

Key Behavioral Traits to Look for When Hiring a Sales Rep

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Building a strong sales team requires you pick the right people to drive, convert and close.

Which attributes come to mind when you think of a typical sales person?

Aggressive? Pushy? The ability to close deals quickly? Knowing how to overcome objections?

If you're like most people, these could be some of the ideas that cross your mind.

This is not entirely surprising, given that the modern buyer is much more empowered. Today's buyer does not want to be sold to and coerced into making a purchase. They want to be treated with respect and educated before they make their decision.

When you've decided to scale your sales team, the most important factor that can make or break your success is the hiring of exceptional talent. A productive and engaged sales team is the lifeblood of a top organization and can elevate your business to new heights - which is why it is crucial to get your sales recruitment on point.

World-class sales hiring is the most important driver of sales success - Mark Roberge, HubSpot CRO

Given the current nature of sales, what are the key competencies you should look for in a top candidate? Let's take a look at some essential traits that you should look for when hiring sales reps.

Accountability

When an employee is accountable, you can rely on them to take ownership of their work and actions. If they fail to hit targets, they will be responsible for their mistakes, and take necessary steps to improve outcomes, rather than blaming external factors.

A few pointers to keep in mind while testing for accountability during the interview process are:

- Does the candidate take responsibility for mistakes?
- Are they able to attend appointments and meetings on time?
- Do they deliver agreed work on time and to deadlines?

If the candidate is not able to demonstrate that they have a record of adhering to deadlines and appointments, then you have reason to doubt their ability to hold themselves accountable for their work.

Coachability

Perhaps you've heard that 'Great salespeople are made, not born'. Sure, natural talent is important, but what separates the top performer from the mediocre salesperson is their coachability or the ability to absorb and apply new information to improve their sales performance. A 'coachable' candidate will be highly receptive to feedback and will positively apply learnings to become better at their work.

So, how do you test for coachability?

After involving them in a role play exercise, offer both positive and negative feedback on their performance. When you get them to repeat the exercise, check to see if they alter their performance based on the feedback that was given to them. If the candidate is able to take criticism positively by using it to improve performance, then you can identify their aptitude and willingness to be 'made' into a superstar sales person.

Record of Previous Achievement

If the candidate has a record of achievement or excellence such as a solid sales record or even strong academic achievement, then they are highly likely to have the skills and commitment to do the job well.

You can look for evidence in the interview or during the presentation (if there is one).

- Are they giving examples of successes in previous jobs?
- Do they have real experience in the role or are they showing a real interest in it?
- Is the candidate aware of the skills required for the role, and are they able to provide examples to back up these skills?

Curiosity

Top sales people are naturally curious and are genuinely interested in knowing more about their customer's background and buying needs. They realize that understanding the customer's goals, requirements and concerns is key to providing them with the information that can push them further down the sales funnel. They do this by asking thoughtful, probing questions to uncover more about their prospects. This is also a great way of building trust and creating rapport with them.

One way to identify this trait is to observe if your candidate appears naturally curious during the interview. For instance, did they:

- Display knowledge about the company and interviewer?
- Did they ask relevant questions about the role?
- Demonstrate meaningful interest in the business, industry and job vacancy?

Listening Skills

Contrary to the common image of the talkative salesperson, a top performer will know that 'actively listening' is an important part of what they do. Truly listening means allowing the customer to speak about themselves and their background. They see this as an opportunity to learn insightful details about their buying habits and behavior.

You can check if the candidate has been listening to you based on their responses at the interview. Some points to observe:

- Are they giving full attention to the interviewer?
- Are they maintaining eye contact? How concise are their answers in response to the question?
- Are they interrupting or not allowing you to finish your sentences?

Work Ethic

It goes without saying that work ethic is one of the core attributes of a successful sales rep. This relates to having the discipline to work in alignment with the company's mission and culture with integrity.

You can check if the candidate has demonstrated a good work ethic if he comes highly referenced and has a favorable record of positive relationships in previous roles. Some questions to consider:

- Do they understand the values and mission of the company?
- Have they shown integrity while aligning to the organization, people and client expectations?

There's no winning list of attributes - examine what works for your company

Now that we've identified some essential behavioral traits to look for when you hire a sales team, keep in mind that this is not an exhaustive list. Top performing salespeople at your company will have a set of skills and attributes that are unique to your industry and company culture, and it helps to first determine what these are.