choose not to use this process in filling future sales jobs you may discontinue its use at the beginning of the new interview cycle.)

Your Company Logo
Behavioral Interview

Position	Account Executive	Applicant Name	
Date		Interviewer Name	

When evaluating an applicant's answer to a Behavioral Interview question consider the sales situation, the action taken and the results they achieved.

Characteristic	Making Quota			
Interview Question	Describe a time when you began the month with very little in your funnel. Tell me specifically how you went about getting qualified customers in your sales funnel?			
Characteristic Value (circle rating) 5 of 25 total points	Rating: Evidence of skill is clearly absent 0	Rating: Evidence of skill is adequate 2	Rating: Evidence of skill is highly present 4	Rating for this question - Value x Rating =
Interviewer's Notes				

Characteristic	Cold Calling			
Interview Question	Give me examples of how you obtain customers through cold calling and prospecting. What methods do you use in approaching your prospective customers in a cold call?			
Characteristic Value (circle rating) 6 of 25 total points	Rating: Evidence of skill is clearly absent 0	Rating: Evidence of skill is adequate 2	Rating: Evidence of skill is highly present 4	Rating for this question - Value x Rating =
Interviewer's Notes				

Characteristic	Managing Customer Objections			
Interview Question	Describe a time when a customer objected to a company mandate issue. How did you deal with it? How did you save the customer?			
Characteristic Value (circle rating) 3 of 25 total points	Rating: Evidence of skill is clearly absent 0	Rating: Evidence of skill is adequate 2	Rating: Evidence of skill is highly present 4	Rating for this question - Value x Rating =
Interviewer's Notes				

Characteristic	Salesmanship			
Interview Question	What are your three most effective sales skills? Then, please provide an example of a situation in which you demonstrated each skill with a customer.			
Characteristic Value (circle rating) 6 of 25 total points	Rating: Evidence of skill is clearly absent 0	Rating: Evidence of skill is adequate 2	Rating: Evidence of skill is highly present 4	Rating for this question - Value x Rating =
Interviewer's Notes				

Characteristic	Closing Skills			
Interview Question	How do you know when it is time to close a sale with a customer and describe each step in your method of closing.			
Characteristic Value (circle rating) 5 of 25 total points	Rating: Evidence of skill is clearly absent 0	Rating: Evidence of skill is adequate 2	Rating: Evidence of skill is highly present 4	Rating for this question - Value x Rating =
Interviewer's Notes				

Overall Rating	<i>Note: You may use as many or as few questions as you wish but the total Characteristic value for all questions must total 25 points.</i>	Total of all Characteristic Ratings =
-----------------------	---	--

Recommendation: Hire _____ Not Hire _____

Reason for Recommendation:

*“This is the only way that you can hope to survive. **Because life ... is not a movie. Everyone lies. Good guys lose. And love... does not conquer all.**”* In this cynical opinion of Buddy Ackerman, he is not speaking of sales recruiting but it may very well apply. And if a Harvard study on this topic is correct; that **“Most hiring managers make their selection decision within the first 3 minutes of the interview”** there may be a great opportunity in behavioral interviewing to improve the way we hire successful sales people.

About the Authors

Michael E. Hackett is a retired Human Resources executive with 40 years experience and is an Adjunct University Professor, Management Consultant and Mediator in Nashville Tennessee. Hackett has a BS and MS degrees from The University of Memphis. You may reach Michael and Jonathan at mehackett@comcast.net

M. Jonathan Hackett has a BS in Business Administration from Christian Brothers University in Memphis Tennessee and M.Ed. from Auburn University. Hackett has six years experience in business to business sales and sales management. Jonathan is an Account Executive with Adlam Films, LLC. based in Tupelo, Mississippi.