

Improved Sales Selection



Some companies consistently hire the right salespeople. They follow a disciplined process that leads to new hires ideally suited to each position. These companies follow three **steps**:

First, the sales manager defines the *type* of selling that is unique to the industry or the company's strategy, i.e., the *roles* the salesperson plays. In the chart below, check those roles that are most relevant. In some cases you might check both items in a pair.

The **second** step involves defining a short list of desired skills, based on these roles. Listed on the next page are 17 skills that our research shows are most predictive of sales success. Ideally, a sales manager will focus on the five core skills and 3 - 5 specialized skills. Note: research shows that Drive is the most important trait for sales success, regardless of roles. Sales managers should focus most heavily on the candidate's level of Drive.

The **third** step involves using the right kind of interview questions. We recommend "experience questions" that evaluate a candidate's past experience and behavior, rather than their ideas or philosophies. The best predictor of a person's future behavior is past behavior (or what they're doing right now). Experienced assessment psychologists spend the majority of an interview probing stories of what a candidate did in previous jobs, e.g., "tell me about a time when you . . ." Multiple interviewers can ask questions in different ways and increase the probability of making the right hire.

Selection success is *even higher* when you use *multiple methods* to assess candidates. Professional assessors use experience questions *plus* selected testing *or* role-plays. The more diverse the methods, the more accurate the assessment.

Step 1—Define the Roles the Salesperson Plays

Hunter	Develops leads and new business opportunities
Farmer	Aggressively develops and resells existing opportunities
Individual	Is solely responsible for account development and maintenance
Team-based	Works closely with others internally on the account
External	Spends a lot of time at client sites
Internal	Works almost exclusively from the office, via phone, etc.
Short Cycle	Quick or repetitive sales, usually under 2 months start to finish.
Long Cycle	Strategic sales, understanding customer's business, 4+ months
Sell End	Sells directly to the end user
Sell Reps	Motivates other representatives to sell products
Simple Sales	Commodity sales, price sensitive, off-the-shelf
Complex Sales	Sells solutions involving multiple components and customization

Step 2—Define the Most Critical Skills

CORE SKILLS – Essential in all sales positions
Drive —needs to achieve; loves to compete and win; certain of success
Confidence —unfazed by rejection; will persist despite setbacks; inner strength
Persuasion —articulate; builds a good case, taking customer needs into account; closes compellingly
Relationship – easily establishes and maintains relationships with prospects and customers; service-oriented
Organization —disciplined; tracks opportunities & contacts; follows up; juggles multiple tasks
SPECIALIZED SKILLS – Unique to your position
Problem Solving —seeks solutions proactively and creatively, solves customer dilemmas
Profit Priority —understands business priorities, sells profitable business
Independent —self-starter, works well without external structure or supervision
Listening —patient; tunes in; will probe and clarify to get a real sense of customer needs
Tact —considerate; diplomatic; treats others with respect, even if opinions differ
Detail —patient/detailed/timely with necessary product knowledge, reporting, paperwork
Analytical —can dig into needs/problems effectively; adept with numbers
Conceptual —abstract thinker; grasps complexity of customer situation; develops complex solutions
Strategic —sees big picture and long-range implications; understands customers' strategies
Technical —understands customer's industry, products, and technology
Executive Presence —earns respect in the executive suite; appropriate image
Motivator —will teach, coach, motivate those who sell product to end user

Step 3—Use “Experience Questions” in the Interview

CORE SKILLS
Drive —When was the last time you lost an order? How did you respond?
Confidence —Tell me about a time someone rejected you. What did you do?
Persuasion —Give me three examples of closing a difficult sale. What did you say?
Relationship —What have you done in the last 30 days to deepen relationships with key accounts?
Organization —When was the last time you felt overloaded, and how did you recover?
SPECIALIZED SKILLS
Problem Solving —Tell me about a difficult customer dilemma that you resolved.
Profit Priority —Tell me how you balanced volume and profit in your last position.
Independent —Tell me about a time when you took action without explicit permission
Listening —(This skill is best assessed by evaluating the candidate’s listening in the interview).
Tact —Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an obnoxious person in an argument.
Detail —Give me a detailed description of how you manage your paperwork and reporting to the company.
Analytical —Have you ever had to make a sale based on analysis of data? Describe the process in detail.
Conceptual — (This skill is best assessed by evaluating the candidate’s depth with complex questions).
Strategic —Tell me about a time when you had to adapt to a complex customer strategy?
Technical —Describe the technology of your most technically-complex customer.
Executive Presence — (This skill is best assessed by evaluating the candidate’s appearance/demeanor).
Motivator —When did you last have to motivate a Rep? How did you do it?