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Sales solutions

How you can hire the best possible salespeople

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Question: I've been working as a sales rep for a high-tech company in Seattle for the past four-and-a-half years and have recently been promoted to sales manager. As such, I will be responsible for hiring new salespeople. What are some common traits to look for in the people I interview that might indicate they'd be good as a high-tech sales rep?

Answer: Congratulations on your promotion!

First of all, before you interview anyone, look for resumes that are sales results-oriented - in other words, resumes that highlight the sales results your candidates have had at previous employers. Specifically, look for data such as where they ranked as salespeople in their previous places of employment.

Also, look for statistics that speak to the percentage of overall sales increase of the previous employers that the candidates were directly responsible for. Furthermore, consider the candidates' achievements related to sales, such as receiving awards and special recognition and/or qualifying for "president's club" or some other goal-attainment reward. Seek to interview only those candidates who have a proven track record of sales success, by looking at their previous sales results.

You may also want to consider any personal letters of recommendation included with a resume. While these letters in general are a great testament to your candidates, you should hold letters of recommendation from their previous employers in especially high regard.

Anyone who leaves an employer on such good terms that he or she is able to obtain a letter of recommendation is an individual who is skilled at both developing and keeping good relationships, even in situations that can sometimes be difficult, such as leaving an employer.

Letters of recommendation offer a bit of insight to the candidates' character, which is helpful when the candidates are unknown to you. Also, always follow up on any references that are provided by the candidates.

Once you are ready to conduct interviews, there are a few rules of thumb I can suggest:

- Make sure candidates make good eye contact with you and offer a firm handshake.
- They should be good at making small talk and building rapport.
- They should ask plenty of questions about your company and about the job.
- They should try to close you on hiring them for the job.
- They should send you handwritten thank-you notes for the opportunity to interview.

In addition to the above, pay attention to your intuition and how you feel about the candidates. What does your gut tell you? Do you like the person? Why or why not? Keep in mind the rules above, and be aware that the gut feel you have for the candidates is likely the same way your prospects and customers will feel about them and react to them as well.

The interview process is a great way to determine the candidates' selling styles. After all, the point of the interview from the candidates' perspective is to sell you on hiring them for the job.

What kind of a job have they done on selling you to hire them? Pay attention to how they sell you -- that is likely the same way they would sell your prospects on your products and services.

As regional sales manager for a data cabling company years ago, I was interviewing candidates for several sales representative positions I had available on my Seattle sales team. One candidate in particular, by the name of Brad Richards, not only had an impressive resume, but was great during the interview and actually tried closing me at the end of our meeting by saying, "Do you see any reason why you wouldn't hire me today?"

I was so impressed with him that I hired him on the spot. He did all the things I mentioned in the bullet points mentioned above, I had a good gut feeling about him, and he tried closing me at the end of the interview. He turned out to be the best sales rep I ever hired.

ANDREA SITTIG-ROLF is a public speaker, author, and president of Sittig Inc., a sales training and consulting firm. Her new book, "Business-to-Business Prospecting: Innovative Techniques to Get Your Foot in the Door with Any Prospect" (Aspatore Books) is available on Amazon.com. Reach her at 206-769-4886 or www.sittiginc.com, and send your "Sales Solutions" questions to info@sittiginc.com.