

Two Approaches To Hiring Inside Sales Representatives

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With today's rocky economy, it is important for any company to hire outstanding salespeople so that they can be productive in a short period of time. While that can seem like a daunting task, there are some ways that you can recruit top people for your inside sales organization.

Ideally, it would be terrific to know an applicant sales' ability before hiring the person. However, for many applicants, this is their first job. The person may not have any sales experience or even any significant work history. No one has a crystal ball, but there are two approaches that will significantly improve your hiring success rate. They are Behavioral Interviewing and Tryouts.

Behavioral Interviewing

The premise of Behavioral Interviewing is that a person's past behaviors are a good indicator of his future behavior. To utilize behavior interviewing with an inside sales group, your interviewing team first needs to analyze the job and identify the skills necessary to perform the various tasks. These may be things such as selling, developing client relationships, researching potential clients, cold calling or responding to technical support issues. Then, your team has to identify the competencies needed to perform these tasks. These may be things like cognitive skills, organizational skills, time management skills and interpersonal skills.

When you conduct your interviews with potential candidates, ask for **specific** examples of times when they were successful or unsuccessful at the competencies you have identified. For example, ask candidates for an example of a time when they were successful at calming an upset person or uncovering information, or ask them for an example of how they solved a difficult problem and what the results were. When the candidate talks about things

he did in the past that specifically deal with the skills or tasks you have identified as critical, you get a good picture of how this person will perform in the future. The candidate should be able to tell you what this past experience taught him and how it has altered or shaped what he currently does.

If the candidate seems flustered, chances are he doesn't have the skills. Through behavioral interviewing, you end up with a well-rounded picture of the candidate. It is also more difficult for candidates to make up information because they will not have had the opportunity to prepare for your questions ahead of time.

Tryouts

Jeff Furst and Michelle Cline in the June 25, 2001 Teleservices News article recommend that inside sales organizations hold tryouts. Coaches, band directors and producers have used tryouts for years to weed out poor performers and spotlight exceptional talent. Your organization can do the same thing. Here's how it works.

Break down the roles your reps need to play. The categories might include sales, customer care, Web-enabled agents, market research, customer and help desk. Then further break down the job into competency buckets. These might include:

- Mental ability (problem solving, decision making, analytical skills).
- Organizational ability (planning and time management).
- Interpersonal Skills (handling difficult people, customer care, teamwork).
- Attitudes, interest and motivation (attitude toward quality, ethics, job interests, desire to produce).

The first three buckets include skills associated with the **can-do** aspect of job performance. For example, "I can ask questions and uncover information." "I can persuade people in a forceful or low-keyed manner." The fourth bucket – attitude, interests and motivation is associated with the **will-do** aspect of the job. " I enjoy talking to people." "I

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will be at work on time." The **will-do** is very important but difficult to measure. Furst and Cline stress that high performance only happens when the person's **can-do** and **will-do** match the job competencies that you have identified.

Try-outs help you to ascertain whether the person has the competencies to do the identified categories of tasks. The tryout method is a multiple hurdle hiring process. The candidate has to pass each stage before he can move to the next stage. Your team creates a series of three or four simulations, tests, case studies or interviews that act as a multiple hurdle process.

The first tryout to assess cognitive ability might include job-specific case studies, tests exercises or structured interviews.

The second tryout for organizational ability might also include job-specific cases, tests, exercises and structured interviews, but these would be more difficult than the first tryout.

The third interview for interpersonal skills could stress simulations and observations on handling difficult customers, objections, closing etc.

The fourth and final tryout would be on attitudes, interests and motivations. Here you might use job specific tests, simulations on ethics, time management, or relating to the customer.

Each tryout needs to be linked to the previous one and needs to become progressively more difficult so that you can identify the real super stars.

Hiring the right people is always a challenge. If you spend time on the front end really identifying the skills and abilities the job requires and determining how you will assess these, you will be more successful, and your inside sales team will shine and produce the results you desire.

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