

Recruiting one sales professional in today's employment market typically takes 30 hours of administrative effort, 15 hours of direct sales management time to screen and interview, plus 40 hours of productivity loss by other sales employees. And the 'sunk' cost of these hours does not include the revenue shortfall of an uncovered sales territory and unassigned sales quota.

How can the hiring sales manager help ensure that all this effort and cost will result in adding a top sales performer to the sales team?

One way is to improve your interviewing skills to include behavioural interviewing strategies.

What is behavioural interviewing?

In a sales behavioural interview, the hiring sales manager asks a series of fact-based questions to determine whether the candidate has the necessary skills, experience and knowledge to succeed in the company.

The basis for this line of questioning is that the candidate's past performance is the most accurate predictor of future behaviour and achievement.

Many hiring sales managers attempt to approach behavioural interviewing by setting job requirements that are far too specific. It would be great to find the 25-year-old business graduate who had been a top sales performer at your major competitor, selling into the exact sales territory you are hiring to fill, but you will bypass many very talented and qualified candidates with this narrow approach.

The first step in preparing for a behavioural interview is to determine the characteristics that lead to selling success in your company.

What kinds of questions should you include? Any sales behavioural interview should include the seven questions below.

1. Revenue attainment – What is the highest revenue achieved by the candidate?

Most hiring sales managers prefer a candidate who has routinely achieved the revenue threshold represented in their annual quota plan. Some sales managers look for sales talent with the 'potential' and drive to beat a bigger revenue number than previously attained. Both positions are valid – you just need to decide what works best for your business.

2. Revenue velocity – How many sales closed per year, per quarter, per month?

In addition to achieving a revenue number, the hiring sales manager should determine the typical number of individual deals closed by the sales representative in a given time. The selling experience and skills needed to close two deals per week valued at \$5K each are quite different than the skills and experience needed to close ten sales worth \$1K each.

3. What business owners and managers were called on and closed?

If your product or service is sold to business owners or managers, then you should ascertain whether the candidate has sold to this area and ask questions to see if the sales representative understands the business issues of those job titles.

4. What standard milestones in the selling cycle does the candidate track?

Does this 'resemble' your sales process? For example, if your sale demands that the sales representative call on people in a business to uncover needs and determine value, coordinate a demonstration, and finally prepare a proposal, you should look for similar sales process experience in your candidates.

5. What is the candidate's experience and proficiency in lead generation and final sale negotiation?

Two of the most critical selling skills are: 1) finding and developing new interested prospects, and 2) negotiating the final deal with the decision maker. In some sales organisations these key selling tasks are not directly performed by the sales representative, but rather by specialized teams – pre-sales teams (for lead generation), or by sales management, subject matter or product experts (for negotiation). Does the experience and skill set of the candidate match how you conduct these tasks in your business?

6. Phone or field sale? Virtual/home office or centralised shared office?

Is your sales cycle conducted by phone or does it demand face-to-face visits to the client? Do sales representatives work in virtual home offices or from centralised sales offices? The background (and preferences) of a sales rep shouldn't conflict with your 'logistics' – how and where you manage the selling effort.

7. Are technical or specialised skills required to sell your offering?

Customers buy from sales representatives who are sincere and competent, and who empower them. Are specific knowledge, technical skills and/or education demanded to sell your offering? Finding a candidate with a match to these skills is more important than number of years of experience in the field.

Conclusion:

Past performance is no guarantee of future results, but the responses gleaned from behavioural interview questioning tend to be 40-50% more accurate in determining how a sales person will perform than the general interview questions we have all heard (and asked), like 'tell me where you would like to be in five years'.

Use the seven questions above in your next sales interview, and plan on posing follow-up 'probes' to satisfy yourself that the candidate's characterisation of their experience and selling behaviour make that individual the 'most likely to succeed' on your sales team.

This resource has been adapted from Marie Warner's [Seven Interview Questions to Find Your Next Sales Star](#), originally posted on [SalesVantage.com](#).