

Sales Talent Acquisition Guide

How to Hire, Onboard, and Retain High-Performing Sellers





Hire and Retain High-Performing Sellers

Top sales talent can make or break a company. Organizations depend on sales professionals to find high-value prospects, negotiate and protect margins, and increase revenue—quarter after quarter.

But what, exactly, constitutes “top sales talent”? How do you find and keep the right sellers for your organization?

Around **one-third of your salespeople** will leave the organization this year, [according to HubSpot](#). Think about it. To hit your revenue targets, you’ll need to fill all those open positions.

A high turnover rate has several negative effects. Constant churn lowers morale for the rest of the team, which can lower productivity. Hiring, onboarding, and training cost time, energy, and resources. The more frequently you must hire, the more it costs your company.

Plus, it takes a [new seller six to twelve months](#) or more to be as productive as a more seasoned sales professional, according to our research. If your turnover rate is high, your productivity is lower than it should be for longer.

It costs an average of \$100,000 to replace one seller, according to [DePaul University](#). Retaining sales professionals saves your organization time, resources, effort, and revenue.

A well-defined—and well-executed—selection process is essential to hiring, retaining, and developing sellers to their full potential. This guide explains each step with practical tips for building a high-performing sales team.



Talent Success Stages



Hire



Onboard



**Train and
Coach**



**Develop
and Retain**

Sales Talent Acquisition Stage 1: Hire

It's critical to bring the right sellers onto your team. No amount of training can change a seller's innate motivators and behavior style. You need to be sure you are a good fit upfront.

Finding candidates with selling skills is an important factor, but it's not the only one. Many sellers have the right skillset or the potential to acquire those skills. What's more challenging is finding candidates who are the right fit for the role and your company culture.

Benchmark the Role

First, you need to determine exactly what skills and abilities the position requires for sales success. Benchmarking the role will give you a standard to compare candidates against. You can gain insight by getting input from current team members—those who will be working closely with the new hire and other stakeholders.

For example, if you determine a sales competency such as “self starting” or “interpersonal skills” is important for sales performance, you can use the benchmark to decide whether a candidate possesses that ability.

Define the hard skills—the baseline to perform the job—and the knowledge and experience required. Just as important, though, are soft skills. This includes communication style and ability, attitude, and behavior.



Recruit High-Quality Candidates

Once you've identified key competencies for long-term success, the next step is to source qualified candidates. Don't limit yourself to placing ads on job sites or hiring a recruiter. At conferences, trade shows, and other industry events, you may meet sellers who seem like they'd thrive at your company.

Have an ABR mindset: Always Be Recruiting. It's important to look consistently—not just when you have an open position. Make connections wherever you can, and keep track of them. Even if they're not what you're looking for now, they may be a fit in the future.

Assess Candidates

You also need to assess each candidate to see if the position will motivate and engage them. If they're not innately driven to perform sales activities the job requires, they're not a good fit. They'll quickly become disengaged and eventually burn out—leaving you back at square one.

Resumes provide a candidate's work experience, but they don't reveal what's truly “under the hood.” To see past the interview “best behavior” and ensure you're hiring someone who is a good fit, back up your gut feelings with a validated [sales hiring assessment](#).



A job benchmark can provide role-specific questions that help uncover areas of concern.

Learn About Job Benchmarks

Interview Effectively

The best way to determine if someone is the right fit for your company is by interviewing and screening thoroughly. A job benchmark can provide role-specific questions that help uncover areas of concern.

Sales roles typically require interviews with multiple team members. Committee interviewing provides a system of checks and balances so no one's bias for or against a particular candidate becomes the deciding factor.

Ask Behavior-Based Questions

Instead of falling back on the standard job interview questions, ask behavior-based questions that reveal how the candidate will act in situations they'll encounter in the role.

For example: *"You're speaking with a prospect, but they've made it clear they don't like or trust you. In fact, they're being openly hostile and belligerent. How do you handle it? What do you say to them to gain their trust?"*

The answer to a question like this will tell you much more about the candidate than a generic question about strengths and weaknesses.

Shadow Experienced Sellers

Have your candidate shadow one of your top sales professionals for the day. Someone who's doing the same role the candidate is interviewing for will have a valuable perspective on what they need to succeed in your organization.

Plus, having candidates experience a day in the life of a seller is a good way to see firsthand whether they fit with your culture. It's easy for a candidate to hide a personality trait in a 20-minute interview. It's a lot harder to do so for an eight-hour day.



Sales Talent Acquisition Stage 2: Onboard

Once you've completed the hiring process, your next step is to acclimate your new sales professional to your company. Set up your new hires for success with structured onboarding.

Sales onboarding is a systematic process designed to welcome, train, and engage new hires. When done well, sales onboarding puts sellers on a faster track to meet sales targets and, ultimately, ensure success for the organization.

Remember: The onboarding process is about much more than basic training on products or company policies. You want to make them feel like part of your company and to set a foundation that will help them thrive.

While you want new sellers to be resourceful, it's a mistake to simply let them fend for themselves. Your onboarding process can include company and product knowledge, industry insight, regulatory information, and selling skills.

A successful onboarding process will:

- Set time-based goals for content and skills proficiency.
- Establish expectations for new hire participation in the process.
- Guide the sales professional and the sales manager through the process.
- Include clear checkpoints to measure progress.

Structured sales onboarding provides a framework that introduces them to the resources, tools, and information they need in an organized manner within an appropriate time frame.

A best practice is to have 30-, 60-, and 90-day plans for onboarding, with scheduled check-ins to evaluate a new hire's progress and determine what they're doing well, where they're struggling, and what type of targeted coaching can be used to help them further improve.



Sales Talent Acquisition Stage 3: Train and Coach

Many organizations think of training as a one-time event, or a brief period at the beginning of a new hire's time at the company. But training should be an ongoing process. Your sales professionals should never stop learning, growing, and becoming better at what they do.

Follow a Sales Process

Research shows that [successful sales teams follow a sales process](#). In its simplest form, a sales process is a repeatable set of steps sellers use to guide prospects through each stage of the buyer journey. Using a structured sales process promotes consistency and helps every seller speak the same language.



The most successful sales teams have a mindset of continuous improvement.

Develop Skills

The most successful sales teams have a mindset of continuous improvement. Once you've onboarded a seller, maintain your investment in them by providing more advanced skills training such as [negotiation training](#) or [sales territory planning](#), for example.

Define Objectives

It's also important to lay out job expectations in a clear, straightforward manner. What is expected of the new seller? What constitutes an acceptable success rate, versus an unacceptable one?



Coach and Support

Sales coaching is widely considered to have a huge impact on seller performance. While training gives sales professionals the skills and knowledge to succeed, coaching provides mentorship and guidance.

Training helps sales professionals understand expectations; coaching helps them meet those expectations. Prioritize one-to-one or team coaching with a standard cadence. Coaching not only helps improve performance; it also increases seller retention.

Reinforce Sales Skills

Reinforce sales skills with ongoing access to refresher training or online resources. This will help your sales professionals retain and apply the skills they need so they can adapt to changing market conditions and new competitors.

Providing professional training development opportunities will not only improve performance; it will also increase the likelihood that new hires have long and successful careers with your organization.

WEBINAR

Sales Coaching 101: Strategies for Highly Effective Coaching Conversations



[Watch on Demand](#)



Sales Talent Acquisition Stage 4: Develop and Retain

Onboarding, training, and coaching are important factors in improving seller retention, but they're just the beginning. The final step is to develop your sales professionals' careers to ensure their future is with your company rather than your competitor's.



Developing your sales team members begins with defining clear goals and milestones.

Career pathing shows sales professionals they're more than just a cog in your machine. It demonstrates you care about them and are committed to their development at your company—that their success is your success as well.

Define Milestones

Developing your sales team members begins with defining clear goals and milestones with measurable outcomes. To help them meet these goals, it's important to give regular feedback, in both formal meetings and casual conversations. Encourage them and give them tips on how to improve.

Communicate Effectively

Every sales professional has a different communication style. Find out what they respond to best and reach them on that level. A [personal assessment](#) will identify communication preferences and driving forces.

Keep channels of communication open, and make sure they work both ways. You need to be able to talk to your sales professionals and provide feedback. They need to be able to reach out to you when they need help. Make sure they know who to go to when they have an issue, and what resources are at their disposal to find an answer.



Mentor New Hires

Pair newer hires with experienced sellers. A mentor who knows the ropes can help a new seller onboard more smoothly, answer questions, and coach, which takes some of the burden off management.

The bond between a seller and their mentor can continue for years. The more seasoned seller can help their mentee grow and advance, lay out a career path, and reduce the likelihood of they'll leave the company.

Define Career Paths

Three common reasons sellers leave their jobs are there aren't enough opportunities, they feel like their career is stagnating, or they're stuck in a place they don't want to be. You need to provide a path for sellers to move forward if you want them to feel invested in your organization.

Growth and advancement mean different things to each seller. Not everyone is gunning for the corner office. To help sales professionals along their career path, you need to understand what motivates them.

Each sales professional will have a mix of driving forces that motivate them. Every role has a unique set of motivators that it rewards, as well. The key is matching your sales talent to the position that rewards these motivators the best. Using a job benchmark can help you be objective and consistent.

When promotions aren't an option, organizations can broaden a seller's responsibilities based on their motivators and skillset or assign them a special project that's closely aligned with what motivates them. This can improve engagement and help sellers feel valued.

Improve Sales Hiring, Training, Coaching, and Retention

Some sellers show up to get a paycheck—they're not passionate about the work they do. These sales professionals are likely to leave your organization if another offers them more money, better hours, or a shorter commute. That's why it's so important—right from the beginning—to take steps to choose the right candidates.

Retaining your sales professionals for the long run starts with the hiring process: finding sellers who have the hard skills to do the job, will fit in with your company, and thrive in their role.

Onboarding, training, coaching, and mentoring will help new hires succeed and make them feel like an integral part of your organization.

Finally, understanding their personal and professional goals and defining a career path to achieving them will help them invest in your organization.

If you can do this, you'll improve seller retention and have higher productivity, a better bottom line, and happier, more effective sales professionals for years to come.

Sales Assessments to Hire and Retain A-Players

The Brooks Group offers a selection of hiring and talent development solutions, including comprehensive assessments that can be used for the entire lifecycle of the seller.

Our tools accurately and objectively measure skills, competencies, and driving forces to reveal how compatible a candidate is for a specific role. [Contact The Brooks Group](#) to learn more about how assessments can improve your hiring and talent development processes.

About The Brooks Group

Unlocking sales team potential for over 45 years, The Brooks Group is the leading sales training and development company empowering sales teams to generate breakthrough results. To learn more about our suite of ROI-driven sales training and development programs, best-in-class assessments, and industry-leading reinforcement tools, visit brooksgroup.com.

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