

Hire Better Sales People

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In today's challenging economy, one of the primary concerns for most business leaders is:

How do I drive consistent sales growth?

Part of the answer to this key question is to *hire better sales people*. But implementing this goal can be challenging and spawn a series of questions:

- *How do I recruit the best sales people?*
- *How do I hire sales people who are more effective than those who are currently on my team?*
- *How do I make new hires productive more quickly?*
- *What metrics must I use to measure early success?*
- *How do I reward "intrinsically motivated" sales individuals?*
- *What are "non-punitive" consequences for failure to perform?*

We'll address answers to these questions and others with a 3-step process for hiring better salespeople.

We believe that [Objective Management Group's](#) Sales Evaluation Approach provides the foundation for building a winning team. The process, while sometimes painful, provides incredible insights and information that will form the launching pad for hiring better sales people. Valuable analysis of sales and management skills and traits are uncovered. Crucial internal systems and processes, like sales force recruiting, are addressed.

Something is wrong with your sales force recruiting process if:

- You are reactive in your recruiting – You only recruit when you need someone
- You transfer the entire responsibility of finding candidates to a search firm
- You don't have a candidate pipeline
- You aren't getting enough of the right candidates to interview
- The candidates that you interview and fall in love with fail to pass your evaluation process
- You interview quality candidates, but cannot attract them to join your company
- Candidates use you to improve their current position after you make an offer
- Your evaluation process is inconsistent
- You don't have a way to compare one hireable candidate against another
- You don't have multiple candidates to choose from
- You pay "A" compensation to "B" hires
- Your new hires are failing to succeed quickly enough

There are three key steps to insuring that you recruit quality candidates that will maximize your organization's revenue potential. Step 1 will focus on preparation, Step 2 will focus on building a candidate pipeline and Step 3 will conclude with recommendations for screening those candidates.

Step 1: Define Your Sales Candidate Profile & Hiring Standard



The first step in our sales force recruiting process is to establish a profile of the **ideal** candidate for your specific situation. Objective Management Group's hiring approach called **STAR – Sales Talent Acquisition Routine** - helps you establish the right hiring profile and then ADHERE to that profile. Do not settle for a candidate who fails the criteria. And when you are evaluating resumes, pre-hire evaluations and your interview notes, ensure that you are consistently comparing potential candidates to the hiring profile that you have established.

I'm currently reading a book by [Perry Marshall](#) about the [Pareto Principle](#) (*also known as the 80-20 rule*) as it applies to sales and marketing. Perry talks about how organizations of all kinds measure success against the wrong data reference points.

For example, do you remember when you had to take a particularly difficult test in school? After you finished it, you talked with others about how the test would be “graded on the curve.” What that means is if the average score on the test was 50% and you scored 75%, you would probably get an “A”. The questions that follows are, “Did the A truly reflect your skill-set or know-how of the subject matter? Or did it merely reflect how you – or someone else – scored against the average?” The answer, as painful as it might be, is that it compared you to the average.

The same is often true when using sales evaluations that are not provided by OMG. Many, though not all, of the pre-hire evaluations available today provide you with an analysis of how your candidate's score compares to an "average" score. But is that really what you want? Do you really want to hire an *average* sales person when you are trying to hire *better* sales people than those you have currently?

Accepting mediocrity in the sales candidate test is not the only problem. Settling for average can be a problem in nearly every step of your hiring process.

- Do you describe the job... or do you detail *what it takes to be extraordinary* in the sales role?
- Do you describe what your candidates will be selling... or do you detail *what kind of competition* they must be successful against?
- Do you make it clear that your organization puts high pressure on someone to perform? And do you find out if your candidate can survive in that kind of environment?
- Do you create the same environment when interviewing candidates that they will encounter when they are in the field? For example, do you challenge candidates by being difficult on the phone? Do you make them establish rapport with you in the initial interview? Do you make them try to close you in order to reach the next step of your hiring process?
- Returning to my example about grading on difficult tests, do you find yourself hiring people who score 77% to 85% on the test and are benefiting from a curve? Or are you hiring those who score 100% and correctly answer all of the extra-credit questions?

In summary, if you are committed to recruiting and building an extraordinary sales force, your first step is to:

- establish the right candidate profile for your specific situation,
- keep your screening decisions during the hiring process consistent the right candidate profile, and
- prepare to challenge your prospects to meet exceptional standards rather than settling on "adequate".

Step 2: Building a Sales Candidate Pipeline

In today's environment, most of our communications are done online. And, at first glance, when it comes to recruiting, the Web seems to be a simple and relatively painless solution for finding new

employees. Post a job profile on a myriad of the available job search engines, and responses come flooding in:

- Monster
- Indeed
- Jobs - *whatever city*



- Ladder
- Snagajob
- LinkedIn

While this approach may work for some positions, I am unconvinced that it is effective when attempting to hire good sales people. In my experience, the best method for recruiting quality sales candidates is by introduction, the same method that works for the sales people when prospecting for new business.



Finding sales talent candidates by introduction can be time consuming and painful, however, it forces YOU to own the process, and *that* is the key. Finding new talent for your organization should not be left entirely up to the "recruiters". They have a vested interest in placing people in positions and NOT IN the success of a sales person you hire. Remember: Recruiters get paid when they place someone. That individual may not be (*and often is not*) the best fit for your organization.

Recently, I read that 75% of replacement hires are as bad as or worse than the employees that were replaced! If you have an open position for someone who is making \$50,000 a year, you need to find the best \$50,000 a year person in your industry/marketplace to fill it. Don't settle for a B or C player because that is the caliber of individual you are replacing!

Take ownership:

- Create your hiring profile (*as discussed in Step 1*)
- Create a process of getting introductions
 - Build your team of candidate prospectors
 - Identify candidate sourcing activities
 - Identify monthly goals for the activities
- Build an inspection process – and consider using “huddles” to have prompt, productive and painless meetings as you conduct that process (See [Verne Harnish](#))
- Hold people accountable for reaching candidate sourcing goals
- Throughout the process - reward success, discipline failure

Once you start this process, you will begin to fill your candidate pipeline just like your sales people fill their prospect pipelines. When you take ownership of this effort and you have a pipeline of potential hires that are better than your current underperformers, you will be more likely to:

- Replace under-performers
- Not be “held hostage” by prima donna sales people
- Not settle for mediocrity
- See improvements in your current sales team

Finally, keep in mind that driving sales growth isn't *always* about more disciplined accountability, sales force automation, or sales training. Those things *will* help *only* if you have the talent on hand that will respond to these investments. Start with good talent, create an environment where people can succeed and see what happens next.

Step 3: Screening Sales Team Candidates

When evaluating candidates from our pipeline, we turn once again to Objective Management Group's **STAR (Sales Talent Acquisition Routine)**. Screening involves two parts:

1. Pre-hire sales assessment
2. Phone interview

Pre-hire sales assessment



You must evaluate ALL candidates using a sales candidate pre-hire screen before the interview. There are many assessments to choose from and you can go to this link - [compare test](#) - to evaluate them for yourself. Many companies pick and choose which candidates to evaluate. Sometimes if the candidate has come highly recommended or if the candidate has a great sales pedigree or if a placement firm has recommended the candidate, the company may choose not to evaluate. ***This is a mistake.*** Evaluating candidates BEFORE you interview has several benefits:

- 1) The OMG evaluation tells you if the candidate is hirable or not (with 95% predictive validity). If they are not hirable, then there is no need for an interview.
- 2) Evaluating prior to interviewing helps you pinpoint your interview questions based on information that you won't find in the resume therefore you are able to conduct a better, more informative interview.

The phone interview

As you begin your phone screening process, you need to consider how much time your sales people normally spend on the phone for either prospecting or selling. It's important to have a clear idea of how important phone skills are to their success. If effective phone skills are critical for success, then evaluating a candidate's ability on the phone must be part of your screening process.

If you receive a potential candidate's resume, pass it to the person assisting you. This recruiting coordinator should then contact the potential candidate, let him know that the first step is a phone interview and schedule the interview. Keep this same process even if you meet a potential candidate. Give their information to your recruiting coordinator and let him or her follow the normal process.

Make the process consistent by conducting phone interviews on a regular schedule, on the same days of the week (*for example, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:30 to 12:00*).

Conducting the Initial Phone Interview



Consider the challenges your sales people regularly face when making phone calls. Recreate this same environment for your candidate. If your sales people must get past gatekeepers to get to the decision-maker, then make the candidates get past your gatekeeper.

The best way to implement this is for you to email candidates after the phone interviews have been scheduled. Instruct them to contact you as if they are making a

prospecting call. Their goal is to get past your gatekeeper and to you. Instruct your gatekeeper to make this somewhat difficult, but to eventually let them through if they are persistent. After each phone interview, find out how each candidate approached your gatekeeper.

Once you begin the phone interview, treat the candidate as if he is a typical sales person trying to sell you something. Be brief. Be abrupt. Ask questions. Challenge each candidate. Make each sell you on why he should be considered for a face-to-face interview.

There are three factors that determine whether the candidate will progress to a face-to-face interview. Ask yourself if the candidate...

1. Attempted to control the interview
2. Asked questions
3. “Closed” for the face-to-face interview

Did the candidate take control of the interview by attempting to slow it down and establish rapport? Did he get flustered attempting to answer your questions? Did he get intimidated by your demeanor? Look for a sales person who can handle the pressure and have a conversation with you, not one who simply answers questions.

Did the candidate ask good questions, attempting to get specifics? He should attempt to uncover what you are looking for, what it takes to be successful, what is needed to get to the next step, and what he must say or do to convince you that he is qualified. Don't get too hung up on the exact questions that he asks. But recognize that this interview will demonstrate how the candidate will do in a sales call.

As you finish the interview, instruct the candidate about the next step and tell them, if they qualify, someone will call to follow up. This way you are telling the candidate that you want to think it over - just like any prospect might do. If the candidate does not try to "close you" at that point, then he won't attempt to close on a prospect either.

Conclusion

In this paper, we've looked at three steps that are key to building an exceptional sales force that will help drive consistent sales growth in your company:

1. **Prepare:** Establish the right candidate profile for your specific situation. Use this standard to compare. Challenge these candidates to meet your specific standards.
2. **Pipeline:** Build a pipeline of potential candidates by using time-tested sales prospecting techniques rather than leaning on the far less effective Internet-based job boards.
3. **Screen:** Use a properly constructed telephone pre-interview to identify the most qualified candidates who should be brought in for a face-to-face interview.



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The good news is that many firms are hiring again. But most find it a real challenge to find and hire successful sales people for their company.

Take a minute to download our
[How to Find, Attract & Recruit an All Star Sales Team Kit](#)

If utilized, your hiring will improve.